

Engage to Change:

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# Should Citizenship Be Earned Through Compulsory Volunteering ?

Migrant and Refugee Voices on Active Citizenship



M R C F

Migrant and Refugee  
Communities Forum

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Engage to Change Project is funded by London Councils



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July 2010

*“We will introduce new ways to increase philanthropy, and use the latest insights from behavioural economics to encourage people to make volunteering and community participation something they do on a regular basis.”*

*“We will promote integration into British society, as we believe that everyone coming to this country must be ready to embrace our core values and become a part of their local community.”*

**Conservative Party Manifesto, 2010**

*“We believe that society is strengthened by communities coming together and engaging in voluntary activity, which sets people and neighbourhoods free to tackle local problems.”*

**Liberal Democratic Party Manifesto, 2010**

*“[Compulsory volunteering] makes some of us feel that the good work and contribution we are already making will never be enough, we will always be treated differently, what will be next?”*

**Zimbabwean public sector worker**

*“This reminds me of the Soviet Union where we also had an official volunteering department in the government— this is just like that!”*

**Ukrainian MRCO worker**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 introduced a longer and more difficult process for becoming a British Citizen. However the then Government also proposed an option for those who wished to shorten this process called 'active citizenship', a type of regulated community volunteering that may come into force in 2011. Under this scheme prospective citizens will need to show evidence that they have done voluntary work. The emphasis of the policy is to encourage migrants and refugees to volunteer within 'mainstream' organisations rather than in their own communities. So far though, there has been no detailed government plan about how this proposal might be implemented.

In a similar vein, the new coalition government calls for tougher immigration rules while declaring its full support for volunteering, neighbourhood groups and social entrepreneurship, including funding and training for community organisers. Thus, a Big Society - rooted in social responsibility and community action - is to be brought about by a revival of civic engagement amongst the British population, including those newly settled who *'embrace our core values and become a part of their local community'*<sup>1</sup>.

Alas, the government's larger objectives and its specific policies are disconnected. This is particularly true for 'active citizenship' with its implied regulated community volunteering. For a start, volunteering is already highly valued and regularly practiced by migrant communities. Nearly 70% of all working hours in migrant and refugee community organisations are performed by volunteers – the equivalent of five extra full-time staff per organisation per year<sup>2</sup>. What is more, the number of volunteers supporting community work is likely to increase in a future marked by public spending cuts.

But the numbers alone do not tell the full story. Refugee, migrant and BME community organisations provide invaluable services and support to their most vulnerable members. Their work is an authentic example of poverty alleviation, social renewal and cohesion, crime fighting and civic participation – all propagated as desirable societal goals and good citizenship by the current government. In addition, the idea that government run compulsory volunteering schemes encourage integration is not supported by empirical evidence anywhere in the EU<sup>3</sup>. What is more and as this report makes clear, the likely achievement of 'active citizenship' will be to undermine volunteering amongst migrant communities and alienate them further from mainstream British society.

<sup>1</sup> Conservative Party Manifesto 2010

<sup>2</sup> Working with Volunteers, A management guide for refugee community organisations by Kate Bowgett and Lynne Gillett, Evelyn Oldfield Unit. [www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/publications/index.shtml](http://www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/publications/index.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Involve: Involvement of third country nationals in volunteering as a means of better integration. Final Project Report. Published by the European Volunteer Centre. [www.involve-europe.eu/reports.html](http://www.involve-europe.eu/reports.html) and Asylum Seekers and Volunteering in Europe: a transnational report based on experiences in Hungary, France and England, Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate [EASI] Development Partnership, 2007 [www.itn.org.uk/easidpwebsite/publications.html](http://www.itn.org.uk/easidpwebsite/publications.html)

In early 2010, the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum (MRCF) conducted a London-wide community consultation involving over 35 community organisations, faith institutions and trade unions, and an online survey of 179 people representing in total over 30 nationalities living and working in the UK. Their voices offer a unique insight into the social, civic and psychological damage that regulated volunteering would inflict on these communities as well as an insight into the practical obstacles to actually implementing such a policy. Their dismay with the 'active citizenship' proposal reveals these **key messages**:

- Active citizenship is unlikely to achieve the government's integration objectives
- Active citizenship will undermine genuine volunteering by migrants and refugees
- Active citizenship will disadvantage vulnerable migrants, such as low-paid migrant workers, parents (especially single parent families), carers, migrants with basic English language skills, migrants with mental and physical impairments, migrant workers with long hours, shift or night work
- Active citizenship could cause difficulties for community-based organisations as their volunteers drift off to perform their volunteering 'duty'
- Active citizenship will pose a great financial and other burdens on the public sector who will have to implement and monitor the scheme

**As an alternative, MRCF suggests withdrawing the Active Citizenship proposal and instead:**

- **Mapping voluntary activity done by migrant and refugees so as to account for their contribution and involve them as equal partners in Big Society community development plans**
- **Providing targeted support for migrant and refugee volunteers so as to remove barriers to them accessing mainstream volunteering opportunities**
- **Changing the current one-way approach to integration into a two-way one that is holistic and sustainable**
- **Sending out positive media and public relations messages so as to encourage and generate mutual understanding and foster good relations between refugee and migrant communities and the wider public.**

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## AIM AND METHODOLOGY

When 'earned citizenship' comes into force from July 2011, the process of becoming a British citizen or permanent resident in the UK will become substantially longer and more difficult for non-EEA migrants to navigate.

According to government proposals from July 2011 undertaking active citizenship - or regulated voluntary activities – will be the only way that migrants can avoid a substantial delay in their progress towards citizenship. The rationale behind this is that the public wants to see migrants make "a more visible and more substantial contribution to Britain" before they can become British citizens.

This report was developed in response to government literature on 'active citizenship'. Migrants and refugees have not thus far been involved in developing these proposals, and as a result many people feel that their concerns about active citizenship have not been adequately heard. In particular it responds to the fact that the UK Borders Agency's own consultation on 'earned and active citizenship' did not engage migrant and refugee communities. We therefore aim to present some perspectives on active citizenship from migrant and refugee communities and from people working in support of them.

