

Executive Summary

The Migrants' Perspectives on Brexit and UK Immigration Policies provides an overview of the key findings and recommendations from The Outsider Project's Listening Campaign, coordinated by the Migrants' Rights Network (MRN).

Introduction

In recent years the position and perception of migrants in the UK has steadily worsened; this was clearly demonstrated by the EU referendum vote to leave the European Union, where debates continuously returned to immigration and reducing the numbers of migrants in the UK.

Throughout all this migrant voices are rarely heard, and the impacts of these policies are unlikely to be described openly. Migrants have lower representation in the democratic arena, and the marginalised status of migrant communities means that discussions about them are often exclusive and do not provide space for their views. Within public policy, the representation of their needs, experiences and the impact of restrictive immigration rules is low.

This report intends to share migrants' perspectives on Brexit and UK immigration policies, and offers an opportunity for migrant voices and perspectives to be included in the discussions around Brexit and immigration policies in the UK.

The Outsider Project

During 2017, the Migrants' Rights Network coordinated a listening exercise through The Outsider Project. This project supports migrants affected by the negative discourse around immigration, and seeks to promote a positive narrative demonstrating the benefits of living in an open society where migration is commonplace. The project has engaged with migrant communities in four locations within the UK - Wolverhampton, Oldham, Boston and Barking and Dagenham¹ - which were selected based on their majority leave vote in the 2016 EU Referendum² and their high non-UK born population.

Conducted by the project's volunteers and staff members from May to June 2017, the Listening Campaign recorded 277 interview responses from migrants living in the four aforementioned areas on topics including Brexit, attitudes towards migration, immigration policy and implementation, and the contribution of migrants towards the UK economy³.

Respondents ranged from under 18 years of age to over 46 years of age⁴, and 61.7% had lived in the UK for five years or more⁵. Between them respondents had previously lived in six geographic regions⁶, and when asked which nationality, background or community they personally identified with, 55 were identified⁷. Ten immigration statuses were recorded amongst the interviewees⁸.

Findings

EU Referendum Vote, Brexit & Hate Incidences

A majority of respondents felt people in their local area talked about migration negatively (66.1%), with some split on migration being described in a positive and negative manner. Only 10% felt that people in their local area spoke positively about migration.

The majority of respondents believed that people in their local area voted to leave the European Union because (i) they felt there were too many migrants locally or in the UK, (ii) they believed Brexit would mean migrants would have to leave the UK, or (iii) because of racist or xenophobic views.

The majority of respondents felt that the result of the EU Referendum has already had an impact in the UK. The two most referenced impacts were an increase in hate incidences, prejudice or discrimination towards migrants, and uncertainty about migrants' right to remain in the UK post-Brexit and the impact on their ability to travel outside of the UK. Some respondents reported hate incidents that took place after Brexit, including being told to return to their country of origin.

Immigration Policies and Life in the UK

Less than half of respondents said that they thought it was easy to access information about their right to live, work and study in the UK. Respondents from almost all immigration statuses raised the issue of language barriers when talking about the ease of accessing information about immigration policy.

Almost half of respondents said that they believed Britain's immigration policies were unfair, restrictive or negative. Many of the respondents spoke about the impact of immigration enforcement on mental health. Respondents also commented on the fear of being detained or deported during the immigration process, and the cost of visas and applying for British Citizenship.

Migrant Contribution & Misconceptions

The vast majority (98.9%) of respondents that answered questions about the contributions of migrants to the UK economy felt they made a positive impact, mentioning migrants being employed, paying taxes, opening businesses and spending money locally. Many respondents felt there are misconceptions about the economic contributions of migrants living in the UK, specifically that they did not work, or lived on benefits. The media was mentioned by a number of interviewees as the cause of this misconception. Only three respondents said they felt migrants had a negative impact on the UK economy.

Housing & Exploitation of Migrant Workers

Respondents reported that after arriving in the UK they faced issues around accessing suitable accommodation due to a lack of suitable or affordable housing. This was most prevalent in Barking and Dagenham, where 43.4% of respondents listed it as a key issue, and in Wolverhampton, where it was listed by 36.3% of respondents. In Boston, respondents highlighted that exploitation by agencies and employers is a key issue migrants face locally; both issues were described as intersecting with language barriers and access to information about migrants' rights to live and work in the UK.

