

**BMER Advice
Network – London
Partners Contact
Information:**

AdviceUK

0300 777 0107

**Afro – Asian Advisory
Service**

SE5 - 020 7701 0141

**Asian Women's Re-
source Centre**

NW10 - 020 8961 6549

Asylum Aid

N1 - 020 7354 9631

**Asylum Support Ap-
peals Service**

E2 - 020 7729 3056

Barnet Refugee Service

NW9 - 020 89059002

**Bosnia Herzegovina
Community Advice Cen-
tre**

NW10 - 020 8459 4201

**Centre for Armenian
Information & Advice**

W3 - 8020 8992 4621

**Chinese Community
Centre**

W1 - 020 7439 3822

**Day-Mer Turkish &
Kurdish Community
Centre**

N16 - 020 7275 8440

**East European Advice
Centre (EEAC)**

W6 - 020 8741 1288

Embrace

N17 - 020 8801 9224

**Eritrean Community in
UK (ECUK)**

N7 - 020 7700 7995

**Haringey Somali Com-
munity & Cultural Asso-
ciation**

N17 - 020 8885 1307

**Indoamerican Refugee
and Migrant Organisa-
tion (IRMO)**

SW9 - 020 7733 9977



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Another Refugee Crisis

What Can We Do?

Prompted especially by the escalating violence and conflict in Syria, more than a million refugees crossed into Europe in 2015 according to the latest estimates. This historical influx gave rise to a migrant crisis, with European countries struggling to deal with this situation as well as not being able to form an internationally agreed policy position.

The issue has also come onto the public agenda in UK with the situation of the refugee camp in Calais in the forefront of media attention over the last few months as well as support campaigns and lobbying campaigns for refugees in Calais and elsewhere in Europe. The refugee crisis is also becoming a central question in the EU referendum process. One of the questions discussed in Britain has been the role UK can play to support these refugees, with questions of the number of refugees UK should/could accept a current political hot topic.

In the face of this humanitarian crisis, finding out the experience of the BMER advice providing organisations working with new arrivals, especially those working with members of the nationalities which make up the refugees is important in terms both of raising awareness of the humanitarian aspect of the question as well as an objective basis for UK response to the crisis. The BMER Advice sector, for this reason, can contribute to this debate by sharing information about the situation in their boroughs, by identifying the priority areas of support new arrivals face, by drawing attention to the parallels between the experiences of new arrivals and the communities they work with and by identifying areas of joint local and national lobbying.

As the crisis progresses with no sign of resolution in the near future with controversial EU treaties between EU and Turkey coming into implementation and facing significant opposition, it is important that BMER advice providers, both as advice providers and as organisations working with members of BMER communities, keep this important topic on their agenda.



**Iranian and Kurdish
Women's Rights Organi-
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EC2P—020 7920 6460

IMECE Women's Centre

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Iranian Association

W6 - 020 8741 2304

Iraqi Association

W12 - 0207 023 2650

Island Advice Centre

E14 -020 7987 9379

**Latin American Disabled
People's Project**

SE17 - 020 7793 8399

Latin American House

NW6 - 020 7372 8653

**Latin American Wom-
en's Rights Service**

EC1 - 020 7336 0888

**Lewisham Refugee &
Migrant Network**

SE8 -020 8694 0323

Limehouse Project

E14 -020 7790 9699

**Migrants Resource Cen-
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SW1 - 020 7834 2505

**Notre Dame Refugee
Centre**

WC2 - 020 7440 2660

Praxis

E2 - 020 7729 7985

Refugee Action Kingston

KT2 -020 8547 0115

**Refugee and Migrant
Forum of East London**

IG1 - 020 8478 4513

**Refugee Network Sut-
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SM1 - 0208 770 6198

**Refugee Women's Asso-
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E8 -020 7923 2412

Roma Support Group

E7 - 020 7511 5721

**Sangam Association of
Asian Women**

HA8 - 020 8952 7062

Sangat Advice Centre

HA3 - 020 8427 0659

Tamil Relief Centre

N9 - 020 8345 6301

**Tamil Welfare Associa-
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E12 - 020 8478 05 77

**Welwetchia Legal Ad-
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N17 - 020 8808 1255



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Legal Aid and other funding cuts to access to justice

BAN was invited to present at a seminar on the impact of legal aid and other funding cuts on access to justice for those in need hosted by Middlesex University and Toynbee Hall and held at Linklaters LLP.