This report has canvassed perspectives in two main ways:

**A public meeting** on 'active citizenship' was organised as a part of the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum (MRCF's) Engage to Change initiative which aims to give voice to BME and migrant and refugee communities in London in shaping policies that affect their lives. The meeting was held on the 3rd February 2010. Approximately 40 community leaders and volunteers took part and over 35 nationalities were represented. The majority either worked or volunteered for migrant and refugee community organisations.

**An online questionnaire** was circulated to migrants, refugees and people working in support of them among the Migrants' Rights Network (MRN) and MRCF's national contacts between 11th and 26th February 2010. A total of 179 people responded from across the UK.

172 questionnaire respondents stated their nationality:

- 82 (48%) held British (including Scottish) nationality alone.
- 90 (52%) were of migrant background (75 people held one foreign nationality, 15 held dual nationality).
- Overall, respondents from 37 nationalities answered the online questionnaire.

96 questionnaire respondents told us their profession:

- One third (33%) worked for voluntary sector organisations.
- One fifth (20%) worked for MRCOs.
- One fifth (19%) worked in the public sector.
- 12% worked in the private sector.
- 10% worked in academia.

The report begins by considering some of the key factors which some migrants and refugees consider important in volunteering, exploring the voluntary contributions which are already underway. It then draws together perspectives from migrants and refugees about the 'active citizenship' proposals to identify key messages and make recommendations.

## About MRCF and our Engage to Change initiative

MRCF is a user-led community empowerment alliance of 40 organisations, with 16 years experience of supporting refugee and migrant communities. Our work practically addresses the social exclusion of migrant and refugee residents and strengthens their voice and civic participation, with the overall aim of achieving equality for disadvantaged individuals and communities.

MRCF would not be able to carry out its work without the contribution of volunteers. Hundreds of migrant and non migrant volunteers have worked alongside each other through the forum to promote integration and strengthen communities. Our current mentoring programme which provides one to one support for vulnerable migrants has involved 74 volunteers from 34 different ethnic backgrounds who between them speak 42 languages and dialects and who have supported 75 mentees.

Our Engage to Change initiative, of which this report is a part, provides our member organisations (refugee and migrant community organisations MRCOs), individuals, partners and staff with opportunities to engage directly with policy makers. This is mainly achieved through public meetings with high profile speakers on relevant topics. The format of the meetings varies depending on the issue, but what makes these meetings different is that the agenda is always set by the MRCF participants and not by the policy makers. Some meetings include a training element to build the capacity of participants for action.

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### Training session for MRCF volunteer mentors



Supporting the public meetings is an ongoing research agenda which MRCF carries out in partnership with MRN. Research evidence is gathered during the public meetings and then supplemented with additional data.

To date our members have had meetings with more than 40 MPs from all over the world, leaders from the NHS, campaigning organisations such as Liberty, educational equality institutions such as the Stephen Lawrence Trust, civil society groups such as London Citizens and equally passionate individuals such as Tony Benn, members of the House of Lords, and the media. We have also attended meetings and rallies.

## WHAT IS ACTIVE AND WHAT IS EARNED CITIZENSHIP?

### Earned citizenship

Under the new earned citizenship process introduced by the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, naturalising as a British citizen or becoming a permanent resident of the UK is soon to become a longer and more difficult process.

Currently, migrants must have spent a minimum of five continuous years in the UK to naturalise as a British citizen (three in the case of spouses or civil partners). They must have held indefinite leave to remain for at least one of those five years. Migrants are also required to adhere to restrictions on the total number of days they have spent outside the UK during this period.

From July 2011, most foreign nationals from outside the European Economic Area will be required to be resident in the UK for an additional period of temporary residence, called 'probationary citizenship', before applying for citizenship. Throughout probationary citizenship, migrants and refugees will not have access to non-contributory benefits such as housing and council tax benefits and child tax credits.

For most migrants, including refugees, who are planning to apply for citizenship, this additional period of temporary residence will last for three years. This will extend the standard qualifying period for citizenship from the current five years to eight. People applying as family members of a British citizen or a permanent resident in the UK will be required to undergo a probationary citizenship period of two years. Attaining permanent residence in the UK will be made even more difficult. Migrants will not be able to apply for permanent residence in the UK until they have undergone a five year probationary citizenship period. From July 2011, a number of other new requirements will increase the insecurity of migrants moving through towards naturalisation or permanent residence in the UK. During probationary citizenship migrant workers will need to remain in 'continuous employment'. This means that it is possible that migrant workers who are made redundant or have a break between jobs would be required to begin their journey to citizenship again. Additional limits will be placed on the amount of time that migrants can spend outside the UK during every year of their qualifying period for citizenship.

## Active citizenship

The only way migrants will be able to avoid some of the additional delays and insecurity in progressing to citizenship introduced by these changes will be by doing 'active citizenship' – a type of regulated community volunteering. Migrants who complete active citizenship will spend one year, rather than three years, in probationary citizenship, or one year rather than two years in the case of family member applications. Although migrants will be able to carry out active citizenship at any time during their qualifying period, the government envisages that most people will complete it during their first year as a probationary citizen.

The aim of active citizenship is to "...encourage all migrants who wish to stay in the UK permanently to integrate fully into society [...by] bringing migrants into contact with the wider community" and by "showing British citizens that those seeking to join them are earning their citizenship by being active participants in British life"<sup>4</sup>. The emphasis of the policy is to encourage migrants and refugees in the UK to volunteer within 'mainstream' organisations outside their own communities.

Although active citizenship has been presented as an optional activity for migrants wishing to naturalise, voluntary sector organisations including Liberty, the Refugee Council and the MRN have pointed out that it will effectively operate as an additional requirement in becoming a British citizen or permanent resident and will be far from 'voluntary'<sup>5</sup>.

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Mike Locke Director of Public Affairs at Volunteering England and a member of the government's Active Citizenship working group speaking at MRC Engage to Change public meeting on 'active citizenship' February 3rd 2010



## What will active citizenship look like in practice?

Active citizenship will require migrants to ‘participate otherwise than for payment in prescribed activities’<sup>6</sup>, but official guidance has not yet been issued on what these ‘prescribed activities’ will be. The government has indicated that details of how active citizenship will operate will be laid out in further legislation.

