

Public Sector Inclusive Leadership Programme (Pilot)

Evaluation Report

12.09.2024



Background

Data on migrant representation in the public sector workforce is limited, and many groups and communities remain overlooked due to a problematic diversity assessment framework that fails to accurately reflect the diverse identities often categorised under the term “White Other”.

This broad classification includes distinct communities such as Eastern Europeans, Latin Americans, Gypsy Roma and Traveller groups, each of which faces different challenges and barriers and migration experiences. As a result, these communities are often invisible in terms of public sector representation, excluded from efforts to diversify recruitment in public sector roles, particularly local government. Using this evidence and in response to this gap, the Social Equity Centre delivered a bespoke project aimed at engaging the Bulgarian, Romanian, and Ukrainian communities in London (as these have had different experiences of migration) to find out about leadership opportunities in local councils through workshops and by connecting them to people of similar backgrounds who are already working in different public sector roles.

Introduction

The Social Equity Centre CIC is an equity-led not-for-profit organisation that aims to address the under-representation of migrant groups in the public policy sphere by upskilling and supporting migrants to apply and access Community Infrastructure roles in the public sector, mainly at local authority level. The Public Sector Inclusive Leadership project engaged with individuals from a Romanian, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian background to help them better understand the opportunities available within the UK public sector and increase their awareness of Community Infrastructure roles and the legal diversity obligations of public bodies. Additionally, the programme provided practical guidance on where to find public sector job listings, how to effectively apply for these roles, interview preparation, and insights into the structure of the UK public system, including the types of jobs available.



The project

The project included the following key activities:

Designing a bespoke 3-hour training:



focused on Community Infrastructures; Diversity and Inclusion, and Practical Skills for job applications.

Organising social gatherings:



to facilitate networking and interaction among community members. Conducting pre and post course evaluations to assess knowledge gained and gather feedback on the training content and delivery.

Three training sessions have been organised as follows:

- one online session on 16 March, attended by participants from Bulgarian (including Roma Bulgarian) and Romanian backgrounds.
- in-person session in Newham for Ukrainian attendees.
- in-person session for Ukrainian attendees, and one Albanian attendee.

Outcomes:



The training sessions were widely promoted through our social media channels, email lists, shared by partners, local authorities, and community members.

A total of 27 participants from Romanian, Bulgarian, Roma Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Albanian, and Ukrainian backgrounds successfully completed our Public Sector Inclusive Leadership training. This achievement represents 90% of our original target of 30 learners.

Evaluation results were highly positive, with 100% of respondents reporting a significant increase in their knowledge of public sector recruitment and structure moving from a “very low” or “low” level of knowledge to a “very high” or “high” level.

The Training content and delivery were consistently rated as “very good” with one exception of one participant who rated it as “good”. This individual found the content on Community Infrastructure challenging to understand, which was anticipated due to the technical nature of the information and the lack of equivalent concepts in their country of origin.

Most of the respondents agreed that the group dynamics were positive, and they found it easy to engage in discussions. However, they did not rate this aspect as “strongly agree” because they were meeting the other participants for the first time on the day, and there was a lot of information to absorb. To address this, we conducted a round of introductions at the start of each session, though our learning session delves further into this observation.

Half of the respondents (50%) indicated that they would consider applying for public sector roles after the training, with 25% stating that they would apply the skills and knowledge gained to work in another sector, such as the charitable sector. 25% expressed a need for additional training before feeling confident enough to apply.

Notably, 80% of learners identified as women, which was expected. For instance, many of the Ukrainian participants were refugees who had arrived in the UK within the past 2 years due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, with women more likely to leave Ukraine as men are required to enrol in the army.

The training sessions also provided opportunities for socialisation. After each session, learners were able to interact with one another and other members of the public during informal conversations and social activities, accompanied by refreshments.

Highlights

Feedback from attendees – goals:



To give a voice to my community whilst working within the public sector.



Active involvement in the migrant representation within local authorities in England.



Gaining knowledge and new information that I can give forward.



Improve my job prospects.



See how I can get involved in public sector.

Feedback from attendees – most enjoyable part:



Q&A section was the most enjoyable as all group mates asks the specific questions from their experience and we received expertise answers from speakers and also got the examples of real cases.



Sharing experience.



