

Migration and community cohesion: community development responses

by Jessica Mullen

Since 2004 there has been a record influx of migrant workers from the new European Union (EU) accession countries. This new migration has been exceptional, both in its numbers and because much of it has been to areas which have previously experienced relatively little migration.

Many migrant workers are working and living in areas in the UK which are not used to receiving new community members or to responding to the cohesion effects of migration. In addition, many migrant workers are employed in casual and seasonal work, so often they do not settle in one area for long periods, and this poses a challenge for building integration and cohesion. This has resulted in a renewed concern about the cohesion effects of migration. The Community Development Foundation carried out research with community development (CD) workers to understand the issues and challenges they are facing.

Summary of key findings

- CD workers are playing an important role in responding to tension within and between communities by facilitating dialogue and supporting new community members to develop their own community groups. Challenges remain in responding to negative media portrayals, identified as a key trigger for tension.
- CD workers are responding to low levels of English language among migrant populations by signposting to ESOL classes. A potential role for CD workers lies in facilitating informal opportunities to practise English and mix with the host community. In addition, working through bilingual community members to reach those who do not speak English was highlighted as an emerging approach.
- Many migrants are living in isolated areas. Community development workers are playing a key role as the link between these communities and service providers. However, reaching such communities is also a challenge for CD workers, especially when doing so is added to already overstretched workloads.
- Many migrants do not settle in the UK or a particular area for long periods. This is a challenge for cohesion as there is less time, opportunity and motivation for migrants to integrate and for building mutual understanding between communities. Community development usually relies on long-term work to build trust and relationships. Ways for community development to build the capacity and resilience of host communities to respond to the potential tensions caused by temporary migration should be explored.
- The challenges highlighted are made all the more pressing by the current economic climate, which is likely to lead to increased competition for resources and jobs and therefore have an impact on cohesion.

The context

The UK has long been a place where people from across the world have settled. The trend over the last decade has been increasing migration. Since 2004 there has been substantial migration to the UK from the European Union (EU) countries which gained accession to the EU (Papademetriou et al, 2009). This new migration has been unprecedented, both in its numbers and because much of it has been to areas which have previously experienced relatively little migration. There is a lack of statistical data to determine the size of local migrant populations, making it difficult for service providers to prepare and respond to the needs of migrants. More recently there have been substantial changes in the economic climate, and the impact of this on migration and cohesion must also be considered.

The Government has recognised the importance of the cohesion impact of migration on communities both in its response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, and in the setting up of the Migrants Impact Forum in 2007. In mitigating the effects, the Government sees a significant role for community development in promoting cohesion in communities.

What is cohesion? The Government's response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion indicated that 'Community cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another' (CLG, 2008, p. 10).

The forthcoming revised National Occupational Standards for Community Development have a direct relevance to work in this area. Standard 1 'Understanding Community Development and its Application to Practice' includes encouraging settled communities and newer communities to work together, working with diverse groups which may be in conflict or competition with each other and supporting communities to recognise and deal positively with tensions and conflicts of interest (Federation for Community Development Learning, 2009).

The Community Development Foundation (CDF), with Resources for Change and MAC Associates, has undertaken work to identify the current and potential role for community development in relation to addressing the cohesion effects of recent migration, through a literature review and research with practitioners, whose views underpin this briefing. Previous work by CDF has examined the role of community development in relation

to refugee integration and community cohesion (Navarro, 2006) and points to potential ways in which community development might address the cohesion effects of recent migration. The aim for the current research was to examine the cohesion issues being encountered in relation to recent migration and the emerging practices and potential ways of working to address these issues.

Cohesion effects of migration and community development responses

The cohesion effects of migration on people and communities are varied and diverse. Community development (CD) practitioners identified a range of significant issues which they were encountering. They also outlined community development approaches to address the cohesion effects.

The work taking place can be summarised as including:

- building links between migrants and host communities, helping to promote mutual understanding and combat misunderstanding
- helping individuals and groups to work together to overcome problems, within the migrant community, between communities, or both
- facilitating service providers' ability to access migrant communities, and highlighting migrants' needs to service providers
- empowering migrants to access services by equipping them with the support and skills to articulate their needs themselves.