A document released in March 2009 outlined the government’s ‘emerging thinking’ on the prescribed activities eligible under active citizenship<sup>7</sup>. It stated that eligible volunteering activities would be likely to fall into two categories:

- ‘Formal volunteering’ – giving unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations to help others or the environment
- ‘Civic activism’ – taking on specific community responsibilities such as a school governor.

‘Informal volunteering’ – or volunteering taking place outside of a group or organisational setting – will not count towards active citizenship.

The ‘emerging thinking’ document outlined a list of likely eligible activities including activities which advance education or health, social and community welfare, heritage, arts, culture or sport and/or the natural environment; activities which benefit children, young people, the elderly, the disabled or other vulnerable groups; activities which involve mentoring or befriending; activities which fulfil a charitable purpose; volunteering with a recognised organisation such as a registered charity or constituted group; employer supported volunteering and, serving on a community body.

It is likely that applicants will need to complete a minimum of 50 hours of volunteering – i.e. just over two hours per week for six months. The government does not intend to make any migrants exempt from active citizenship, including people who are elderly, disabled, parents of small children, or refugees<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The path to citizenship: next steps in reforming the immigration system, UK Border Agency, February 2008 [www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/consultations/pathtocitizenship/pathtocitizenship?view=Binary](http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/consultations/pathtocitizenship/pathtocitizenship?view=Binary)

<sup>5</sup> Liberty’s Briefing on the Borders, Citizenship & Immigration Bill for Second Reading in the House of Commons May 2009 <http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/issues/5-asylum/index.shtml>; Joint Parliamentary Briefing from the Refugee Council, the Scottish Refugee Council and the Welsh Refugee Council: Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill 2009 [May 09] [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2009/revised\\_bci\\_briefing](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2009/revised_bci_briefing); Migrants Rights Network, Briefing paper on citizenship provisions in the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill. 2009 [www.migrantsrights.org.uk/downloads/briefingpapers/briefingpaper\\_on\\_citizenship.pdf](http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk/downloads/briefingpapers/briefingpaper_on_citizenship.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Borders Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2009/ukpga\\_20090011\\_en\\_5#pt2-pb1-l1g41](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2009/ukpga_20090011_en_5#pt2-pb1-l1g41)

<sup>7</sup> Document made available to the House to illustrate the government’s emerging thinking on active citizenship, 19th March 2009. [www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2009/DEP2009-0898.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2009/DEP2009-0898.pdf)

## Monitoring and management of active citizenship

Every year, tens of thousands of people seek to naturalise as British citizens. In 2008 156,015 people applied for citizenship in the UK<sup>9</sup>. As such, the introduction of active citizenship would be likely to generate substantial numbers of migrants and refugees seeking to undertake regulated volunteering. Although the government has stated that the active citizenship system should be 'light touch', the scale of it means that a number of different sectors will be involved in its operation and management.

Active citizenship would rely heavily on the willingness and ability of local organisations to take on a potential influx of migrants and refugees as volunteers. In order to successfully carry out active citizenship, migrants would be required to volunteer with an organisation that has been approved by the UK Border Agency. Registered charities would be likely to qualify automatically for the scheme, but unregistered charities and community groups would require a reference from a larger organisation before doing so. It is likely that volunteering for many small and/or community-based organisations would not count towards the scheme. Conversely, the complexity of the scheme would leave it open to abuse by individuals or groups seeking to exploit migrants moving through the system.

Despite the costs for voluntary sector organisations taking part, the government has made clear it that no funding will be available to support the voluntary sector in relation to active citizenship. Organisations including Volunteering England have stated that, because of the costs likely to be incurred by supporting organisations, adequate government funding should be made available to support any such scheme .

Local authorities would need to verify active citizenship via the Nationality Checking Service (NCS). It is not clear whether this will be possible, as the NCS is currently operational within just 87 local authorities, and these are mainly in urban areas. Little detail has been given on how the government will manage migrant volunteering in rural areas or areas with limited volunteering opportunities.

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<sup>8</sup> Document made available to the House to illustrate the government's emerging thinking on active citizenship, 19th March 2009. [www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2009/DEP2009-0898.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2009/DEP2009-0898.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> British Citizenship Statistics, United Kingdom, 2008, The Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, 20 May 2009 [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb0909.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb0909.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Volunteering England briefing Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Bill, March 2009 [www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Policy/Parliamentary+lobbying/Active+Citizenship](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Policy/Parliamentary+lobbying/Active+Citizenship)

## RESEARCH INTO MIGRANT AND REFUGEE VOLUNTEERING

*[Volunteering is] 'an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives' - The Volunteering Compact Code of Good Practice (2005)*

According to the Department of Communities and Local Government, 41% of the population in England undertook formal volunteering – classed as voluntary activities that take place within a group or organisation – at least once during 2009<sup>11</sup>. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) breaks down volunteering activity according to ethnicity, but does not record the nationality or immigration status of respondents. This means that the proportion of refugees and migrants who volunteered during 2009 has not been recorded.

The DCLG 2010 Citizenship Survey report indicates that formal volunteering activity for most ethnic minority communities is as high, or almost as high, as that among white people<sup>12</sup>. Research indicates that the slightly lower volunteering levels within some ethnic minority communities can be attributed to the existence of barriers for volunteers in accessing voluntary opportunities<sup>13</sup>.

There are higher levels of 'informal volunteering' than formal volunteering among both white and ethnic minority communities, according to the Citizenship Survey. 'Informal volunteering' is defined as giving unpaid help to other people who are not relatives<sup>14</sup>. Informal volunteering is more difficult to measure than formal volunteering, but it is likely that the incidence of informal volunteering within all categories is higher than is reported in the Citizenship Survey.