I think all the presentations I enjoyed very much. But generally, I enjoy even more the Q&A and the fact that I felt encouraged to speak and ask questions.



Community Infrastructure presentation on community engagement techniques was really insightful into understanding different methods of interacting.

Other feedback:



Perhaps signposting/creating a space to network further i.e. an email alliance to distribute opportunities for eastern Europeans to be in the public sector.



Overall, I felt empowered after this session and very inspired.



Thank you for such meaningful, valuable and helpful workshop which expanded my knowledge of Public Sector.



The course was informative, interesting and useful, thank you for organising and conducting it.



Maybe cover more practical advice on where to apply for these jobs, are there any peculiar requirement for CVs and cover letters when applying for jobs in public sector.

Learnings

This unprecedented type of development intervention brought some anticipated challenges in engagement and delivery. To address these, we implemented several mitigations. One key adjustment was expanding the training offer to individuals from all London boroughs, rather than limiting it to specific areas.

The three communities we engaged—Romanian, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian—have rarely been invited to discuss opportunities in the UK public sector, despite many of them being highly skilled. Some participants, for instance, had extensive experience in the civil service in their home countries, including one individual who had served as a University Director and Lecturer for over 20 years, managed European projects in Ukraine, and was fluent in English and several other languages. However, she faced significant employment challenges in the UK because Ukrainian qualifications are not automatically recognised, in contrast to Bulgarian and Romanian qualifications, which can be more easily accepted for UK job applications. This highlights the distinct barriers faced by the communities we engaged.

Feedback from attendees suggested that the course content could be enhanced by making it more detailed and extending its duration. In response, we are in the process of redesigning the course to span four half-day sessions and plan to seek accreditation for this new format. We have secured a three-year grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to support this development.

One of the most under-represented groups in our project was the Roma Gypsy Eastern European community, with only one participant from a Roma Bulgarian background completing the training. This suggests a need for tailored engagement strategies and future training sessions specifically aimed at the Roma community, which remains significantly under-represented in the public sector, particularly at the local authority level.

Recommendations

- 1 Public sector organisations need to be proactive and engage more diverse migrant communities when advertising their employment opportunities to attract candidates and appoint individuals who are more representative of the communities they support.

- 2 The training we piloted is both unprecedented and urgently needed. Participants shared that they had never been informed about the possibility of applying for roles “in the system”. Their voices are rarely heard and their relationship with the state is precarious, shaped by experiences of dictatorship or oppression. Therefore, we strongly recommend that public sector organisations make concerted efforts towards building trust and increasing participation of migrant groups in public life.

- 3 Greater awareness raising efforts are required to help migrants learn about such opportunities and how to access them.

- 4 Free training programmes are essential in engaging migrants in conversations about working in the public sector. Additionally, thorough evaluations of their participation can provide valuable insights to inform policies and engagement strategies in the long term. Listening to migrants' needs and experiences must be central to this work to avoid making assumptions and reinforcing power hierarchies.

- 5 There are significant economic benefits for having more migrants apply and work in public sector roles. Most of our attendees were highly skilled, with over 10 years of experience, they were all fluent in English and at least 2 other languages, they held numerous qualifications and were ready to work.

- 6 Engaging these groups and having them access opportunities in the sector can help address skills gaps and avoid crisis points within services that are essential for everyone in the society. It can help address under and unemployment and, ultimately, it can benefit all through cost savings, increased independence, cohesion, and a general improvement of the migrant communities' wellbeing.

Next Steps

Having secured a 3-year grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, we will improve and expand the training into 4 half-day sessions and accredit the course to continue delivering it free of charge to marginalised and seldom heard migrant groups, broadening our reach beyond Eastern European communities to include migrants from all backgrounds.

The same grant also allows us to undertake a one-year research initiative focused on representation and diversity within the local authority workforce in London. Upon completion, we will launch our findings and organise a roundtable discussion with key stakeholders to further the conversation and advance our work in this area.

We are proud to be the youngest organisation funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and are deeply grateful to the National Lottery for its support in piloting our work. Their backing has been instrumental in gathering critical feedback, shaping the next stages of our project, and driving meaningful change for some of the most marginalised groups in the UK.



Note: This report is a comprehensive excerpt from the evaluation report completed on 31st of August 2024 and submitted to the National Lottery – Awards for All grant team by email on 12 September 2024.

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