This community development activity manifests itself at three levels – through work with individuals, groups and partnerships.

Work with individuals develops social capital and encourages communities to be self-supporting. Practitioners highlighted that the time invested in supporting individuals and families enabled them to develop their own community groups and events. In turn, work to support community groups encourages effective community activity and enables communities to come together, organise their own events and form their own support structures. This facilitates dialogue and understanding, which leads to community cohesion and integration. Work to link community groups with each other and with service providers and authorities facilitates mutual aid and effective dialogue. This creates an autonomous and strengthened community sector and, through improved dialogue, can lead to better service delivery.

Emerging practice and challenges

The current migration context has led to some new cohesion effects. However, previous cohesion effects, in relation to other migration contexts and other communities, continue. The example approaches outlined below are taken both from our research with practitioners working in the context of recent migration and from previous community development work.

Community relations

CD practitioners highlighted the positive effects of migration on some areas which in some areas has led to increased economic viability, for example with fewer empty properties. However, they also reported negative attitudes towards migrants amongst receiving communities. They identified negative press coverage as one of the key triggers for emerging tensions, particularly in rural areas and highlighted working with the press to provide balanced reporting as being particularly difficult.

Practice

Practitioners could learn from an example in Kerrier where the district council's Migrant Workers Action Group is providing factual information to the media, taking both a proactive and reactive role in countering negative portrayals.

There are other examples of work with the media in relation to refugees and asylum seekers. For example in a northern mill town the local authority reached an agreement with the local newspaper that if it was going to report a negative story regarding asylum seekers who were being dispersed to the town it would first check the accuracy with the authority (Navarro, 2006, p. 6). Such work could be replicated in the context of recent migration.

In urban areas migrants are often moving into neighbourhoods which have also recently experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees and asylum seekers. These areas, which are relatively unused to migrants, are thus adjusting to two waves of new residents. In some areas CD workers reported a rise in racism directed at both new and settled migrant communities. In others, they witnessed settled migrant communities displaying antagonism towards new migrants and in others still, tensions between different groups of new migrants.

Practice

In Bradford, it has been observed that many of the issues faced by new migrant communities are similar to those faced by the long-established black and minority ethnic (BME) communities on their

arrival in the city. However, now they are largely perpetrated by the younger members of these longer-established BME communities. In Wigan the reverse was highlighted, where a long-established Asian community has begun to experience incidents of racism since migrant workers moved into the area. A key action practitioners highlighted was bringing the leaders of these communities together to enable them to voice their fears and concerns.

In urban areas migrants are largely moving into neighbourhoods that already experience high levels of anti-social behaviour, making it difficult to isolate the effects of migration. Nonetheless, in these areas CD workers identified triggers for tensions as the host community experienced the strain of living alongside overcrowded housing, street drinking, knife carrying and/or worries about the impact of migration on local jobs.

In addition, some practitioners highlighted a lack of desire by young migrant males to integrate. It may be that if people have come to the UK to work, and face a range of employment issues, they do not necessarily have time to invest in community activities. However this issue is not limited to migrants. Leeds University is undertaking work with its students who, due to their temporary residence in a neighbourhood, are reluctant to get involved in and contribute to the communities they are living in. CD workers pointed out that, in contrast to young males, migrant families who intended to stay in the UK for longer periods were willing and keen to integrate.

In response to these issues CD workers have built links between migrants and host communities, helping to promote mutual understanding and combat misunderstanding. They have supported organisations to run events aimed at easing tensions and bringing new and host communities together.

Practice

CD workers have helped the police to organise community football matches between young people from the host and migrant communities. This has led to further programmes of youth activities being developed, including sports events and opportunities for getting together being identified by the young people themselves.

CD workers have also worked with migrant community members to help them run their own events to break down barriers between different groups in the community. Practitioners suggested that such work often results from first investing time to support individuals.