Although there are no formal statistics on the overall proportion of refugees and migrants who volunteer, research indicates that refugees and migrants are likely to be involved in voluntary activities both in mainstream organisations, and for community-based groups<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Citizenship Survey, April – September 2009, England. Department for Communities and Local Government [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1448135.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1448135.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Citizenship Survey, April – September 2009, England. Department for Communities and Local Government [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1448135.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1448135.pdf). According to the survey, 42% of white people, 46% of people from 'mixed race' backgrounds; 39% of black people (including African and Caribbean backgrounds); and 32% of people from Asian backgrounds in England formally volunteered at least once during the previous year

<sup>13</sup> Volunteering works: Volunteering and social policy, The Institute for Volunteering Research and Volunteering England, September 2007. [www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/publications/Volunteering+Works](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/publications/Volunteering+Works)

<sup>14</sup> Citizenship Survey, April – September 2009, England. Department for Communities and Local Government [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1448135.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1448135.pdf). According to the survey, 63% of the 'mixed race' population, 57% of the white population, 53% of the African population and 41% of the Asian population in England indicate that they volunteered informally during 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Refugee women: From volunteers to employees, Frances Tomlinson and Umut Erel, Working Lives Research Institute, London Metropolitan University [www.ivr.org.uk/evidence-bank/evidence-pages/Refugee+women](http://www.ivr.org.uk/evidence-bank/evidence-pages/Refugee+women)

Migrant and refugee volunteers are known to make a substantial contribution to community-based organisations, which often have scarce resource<sup>16</sup>. The Evelyn Oldfield Unit has calculated that volunteers contribute an average of 66% of the working hours in refugee community organisations – the equivalent of five extra full-time staff per organisation per year<sup>17</sup>.

Some migrants and refugees are involved in mainstream volunteering, although it is likely that many people experience barriers in doing so, including language difficulties, discrimination and lack of information about opportunities. Specific support programmes have been set up during recent years to promote volunteering among asylum seekers who are not allowed to work, including the Engage programme run by Community Service Volunteers in 2006-8, and the Open Door programme, run by the Birmingham Voluntary Service Council. Such programmes can be often costly and require high levels of support.

### **Volunteering policies – a route to integration?**

Over the past ten years, the previous government developed a series of strategic interventions aimed at encouraging refugees and migrants to volunteer in their local communities<sup>18</sup>. This was presented as a key route towards cohesion and the social integration of recent arrivals to the UK. The active citizenship policy is part of this wider government drive towards the integration of refugee and migrant communities.

Available research from the UK context indicates that volunteering, whether community-based or within 'mainstream' organisations, can have a beneficial impact on migrant and refugee communities<sup>19</sup>. The benefits of volunteering for refugees include overcoming isolation, meeting people and providing help and support to wider communities. It can boost people's confidence and develop skills, helping people to gain paid employment and to build good community relations. People who have restricted access to paid employment, such as asylum seekers, may find that volunteering is a key way of making links with other people.

Although research seems to support the benefits of volunteering for migrant and refugee communities, there is less consensus on the positive impacts for integration of government volunteering schemes for these groups. Two EU level projects have indicated the importance of developing volunteering programmes aimed at migrants and refugees within a balanced and two-way approach towards integration.

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<sup>16</sup> Refugee and Migrant Community Organisations in 2009: The first in an annual series of reflections on the state of the sector, Ruth Valentine for The Evelyn Oldfield Unit [www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/publications/index.shtml](http://www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/publications/index.shtml)

<sup>17</sup> Working with Volunteers, A management guide for refugee community organisations by Kate Bowgett and Lynne Gillett, Evelyn Oldfield Unit. [www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/publications/index.shtml](http://www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/publications/index.shtml)

<sup>18</sup> Integration Matters: Refugee Integration Strategy, Home Office 2004. [www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws\\_policy/refugee\\_integration0/a\\_national\\_strategy.html](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws_policy/refugee_integration0/a_national_strategy.html)

<sup>19</sup> London Metropolitan research into refugee women; Volunteering works: Volunteering and social policy, The Institute for Volunteering Research and Volunteering England, September 2007. [www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/publications/Volunteering+Works](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/publications/Volunteering+Works)



Free ESOL class run by MRCF volunteer

The European Union Involve project (which MRCF contributed to) worked across seven European countries including England from 2004 – 6, and examined migrant and refugee volunteering and its relationship to integration. It concluded that volunteering can play a substantial role in supporting the integration process for recent arrivals to a country. It also found that key indicators from the European Union Common Basic Principles of integration can be met by volunteering, including improving the employability of migrants and refugees, enabling civic action on local issues, and general empowerment<sup>20</sup>.

However, the Involve report emphasised that integration is a two-way process, which should be reflected in government policies aimed at generating volunteering. The report emphasised the need for a wide range of actors – including national government, local authorities, the mainstream voluntary sector and community-based organisations – to take an active role in promoting the involvement of migrants and refugees in volunteering, as *“there are still major barriers to more involvement of migrants in such activities – at personal, organisational and societal level”*.

As such, this report warned governments against embedding volunteering into integration programmes, saying that this *“has not yet been researched sufficiently to make full use of its potential as an essential element in integration policies”*<sup>21</sup>. It pointed to the lack of research in this area as a key problem in the development of government policies aimed at encouraging migrant and refugee volunteering for the purposes of fostering integration.

<sup>20</sup> Involve: Involvement of third country nationals in volunteering as a means of better integration. Final Project Report. Published by the European Volunteer Centre. [www.involve-europe.eu/reports.html](http://www.involve-europe.eu/reports.html)

<sup>21</sup> Asylum Seekers and Volunteering in Europe: a transnational report based on experiences in Hungary, France and England, Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate [EASI] Development Partnership, 2007. [www.itn.org.uk/easidpwebsite/publications.html](http://www.itn.org.uk/easidpwebsite/publications.html)

A further European Union project, the Exchanges partnership, worked from 2004 – 7 in Hungary, France and England to explore the integration of asylum seekers and the role played by volunteering in this process. It concluded, similarly, that government priorities should be to provide support to asylum seekers who would like to volunteer, and to the organisations expected to provide volunteering opportunities<sup>22</sup>.