Through the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) which came into force in April 2013, some areas of law and advice have been excluded from legal aid funding. This has had devastating effects on different groups and particularly on BMER communities. It has also meant that many BMER people are unable to access justice.

A representative of BAN, Carolina Gottardo from the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS), presented at the seminar. BAN's presentation focused on the challenges faced by BMER people following the cuts, the challenges faced by organisations working with BMER people and how BMER organisations have continued working despite the cuts, showing sheer dedication and supporting those more likely to fall through the gaps, unable to access mainstream services.

The event was very well attended and we received excellent feedback about BAN's presentation.

BAN is keen on forging links with the wider advice sector and following the seminar a representative from Clifford Chance solicitors attended BAN's January meeting to talk about the possibility of pro-bono work with BAN's members and the importance and value of the private sector and the not-for-profit BMER advice sector working together.

**DON'T
KEEP CALM**



**SAVE
LEGAL AID**

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The Last Word...

National Coalition for
Independent Action

November 2015 saw the closure of NCIA (the National Coalition for Independent Action) that has worked tirelessly over the past 10 years to raise awareness about the impact of local and national policies on the independence of the voluntary sector. At the outset, NCIA warned that voluntary groups were in danger of losing their independence due to changes from grant income to commissioning and contracts for public services. Many of us have had to struggle with the decision to bid for contracts (as grants were no longer available) in order to keep services going and continue to employ staff. We have also struggled when delivering these contracts to assert our independence as voluntary organisations and have often lost the argument. There are organisations that know now that they will never get funding from a local authority as they have been critical of the administration of housing benefit or other services. We have also not been assisted by national umbrella organisations that should have led the fight for independence of the sector but they too, it would seem, were compromised by their own needs to survive and win contracts.

Where do we go from here? There is no doubt that some established charities will disappear over the next couple of years but, wherever there is a community need, new groups will appear with the energy and drive that perhaps is now lacking in others after years of battering by local and national government.

Will commissioning for services continue? There are some murmurings that some local authorities are unhappy with the results of commissioning/procurement for advice and other voluntary services. This is, of course, no surprise to many of us, as any community service that is designed top down is unlikely to meet our clients' needs. It really isn't the same as commissioning for dustbin collection! Is there an opportunity to change the dialogue? We think there is and we should at every opportunity be arguing for a return to grants. This doesn't have to mean that we are not accountable.

So, back to the legacy of NCIA – they were right, the independence of the voluntary sector has been compromised – and we should challenge that at every opportunity for the benefit of our clients. We cannot go backwards but we do need to change the discourse and try to influence how advice is funded in the future to ensure our independence.

For further information about NCIA and some of their very useful research on the independence of the sector, visit www.independentaction.net.

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Further Delays in the Introduction of Universal Credit Continue to Cause Concern for the Advice Sector

The issue of the delay to the introduction of Universal Credit has continued to occupy the advice services' agenda over the last few months.

The cause for concern continues to be the uncertainty surrounding the process of rolling out the new system. In February, the DWP came under parliamentary pressure once again for being evasive over providing an explanation for the delays, with the complex IT system, designed to administer the new benefit, being questioned in particular.

Although the focus of the public debate seems to have shifted to other kinds of welfare support in the run up to the announcement of the Budget in March, which featured substantial changes in the provision for the disabled people, the uncertainty surrounding the process hit a low ebb with the resignation of Ian Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. The statements from Stephen Crabb who replaced Duncan Smith as Secretary of State have not as yet made it clear as to whether and how this ministerial change is likely to impact on the process of the introduction of the new system.

Problems with the introduction of Universal Credit continue to cause concern for independent BMER advice providers firstly as the policy implies serious uncertainties in the kind and level of welfare support groups can access, as Universal Credit brings together six existing benefits. Add to this the practicalities which such a radical overhaul of the system implies: concerns specifically relate to emerging client needs regarding the transition to the new system such as language needs and minimum ICT proficiency.

In the face of this confusion and concern, independent BMER advice providers can play an important role by gathering data about emerging client needs in relation to the process, identifying any gaps in provision that may arise and lobbying for support to address these. It goes without saying that the needs and capacity issues independent advice providers face in dealing with this emerging need, at a time of cuts and increasing demand, should be included in this debate.



Would you like to become a member of BAN?

For details of how to join the network please contact
Wesley Harcourt at AdviceUK:

Tel: 0300 777 0107 Email: wesley.harcourt@adviceuk.org.uk

To find out more about BAN, its members, where they are located and
the services they provide, please visit our website:

<http://www.bmeadvicenetwork.org.uk/index.aspx>.