Practice

In Salford, CD workers organised consultation and information events for members of migrant communities, who then expressed the desire to organise further events. CD workers facilitated links with other groups and supported members to work with other community leaders to run a community learning day, with workshops delivered by different communities.

Language

CD workers highlighted language barriers as both a challenge to cohesion and an obstacle they faced in addressing this challenge.

They gave examples of referring migrants to ESOL classes but also highlighted the need for more informal opportunities for migrants to practise English and converse with members of the host community. Therefore future practice might consider drawing on CD experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers to improve language skills. CDF's report on refugee integration and cohesion gives a number of examples of such work:

Practice

Projects used poetry readings as a way of increasing the language skills and confidence of group members and storytelling techniques to improve the language skills of participants as well as their confidence in speaking in public settings (Navarro, 2006, p. 16).

One solution practitioners identified was using translators to overcome language barriers. However this is not always ideal, particularly when running focus groups and consultation events where the use of a translator can make it difficult to build rapport. It is also difficult to provide translation and interpretation facilities for events involving a large number of people.

Another emerging approach is practitioners working through community members who have appropriate dual language skills and therefore can act as ambassadors for and conduits into the community.

Practice

In Leeds, CD workers have identified community members who are willing to train as health educators. These community educators have the appropriate language skills and are trusted by their communities, so community members are more likely to take on board the information given to them.

In North Nottinghamshire, funding has been accessed so that support workers with appropriate language skills can be appointed and engage easily with the migrant communities.

Access

A major challenge for CD workers and service providers is accessing migrants living in isolated areas. This, combined with language barriers, affects CD workers' ability to build trust with migrants. In turn, migrants themselves face challenges in having opportunities to integrate and access services. Community development has much to offer here. The work and time invested by CD practitioners to overcome these issues and build trust with migrant communities have helped other organisations to deliver and develop activities to unite communities.

Practice

Health practitioners interviewed identified CD workers as the key link into the communities where migrants are living. Health practitioners were heavily reliant on the skills and techniques employed by CD workers to open up a dialogue on their behalf.

However, for CD workers to offer this is a particular challenge when work with remote communities is added to what are sometimes already overstretched workloads.

Migrants' long working hours and difficult shift patterns can also hinder both CD workers' access to them, and migrants' access to services. CD workers and service providers thus need to be flexible.

Practice

Amber Initiatives was set up in Plymouth by EU accession immigrants and members of the local community to provide advice and support to people from the accession communities and facilitate integration into the local community. It operates a telephone advice line every evening of the week, rotating between Polish, Lithuanian and Russian for those living on remote farms (Evaluation Trust and the South West Foundation, 2008, p. 26).

Transience

Some members of migrant communities lead mobile and transient lifestyles, often as a result of their seasonal employment or, in the case of the Roma community, for cultural reasons. Practitioners highlighted that in areas where migrants return regularly or lead more settled lifestyles, stronger cohesion is emerging. Working with transient communities presents a challenge for community development, which traditionally relies on long-term work to build relationships and effect lasting change. However, arguably it is in areas where migrants are most transient that there is a higher likelihood of negative cohesion effects, since there is less time for mutual understanding to be built between migrant and receiving communities.

Limited stays too provide migrants with less time, opportunity and motivation to integrate. Therefore it is in these areas that there is most need for community development work to facilitate integration and cohesion.

The research with practitioners pointed to attempts to respond in such areas by working to build the capacity of communities themselves to develop their own infrastructures. However, it is clear that working with transient communities remains a challenge and one which warrants further exploration. It may be that through building the capacity of those members of the migrant community who intend to settle, they will in turn be able to support the more transient members. Bringing settled migrant community leaders together with receiving community leaders might also lead to a greater resilience of communities as a whole to deal with the influx of migrants.

Advocacy

CD workers are providing support and skills for people to articulate their needs, in particular for migrants to access local services.

Practice

Many practitioners reported that they had organised a series of focus groups/consultations exercises to identify the needs of migrant workers and then develop action plans for how these needs might be met. This has often been followed up with information packs or a series of information events, where a range of service providers have been encouraged to attend and talk to migrant communities. The events have enabled service providers to gain a greater understanding of the needs of the migrant communities so that they can tailor their services to meet these needs.