The findings of both the Involve and the Exchange projects strongly indicate that the approach taken by the UK government in developing active citizenship is unlikely to succeed. This policy has not been accompanied by research into voluntary activity among migrants and refugees, nor has the government committed to provide additional resources to the voluntary sector or community-based organisations. Active citizenship, in its current form, would be a one-way street.

## MIGRANT AND REFUGEE VOICES ON VOLUNTEERING

As there has been very little research carried out into volunteering among refugee and migrant communities, this section provides some perspectives on this subject. The quotations are drawn from the Engage to Change public meeting and online questionnaire, carried out during February 2010.

### What volunteering do migrants and refugees do?

We asked respondents whether they were currently involved in volunteering and if so, what they did. 74% of online questionnaire respondents reported that they had either volunteered in the past or that they currently volunteered.

People reported volunteering in a number of different places:

- Migrant and/or refugee community-based organisations
- Local groups
- Other voluntary sector organisations
- Faith institutions
- Trade unions

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<sup>22</sup> Asylum Seekers and Volunteering in Europe: a transnational report based on experiences in Hungary, France and England, Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate [EASI] Development Partnership, 2007 [www.itn.org.uk/easidpwebsite/publications.html](http://www.itn.org.uk/easidpwebsite/publications.html)



Zrinka Bralo, MRCF's Director speaking at MRC Engage to Change public meeting on 'active citizenship' February 3rd 2010

The voluntary roles taken on by people varied, depending on where the volunteering was carried out. Many of these activities were people-oriented, often involving providing direct support to other people. People's volunteering roles were both formal and informal, and included:

- Interpretation, teaching and language support;
- Advocacy and campaigning;
- Casework, training and advice;
- Cooking, cleaning and making tea;
- Administration and office support;
- Organising events, projects and writing reports;
- Sitting on a group's management committee;
- Mentoring and befriending.

### **What are the motivations of migrant and refugee volunteers?**

Questionnaire respondents described a range of motivations for volunteering. The most common motivations for volunteering among questionnaire respondents were "to try to make a difference"; "to help people who need it" and "to contribute to my community". Further answers indicated that volunteering can be a way of learning new skills, meeting new people and gaining work experience.

In-depth discussions with migrant and refugee volunteers at the MRCF public meeting provided a deeper insight into their motivations for volunteering. Some people reported that volunteering is an essential part of making sure that their communities are stable and secure.

*“We volunteer because our communities are under attack and we want to support them” (Sri Lankan migrant domestic worker)* <sup>23</sup>

*“[I volunteer] to empower others – some people cannot speak up for themselves, to have their voices heard” (Colombian community leader)* <sup>24</sup>

Much volunteering carried out within local communities was reported to stem from an overarching sense that their contribution is needed. The lack of resources for local community groups and the perception that communities are not catered for by mainstream provision, meant that for some migrants and refugees volunteering comes automatically with being part of a local community:

*“There is no choice about volunteering – it is just something you do” (Chinese community lawyer)* <sup>25</sup>

The discussions at the public meeting indicated that migrant and refugee volunteers placed a high value on volunteering. Some respondents combined volunteering with other work, and or family commitments:

*“It is a real sacrifice as a domestic worker. We have so little time and what we do have is very precious” (Filipino domestic worker)* <sup>26</sup>

## What do migrants and refugees gain from volunteering?

We asked participants at the MRCF public meeting what they thought they gained from volunteering. Their answers indicated that migrants and refugees experience a range of personal gains from volunteering. Some respondents reported that volunteering can be a challenging learning experience:

*“[You] learn about what you need to improve on – a type of self development” (Chinese community worker)* <sup>27</sup>

*“[You learn how] to listen, to be patient, to understand people and their needs” (Polish community worker)* <sup>28</sup>

Other people spoke of how the benefits of volunteering can require long-term commitment. Overcoming challenges, particularly to help other people, can make volunteering experiences particularly rewarding:

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<sup>23</sup> MRCF public meeting participant

*"You get satisfaction from what you put in when it pays off, which makes you put in more"* **(Colombian volunteer)** <sup>29</sup>

*"It is give and take – you gain and give at the same time"*  
**(Sudanese community worker)** <sup>30</sup>

*"It makes you stronger – taking other people's problems on your shoulders is hard, but you discover you can still stand up!"* **(Iraqi teacher)** <sup>31</sup>

Volunteering was important for some migrants and refugees as a way of countering the insecurity or dislocation they experience in the UK. It helps people to feel more self-confident:

*"[Volunteering] creates a space of belonging for migrants as they need to belong to something"* **(Zimbabwean community worker)** <sup>32</sup>

*"You realise that you have something to give – you get a sense of self-worth"* **(Sri Lankan migrant domestic worker)** <sup>33</sup>

## What qualities do migrants and refugees think make a good volunteer?

Many respondents felt that in order for the individual and the organisation or community to benefit from volunteering volunteers need to have integrity and honest intentions. Migrant and refugee respondents talked about the importance of volunteers being empathetic, honest and patient.

Particularly important qualities in volunteers were reported to be a strong sense of motivation and commitment:

*"You need to do it from your heart and believe in it"*  
**(Somali teacher)** <sup>34</sup>

*"[You need] a sense of justice and of wanting to make things better"*  
**(Chinese community lawyer)** <sup>35</sup>



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Community Leaders speaking at Engage to Change public meeting on 'active citizenship'  
February 3rd 2010

## MIGRANT AND REFUGEE VOICES ON ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

This research revealed a strong and shared feeling that the government has not widely consulted among key stakeholders about this policy, nor has it properly considered its implications for local communities. It is likely that many other migrants and refugees in the UK are unaware of the active citizenship policy, and its role within earned citizenship from July 2011.

As the subjects of this policy, the perceptions of migrants and refugees are very important in anticipating the wider implications of active citizenship. A wide range of issues related to active citizenship were raised in response to the public meeting and questionnaire.

We have summarised these issues into four key messages:

### 1. Active citizenship is unlikely to achieve the government's integration objectives

People taking part in this research generally agreed that volunteering is critical to migrant and refugee communities. Findings from wider research indicate that providing targeted support to encourage migrants and refugees to volunteer could support their wider integration.