Recommendations

The responses shaped the content of the further discussions held in each area at the conclusion of the Listening Campaign. In these focus groups, community members explored key issues that respondents had identified as affecting their communities, and built on them to choose three issues to be taken forward locally for the remainder of the project. The recommendations, which will be actioned through The Outsider Project, are as follows:

Increased Access to ESOL

In all four locations community members highlighted a need for increased access to ESOL as an important solution to addressing many of the key issues. Respondents highlighted a need for more provision of free or affordable ESOL classes, with greater availability at different times of day (especially in the evenings). In Wolverhampton, a specific policy change has been recommended to allow asylum seekers to access

classes on arrival in the UK, and in Boston the need for funding to increase the number of classes led by teachers who speak the native language of their students was highlighted.

Building Community Relationships

In all four locations, respondents chose to focus on building community relationships, while looking at ways to bring together local migrant and non-migrant communities to increase community cohesion and understanding of each other's cultures, and build strong and lasting relationships.

Housing Provision

In both Wolverhampton and Oldham, communities recommended action to address housing issues faced by migrants. In Wolverhampton, respondents highlighted the need to work with housing providers to ensure suitable, well-maintained housing is accessible for asylum seekers. In Oldham respondents suggested ways to work with housing companies to provide support for refugees when applying for housing, particularly with online application processes.

Rights & Exploitation

Both Barking and Dagenham and Boston communities recommended action around migrants' rights and exploitation. In Boston, respondents suggested solutions to address exploitation of migrant workers by employment agencies and employers, by improving access to information about migrants' employment rights, and supporting best practice amongst employers and agencies. In Barking and Dagenham respondents highlighted opportunities to improve access to information about migrants' rights to live, study and work in the UK.

Increased Access to Legal Aid

In Oldham, respondents specifically focused on ways to increase provision of access to free legal advice or representation for migrants, in particular Asylum Seekers, due to closure of a free immigration advice service locally.

The Migrants' Rights Network would recommend policy and decision makers, service providers and community members take action towards these key issues, and will be doing so through The Outsider Project.

1 - In Wolverhampton the project is being delivered in partnership with the Refugee and Migrant Centre, Black Country and Birmingham (RMC); in Oldham the project is being delivered in partnership with Oldham Race Equality Partnership (OREP).

2 - Percentage Leave vote by location: Barking and Dagenham - 62%; Boston - 75.6%; Oldham - 60.9%; Wolverhampton - 62.6%.

3 - Number of responses by area were as follows: Barking & Dagenham - 23 responses; Boston - 136 responses; Oldham - 44 responses; Wolverhampton - 74 responses.

4 - Number of respondents by age group: Under 18: 15, 18-25: 41, 26-35: 92, 36-45: 86, 46+: 42. One respondent chose not to disclose their age.

5 - 106 respondents had lived in the UK for less than 5 years; 74 respondents had lived in the UK for 5-9 years; 70 respondents had lived in the UK for 10-14 years; 13 respondents had lived in the UK for 15-19 years; 12 respondents had lived in the UK for 20 years or more. Two respondents had always lived in the UK.

6 - Prior to living in the UK, respondents had lived in the following geographic regions: Europe - 178, Asia - 48, Africa - 43, Australasia - 1, Latin America - 1, North America - 2. Three respondents chose not to disclose the geographic region they had lived in previously, and one respondent had always lived in the UK.

7 - Nationalities or backgrounds listed by respondents: Afghani, Arabic, African, Asian, Bangladeshi, Black African, British, British/Pakistani, British/Lithuanian, British/Polish, Bulgarian, Congolese, Czech, Czech/Slovakian, Dutch/Somali, Ethiopian, European, Filipino, French, French/Spanish, Ghanaian, Indian, Indian/European, Indian/Italian, IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra), Iranian, Iraqi, Irish, Italian, Italian/European/Indian, Kenyan, Kurdish, Latvian, Latvian/Lithuanian, Latvian/Russian, Libyan, Lithuanian, Mexican/Spanish, Middle Eastern, Nigerian, North American, Pakistani, Polish, Portuguese/Italian, Roma, Romanian, Russian, Rwandan, Slovakian, Somali, South African, Spanish, Sri Lankan, Tanzanian, Zimbabwean. Twenty-six respondents chose not to disclose this information.

8 - Immigration statuses of respondents were as follows: EU National - 162, British Citizen - 30, Asylum Seeker - 26, Refugee - 15, Indefinite Leave To Remain - 13, EEA National - 8, Spouse or Family Visa - 6, Refused Asylum Seeker - 5, Unsure - 3, Work Visa - 2, Student Visa - 1, No Status - 1. Five respondents chose not to disclose their status.

Further Information

More detailed information about The Outsider Project and results from the Listening Campaign can be found in MRN's report entitled 'Migrants' Perspectives on Brexit and UK Immigration Policies'.

Any comments or queries about the results of the Listening Campaign or The Outsider Project can be directed to outsiderproject@migrantsrights.org.uk.