CD workers are also advocating on migrant communities' behalf to get their needs recognised by service providers. In some areas service providers are reluctant to target services at migrants as this could be seen to prioritise the needs of newly arrived communities over those of the host community. This tension can be exacerbated when groups and organisations have to compete against each other for small pots of funding. Therefore CD workers are also working at a strategic level, highlighting equalities issues with organisations and local authorities to ensure that services are appropriately targeted to meet the needs of migrants.

CD workers also play an advocacy role, in ensuring that migrants are treated fairly by employers and understand their employment rights.

Practice

In Salford CD workers became aware of some of the employment inequalities experienced by migrant workers. They organised a series of workshops about how to join a trade union and provided information about employment rights.

However CD workers highlighted the challenge of working with employers who are often initially wary and reluctant for their workforce to be approached.

The economic context

Recent changes in the economic climate may have an added impact on the cohesion effects of migration. In the first quarter of 2009 the number of migrants coming to the UK from the EU accession countries dropped to its lowest level since 2004 (Home Office, 2009). However, this does not mean that the issue of migration and cohesion is no longer relevant. A study by the Migration Policy Institute on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission concluded that the overall stock of migrants will remain roughly the same but that inflows may reduce slightly. Furthermore, the economic climate is likely to exacerbate the challenges outlined in this briefing. It is likely that migrants, since they occupy mainly low-skilled jobs, will be adversely affected by any job losses and this will impact on their ability to integrate. There is likely to be rising hostility towards new communities as competition for resources and jobs increases. However, the economic climate may also provide an opportunity, in that any immigration pause that results from it may give communities time to focus on the cohesion and integration of existing migrant populations (Somerville and Sumption, 2009).

The future role for community development

It is clear that community development has a valuable role to play in addressing the cohesion effects of migration and is already making a contribution.

This research has identified a number of key challenges facing CD workers. Some challenges are specific to the new migration context. Others are issues which CD workers have faced for some time in relation to both previous migration and other communities. Work is needed to examine ways in which community development can overcome these challenges.

Transience

How can community development methods adapt to address cohesion issues within short timeframes?

How does building the capacity of the settled community increase its ability to receive a migrant population influx?

Access

How can community development build on the emerging innovative practice and flexibility being employed to reach isolated communities? CD workers are clearly a vital link into these communities for service providers and other agencies. However, access can also be a challenge for CD workers themselves: to provide this they need to be well supported and well resourced.

Other challenges include language and media. These are not specific to the current migration context and there are interesting examples of work with other communities which community development could build upon.

Language

This is clearly a key issue in empowering migrant communities to access services and integrate with the wider community. However, working with non-English speakers can be challenging and time consuming. How can community develop continue to find innovative responses to this issue and what can be learnt from examples of work with previous migrant communities such as refugees and asylum seekers?

Media

It is clear that negative media reporting can have a detrimental effect on community cohesion – and it can be challenging to work with the media to challenge this. There are examples of work to address this: how can community development build and develop these?

The current economic context makes responding to these challenges all the more timely. There is a pressing need for community development to innovate and develop effective responses to ensure that new and existing communities can work together to deal with the shared difficulties they are likely to face in the economic downturn.

About the research

The research was carried out by Resources for Change, with MAC Associates for the Community Development Foundation (CDF), between June 2008 and January 2009. The research aimed to identify the current and potential role for community development in relation to addressing the cohesion effects of migration, through a literature review-based scoping paper and research with practitioners. The research was carried out in England, and 13 practitioners contributed their views.

This briefing draws on the findings of this research and earlier research by Navarro on refugees and asylum seekers.

Further information

Reports

Resources for Change with MAC Associates (2009) 'Community Development and Migration', unpublished, Community Development Foundation
Navarro, A. (2007) *Refugee Integration and Cohesive Communities: Community Development in Practice*, Community Development Foundation can be downloaded from www.cdf.org.uk

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