But the majority of respondents agreed that the active citizenship policy is not the right way to advance volunteering among migrant and refugee communities, and that it will not bring about wider integration in the way the government intends. Almost three-quarters (74%) of the online respondents agreed with the statement that "[active citizenship] is unfair and would be a barrier to migrants wanting to settle in the UK". Just 5% of the online respondents agreed with the statement that "[active citizenship] is fair and would help migrants to be better British citizens in the end".

Some people felt that the introduction of active citizenship would send a negative message to migrants and refugees about their value in the UK:

*"It makes some of us feel that the good work and contribution we are already making will never be enough, we will always be treated differently, what will be next?"* (Zimbabwean public sector worker)<sup>36</sup>

*"It is one more way of making migrant communities separate and insinuating that they are lazy/not willing to integrate/negatively different"*  
(British public sector worker)

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<sup>36</sup> Online questionnaire respondent

*“Migrants will feel like they are being penalised. Compulsory community service is usually associated with criminals” (Malaysian lawyer) <sup>37</sup>*

Most people did not view long-term integration as a likely outcome of active citizenship. They instead identified the negative potential of this policy, and its potentially negative impacts on migrant and refugee integration.

*“The fact that it is seen as almost compulsory will not aid the strained relationship and the disengagement of some migrant/refugee communities with the ‘system’” (Greek Cypriot academic) <sup>38</sup>*

*“It will make little difference other than marking migrants out as ‘not like us’ (British / Canadian MRCO worker) <sup>39</sup>*

## **2. Active citizenship will undermine genuine volunteering among migrants and refugees**

The perspectives from our respondents indicate that genuine voluntary activity is valued by many migrants and refugees and is critical to local communities. The motivations and commitment of individual volunteers are very important in ensuring that volunteering has positive benefits.

Most people saw it as problematic for migrants and refugees to have to undergo an additional community activity requirement in addition to fulfilling all the other requirements for naturalisation or settlement. This would mean that volunteering is coerced, and not motivated by a genuine desire to volunteer:

*“That is not volunteer work - that will be forced work - almost slave – [to] have to work for a right that should be yours.” (Brazilian private sector worker) <sup>40</sup>*

Some people agreed that the idea of pressurising migrants into undertaking regulated voluntary work was missing the point of volunteering and would have a negative effect on migrants:

*“I think that volunteering in itself is a good thing but that one should have freedom of choice concerning what type of volunteering” (British volunteer) <sup>41</sup>*

*"It is unfair because it defies the nature of volunteering itself"*  
**(Russian volunteer)** <sup>42</sup>

*"This reminds me of the Soviet Union where we also had an official volunteering department in the government– this is just like that!"*  
**(Ukrainian MRCO worker)** <sup>43</sup>

Some people expressed dismay that the government did not seem to have recognised the volunteering that is already underway by many migrants and refugees. This active citizenship policy could therefore lead to volunteering from these communities being undervalued. There were also concerns that active citizenship will lead to general cynicism about migrants' motivations for volunteering:

*"This is going to take the soul out of volunteering and kill it. It is discriminatory because people will assume that refugee volunteers are volunteering only for citizenship"* **(Chinese volunteer)** <sup>44</sup>

*"[Migrants'] volunteering will be less valued than if it were freely given"*  
**(British charity worker)** <sup>45</sup>

### 3. Active citizenship will disadvantage vulnerable migrants

Almost all online questionnaire respondents (94%) agreed that the introduction of active citizenship would be more difficult for some migrants than for others.

*"Those who might have difficulty in volunteering are being unfairly penalised"*  
**(British charity worker)** <sup>46</sup>

The online questionnaire asked people to state which groups, if any, they thought would be disadvantaged by the proposals. The groups who respondents identified as likely to be potentially disadvantaged included:

- Low-paid migrant workers – *"Most migrants work in labour-intensive, poorly paid jobs. This requires them to work longer hours and barely make ends meet. This measure would just add to their woes"* **(Spanish social enterprise worker)** <sup>47</sup>
- Parents and especially single parent families – *"It is discriminatory against people with children"* **(British charity worker)** <sup>48</sup>
- Those with caring responsibilities – *"carers of a sick family member especially a partner"* **(French charity worker)** <sup>49</sup>
- Migrants with basic English language skills – *"it will be even more difficult for those with a language barrier to access good meaningful [volunteering] opportunities"* **(British academic)** <sup>50</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Online questionnaire respondent

<sup>43-44</sup> MRCF public meeting participant

<sup>45-50</sup> Online questionnaire respondent

- Migrants working in the public sector – *“Those public sector migrants will not have time to volunteer as they already over-worked, under paid and what free time is left is for them to rest and recuperate!”* **(British Filipino public sector worker)** <sup>51</sup>
- Migrants with mental and physical impairments – *“Disabled people”* **(Togolese MRCO worker)** <sup>52</sup>
- Refugees and others entering the UK via the protection route – *“those with ... trauma such as rape or torture resulting in fear of strangers and panic attacks”* **(British MRCO worker)** <sup>53</sup>
- Migrant workers with long hours, shift work or night work – *“Some migrant workers are unable to volunteer as they are working long hours in order to meet living costs, have childcare responsibilities and therefore have no time to do voluntary work”* **(Polish trade union worker)** <sup>54</sup>
- Migrants who are exploited by others abusing the system. *“There is huge scope for exploiting the most vulnerable migrants here. We can expect organisations to spring up with the intention of exploiting people who are desperate for citizenship. There is no way this can be properly regulated”* **(British MRCO worker)** <sup>55</sup>

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**Community Leaders speaking at Engage to Change public meeting on ‘active citizenship’  
February 3rd 2010**



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<sup>51-54</sup> Online questionnaire respondent

<sup>55</sup> MRCF public meeting participant

#### 4. Active citizenship could cause difficulties for community-based organisations

Evaluating the impact of active citizenship on the voluntary sector more widely will require widespread research. We were concerned with the impact of active citizenship on migrant and refugee community organisations (MRCOs) specifically. This is because migrant and refugee volunteering is likely to be critical for the survival of many MRCOs.

