A bridge to life in the UK: refugee-led community organizations and their role in integration

YHRMP ID
361
Author(s)
Dick Williams

Aims

The research was commissioned by the Refugee Council. The aim of the research was to help policy makers and funders to understand the role of refugee-led community organizations (RCOs), and how their work contributes to policies that deal with inclusion, equality and cohesion.

Methodology

The methodology comprised of

- A literature review
- Interviews and focus groups with 32 RCOs and 7 refugee forums
- Interviews with policy makers, funders, support organizations and public services

- Roundtables held on local or regional level

Key issues

The report looks at the activities of refugee-led community organizations (RCOs) and how what they do informs policies on integration. It has xx sections:

- **RCOs and their communities –** RCOs saw their primary role to do with promoting engagement of new arrivals within broader society, and also to strengthen their communities through focus on culture, religion and language. RCOs also saw themselves to be the community.
- **RCO activities, outcomes and role in integration** – RCOs activities resulted in outcomes in fields such as reduction of isolation; employability; mental well-being; educational attainment. In terms of the services, they offered information and advice; supplementary education, volunteering, ESOL, children and young people, services for women, etc.
- **RCO assets and ways of working** – RCOs are unique for three reasons:

    1. Reach - they are positioned well to reach out to individuals living in their communities.
    2. Insight – they have level of knowledge deriving from personal experience that could be useful.
    3. Solutions – because of this RCOs are able to find solutions to various obstacles faces by people with experience of refugee-ness

    RCOs adopted holistic approach in their work. They often work in partnership with other organizations, making independence and engagement to be their priority.

- **RCOs challenges** – some of the challenges faced by RCOs include: on the one hand there is increase in hate crimes and lack of understanding of those with experiences of refugee-ness, on the other demand in services provided by RCOs has increased; difficulties to recruit volunteers; smaller RCOs often feel unappreciated; there are often issues relating to organizational development; and so on.
- **RCOs support** – The support for RCOs is often limited, but even so the support that is available is not always taken up by RCOs (e.g. because they rely on volunteers they cannot always make the most out of training sessions offered to them).
- **RCOs, national policy and local planning** – RCOs activities often contribute to national policies. Also LA are planning approaches that could enable RCOs to plan and deliver local services and strategies.

Conclusion

The report suggests that RCOs encourage integration; they are cost effective and deliver outcomes; they reach people that many other organizations cannot access; they have a holistic approach; and they encourage independence.

Recommendations

The report has quite a few recommendations intended for different stakeholders. Some of these recommendations include:

For funders and commissioners – to include grants for RCOs and to adopt accessible grant making process;

For local and other mainstream civil society support – ensure support for RCOs is available; involve RCOs in national advocacy; make RCOs

known among policy makers, funders, etc.

For central government – recognize RCOs contribution in relation to refugee policies;

For local government – provide small grants for RCOs; develop co-production and place-based approach to planning

RCOs – engage with local support organizations and develop capacity to gather data

Web Link
https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0004/4288/J1609_rc-bridge-to-life-repo…
Migrant Group
Refugees
Topic
Community and society
Community cohesion
Refugee community organisations
Year
2018
Month
10
Resource Type
Book

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/bridge-life-uk-refugee-led-community-organizations-and-their-role-integration*