67.3% of online questionnaire respondents indicated that the introduction of active citizenship would have negative impacts on MRCOs. A further 27.8% of respondents said that they did not know whether active citizenship would have a positive or negative impact on MRCOs:

*“It could potentially encourage more clients of these organisations to participate in running the service which would be positive. On the other hand pressure may be placed on staff to find external opportunities which may be hard to find”*

**(British MRCO worker)** <sup>56</sup>

The issue of resources to MRCOs was a critical area of concern, particularly since no funds will be available for organisations to meet the costs of supporting active citizenship. Many of our respondents were concerned that existing voluntary groups would find themselves under increased pressure, but receive no additional support for doing so:

*“The government expects organisations to recruit, train and monitor volunteers without any incentives or assistance”* **(British charity worker)**

<sup>57</sup>

*“It will put heavy pressures on existing voluntary groups who are already finding it difficult to find funds”* **(British and South Indian charity worker)**

<sup>58</sup>

There was also some concern about whether the volunteering carried out within migrant and refugee community organisations would count towards the active citizenship requirements. Government thinking has indicated that informal and community-based volunteering would not be included in ‘active citizenship’.

If this is the case, active citizenship would be likely to have the effect of reducing the voluntary support critical to small, community-based organisations, rather than increasing it.

*“We depend on volunteers, and may not be one of the approved agencies”* **(British MRCO worker)** <sup>59</sup>

*“It could cause exclusion of small, informal migrant community organisations where volunteering is culturally performed informally and without a “large*

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<sup>56-660</sup> Online questionnaire respondent



MRCF volunteer mentors

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

### The active citizenship proposal should be withdrawn

Although there is no question that migrant and refugee volunteering is very important for individual volunteers and for wider communities, the overwhelming majority of people consulted in this research thought that active citizenship is the wrong way to expand voluntary activity among these communities.

The potentially negative impacts of active citizenship are overwhelming, as pointed out by migrants and refugees in this report, and by other organisations through government consultation processes. Criticisms of the scheme include that it would undermine genuine volunteering among refugee and migrant communities, disadvantage numerous groups of migrants, and that it would potentially undermine the work of community-based organisations which are already underfunded.

Most pressing, however, is the indication that active citizenship is unlikely to develop migrant and refugee integration, as claimed by the government. Because migrant and refugee volunteering has been presented as a one-way street to integration rather than a two-way process, it seems unlikely that barriers which often exist for migrants and refugees in accessing mainstream volunteering opportunities would be addressed through active citizenship.

Based on the accounts in this report, it seems likely that active citizenship would generate resentment and insecurity among migrants and refugees and misunderstanding between communities. Active citizenship would be more likely to undermine integration, developing scepticism among the general public about the motivations of migrants and refugees in volunteering. As a result, the active citizenship proposal should be dropped.

## **Voluntary activity already underway by migrants and refugees should be mapped**

The lack of substantive research into migrant and refugee volunteering has been noted by a number of key agencies. Furthermore, the link between volunteering and integration of migrant and refugee communities in the UK has also not been researched in depth.

There is a need for research to be carried out into:

- Mapping the formal and informal voluntary work that is already underway by migrants and refugees
- How this voluntary work can be better supported, and any barriers to accessing mainstream volunteering opportunities be addressed;
- Where funding support might best be directed in order to alleviate the reliance on volunteers among many community-based organisations.

## **Targeted support is needed to support migrant and refugee volunteering**

The development of targeted government support for expanding refugee and migrant volunteering could have an extremely positive impact. Many volunteers play a critical role in supporting local groups and initiatives, with wide-ranging benefits for them and the organisations and communities involved. However, this is an area that would benefit from targeted and strategic support.

If carried out in a positive, strategic and sustainable way, government support for migrant and refugee volunteering would be likely to contribute towards longer-term integration and support for the well-being of migrants and refugees in the UK. Future support for migrant and refugee volunteering could take into account the need to:

- Encourage mainstream organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors to reach out to make volunteering opportunities available to migrants and refugees.
- Address the conditions which may prevent migrants and refugees from volunteering for mainstream organisations, including supporting English language skills and a lack of information about the ways that people can volunteer.
- Support 'buddying' and mentoring schemes which can develop refugee and migrant involvement in mainstream volunteering.
- Alleviate the funding needs of many community-based organisations which force them to rely on the contributions of volunteers.
- Support volunteering activity with a positive public relations and media campaign aimed at generating mutual understanding and fostering good relations between refugee and migrant communities and the wider public.
- Locate support for migrant and refugee volunteering within a wider, two-way integration strategy.

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### MRCF volunteer mentors and mentees on a trip to Brighton



## APPENDIX 1 – MRCF / MRN public meeting flyer

# Engage to Change Question Time at MRCF

## Future of Volunteering for Migrants and Refugees

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February at 1 p.m. at MRCF, 2 Thorpe Close, W10 5XL

Engage to Change is an MRCF initiative to provide our members and partners who work with migrants and refugees with an opportunity to get direct answers about issues relevant to their daily lives and engage directly with policy makers. In the past year hundreds of community leaders met with more than 50 MP's, councillors, executives of public bodies and other professionals who are involved in decision making, campaigning and research on issues of immigration and integration.

### **Our February 2010 meeting will focus on new government proposals for Active Citizenship and Volunteering.**

Every year at least 200 migrants and refugee volunteer at Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum and many thousands of them volunteer across London. They give their time, expertise and energy in good faith to their local communities, schools, churches and mosques. Volunteering helps them integrate and learn new skills. The Government is proposing to introduce a set of criteria for new citizens that will require them to volunteer in order to speed up their applications for permanent stay and nationality. The proposals are vague and there is still time to add our voice to this debate. It is not clear what kind of volunteering will be considered as valid and how the system will work in practice.

*Should volunteering be made compulsory and turned into a currency for immigration status? What will happen to those migrants who can't volunteer such as single mothers, domestic workers, the elderly and ill? How about those new citizens who are active in employment and do not have any free time to volunteer? Should they be disadvantaged for being economically active?*

To inform us about government proposals and latest developments we have invited following experts:

#### **Mike Locke**

Director of Public Affairs at Volunteering England and a member of the government's Active Citizenship working group.

#### **Steve Symonds**

Legal Officer at the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA).

#### **Ruth Grove-White**

Policy Officer at the Migrants' Rights Network (MRN)

We think **you** should have your say on this. So please come to MRCF on Wednesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 2010 at 1.30pm and contribute to the discussion. Lunch will be provided from 1pm. The debate at MRCF will feed into the report that will be distributed to all key stakeholders and the Government in order to ensure that your voice is heard and considered when important decisions are being made.

**Places are limited so please book early via [info@mrcf.org.uk](mailto:info@mrcf.org.uk) or call 020 8964 4815. Lunch will be provided and travel expenses can be refunded. If you have members who need help with interpreting please let us know so we can make arrangements.** Nearest tube station is Ladbroke Grove on Hammersmith and City line and buses 7, 23, 52 and 70 also stop on Ladbroke Grove.

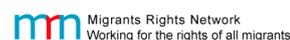
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**APPENDIX 2 – MRCF/MRN future of volunteering online questionnaire**

**1. About you**

Thank you for agreeing to do this quick survey into the future of volunteering. It should take no more than 5 minutes of your time. We will keep all responses anonymous.

1. What is your nationality? If you have more than one nationality, please list them.

2. Where do you work?

- Migrant and/or refugee community organisation
- Other voluntary sector organisation
- Academia
- Trade union
- Private sector
- Public sector
- I don't work

Other type of organisation (please specify)

3. If you wish, please tell us your name and/or the name of the place where you work

**2. About your volunteering**

1. Do you currently volunteer (e.g. help out with a local group, place of worship or school)?

- Yes
- No
- I used to, but not anymore

If yes, please tell us where you volunteer and how often

2. If you volunteer, what is your role? Please write a sentence describing what you do as a volunteer.

3. Why do you volunteer? (you can tick as many boxes as you like)

- to learn new things
- to try to make a difference
- to meet new people
- to help people who need it
- to contribute to my community

to gain work experience

I don't volunteer

Other (please specify)

### 3. About government volunteering plans for migrants

The government plans to introduce more barriers for migrants applying for British citizenship after July 2011. 'Earned citizenship' will, among other things, require people to do regulated volunteering before applying for citizenship. Only certain types of volunteering – specified by the government – will qualify. Migrants who do not, or cannot, volunteer will be penalised by a two-year delay before they can make a citizenship application.

We want to know your opinion about these plans.

1. What effect do you think that it will have on migrants if they have to do regulated volunteering in order to avoid a two-year delay in becoming a British citizen?

- It is fair and would help migrants to be better British citizens in the end
- It is unfair and would be a barrier for migrants wanting to stay in the UK
- It would make little or no difference to migrants
- Other (please specify)

2. Do you think that having to volunteer in order to avoid a two-year delay in becoming a British citizen would be more difficult for some migrants than for others?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If yes, please say which migrants would find it more difficult to 'volunteer' than others:

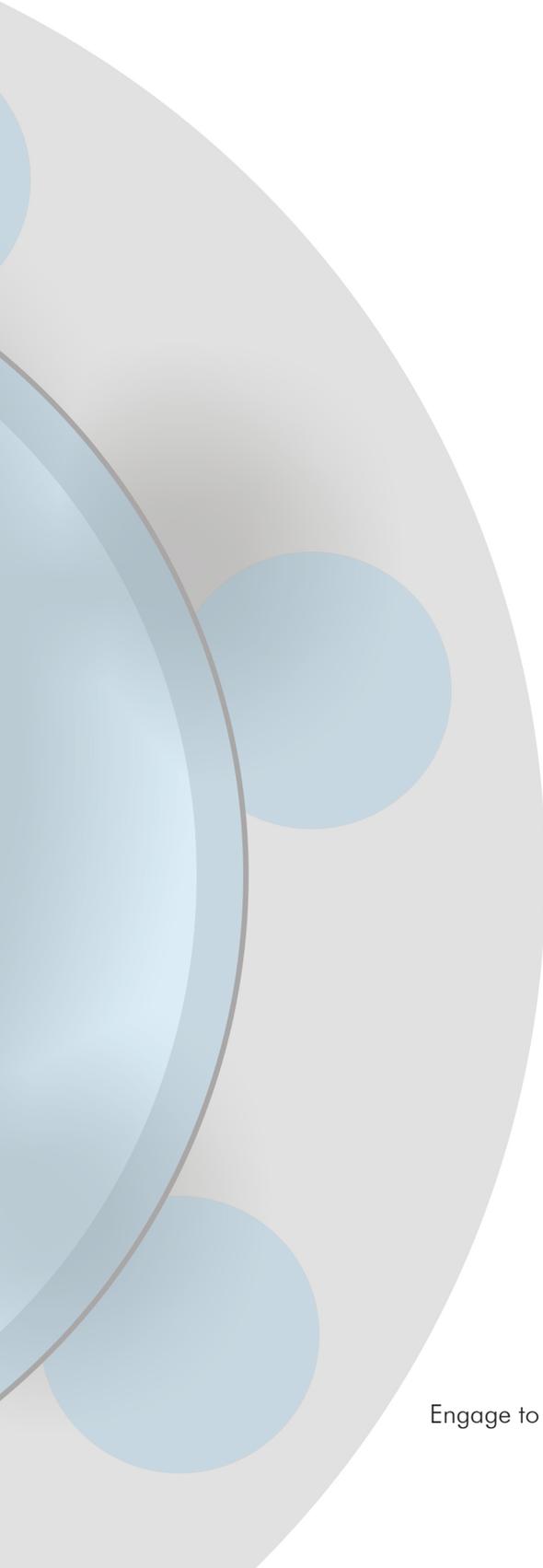
3. Do you think that government plans for volunteering will have a positive or a negative effect on refugee and migrant community organisations?

- Positive
- Negative
- Don't know

Please explain why:

4. Do you think that the government should drop its plans to introduce volunteering into the process of becoming a British citizen?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know



Engage to Change Project is funded by London Councils