



Migrant Voice Theory of Change

Organisational background

Migrant Voice UK is a migrant-led organisation working to develop the media skills and confidence of migrants to strengthen their voices in the media and civil society for a more balanced, well-informed and inclusive public debate on migration to counter xenophobia and build support for our rights.

MV was established in January 2010 to challenge hostile attitudes to migrants, attitudes which we believe influence the content of government policies and may lead to negative behaviour toward migrants and ethnic minority groups in the UK (Changing Minds 2010). In our view the situation is exacerbated by a lack of spokespeople and experts by experience of migration to share their experiences or perhaps lacking the necessary know-how and confidence to do so. This problem is further compounded by a British media in decline with fewer resources and journalists with the time and resources to engage with migrants thus restricting opportunities for greater diversity within current migration debates.

Migrant Voice develops the skills, capacity and confidence of its members to develop their own strategies to strengthen their voice, participation and representation in the media and in public debates on migration issues. We want to support our members to be creative and expressive in getting their message across, and to have opportunities to share, inform, debate, tell their stories, interact with audiences, educate and campaign.

Our aims

The strategic aim of Migrant Voice is to improve attitudes and behaviours towards migration by providing opportunities for migrants from a wide range of backgrounds to contribute directly to migration debates. Reflecting this, our core objectives are to:

- Increase the skills, capacities and confidence of members of migrant communities;
- Mobilise and engage migrants in developing and conveying key messages about their realities; and
- Create opportunities for migrants to engage directly in debates on migration in the UK with journalists, the public and policy makers.

Ultimately, we consider that the direct contribution of migrants to debates on migration will lead to a more balanced, well-informed and nuanced debate, one which is more likely to reflect and take account of the wide range and diversity of migrant experiences and the richness of relationships between migrants and the host community. In time we hope that this will contribute to more positive public attitudes and behaviours towards those from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds. We are fully aware however that these attitudes and behaviours reflect a complex range of factors and are unlikely to be influenced by one single organisation or strand of work. Our work is focused therefore on creating capacity within migrant communities to engage with opportunities for engagement as and when they arise, including those created by other organisations working on these issues.

Our theory of change

Migrant Voice's theory of change underpins the work of the organisation and ensures that there is clarity about the process by which the activities undertaken contribute to a more balanced and well-informed debate on migration. This theory of change sets out the relationship between what we are doing (our activities) what we are trying to achieve (our outcomes) and the pathways through which we expect change (a more balanced migration debate which includes the voices of migrants) to occur.

Our theory of change is based on the idea that the policy agenda on migration is influenced by what the public thinks, cares about, and does. Public thinking and acting are in turn, thought to be influenced, at least in part, by the media. The work of Migrant Voice tries to influence the agenda-setting process in two different ways: firstly, by working to influence what is on the media's agenda and how migration issues get reported (e.g. using media advocacy); and secondly, by communicating with the public and policy makers directly. It aims to do this at the individual and group level, institutional level, and the level of the public debate.

The theory of change underpinning the work of Migrant Voice is based on a three-stage inter-linked process:

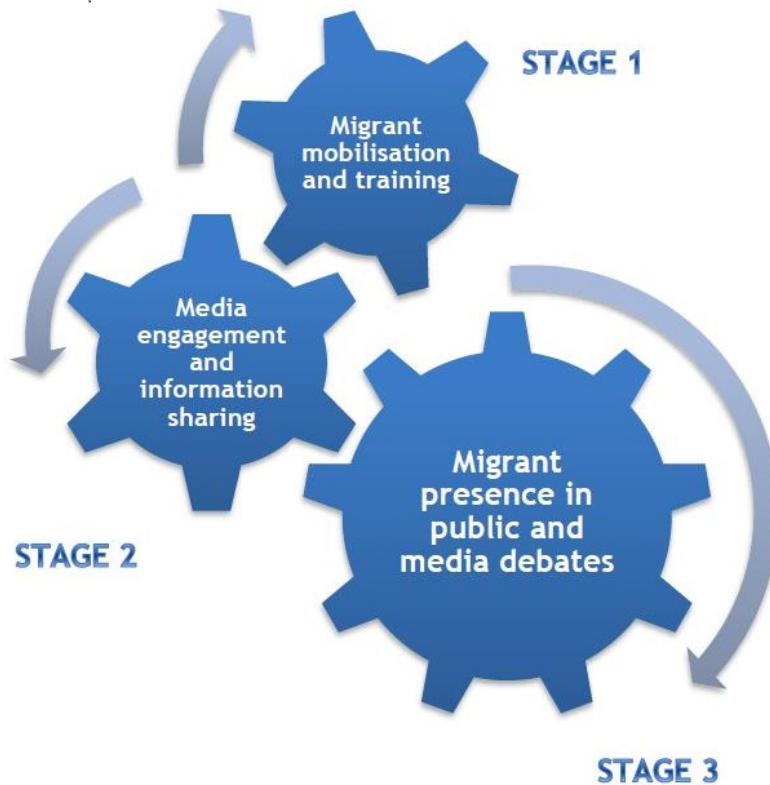
STAGE 1 Migrant mobilisation and training to actively encourage and support migrants from a wide range of backgrounds to contribute to debates about the implications of migration and the experiences of migrants at the local and national levels - providing them with the knowledge, skills, confidence and opportunities to be able to do so. This work takes place primarily at the *individual and group* level;

STAGE 2 Media engagement and information sharing to provide opportunities for journalists from across a wide range of print, television and online outlets to directly access the knowledge and experience of migrants. This work is undertaken primarily at the *institutional* level;

STAGE 3 Increased migrant presence and participation in public and media debates and opportunities for meaningful contact between migrants and members of the host community. This work seeks to influence debates at the *level of public debate*.

This theory of change is represented in the diagram below which shows the causal links between the stages outlined above.

Stages in the Migrant Voice Theory of Change



There is not a simple linear progression between the three stages. We work at all three stages simultaneously as people engage with us and then possibly leave us.

However, by undertaking stage one (migrant mobilisation and training) and stage two (media engagement and information sharing), we will enter stage three (**increased migrant presence and participation in public and media debates**) with a network of empowered migrants ready to tell their story and with better informed and established contacts in the media.

Of course, our work and the context within which we operate is, in reality, complex, and difficult to reflect comprehensively in a diagram.

There are, of course, a range of other organisations working to contribute to a more balanced and inclusive migration debate in the UK. The uniqueness of Migrant Voice is that it creates the opportunity for migrants themselves to be directly and proactively involved in these processes. *This is not an additional element of the organisation's work but rather its primary purpose.*

There is clear evidence "that the absence of migrant voices as sources in the media can deprive the audience of a complex or nuanced understanding of migration issues" and that "the voices of migrants themselves are an important part of the story and that they need to be supported and empowered to take ownership of the issues that directly affect them." It

also matters how those migrants are presented in the stories, so that migrants are not reduced to stereotyped framing. (Coventry University, 2016)

Migrant Voice believes that re-framing the public debate on migration requires migrants themselves be brought into that debate in order to challenge stigma, dispel stereotypes and influence how they are presented in the media.

How do our activities relate to our theory of change?

Our theory of change provides a mechanism for ensuring that all of the activities undertaken by Migrant Voice have a clear purpose which relates explicitly to one or more of the agenda-setting stages identified above. In some cases the activities undertaken by the organisation will relate to one or more stages. Moreover, not all of the stages will have equal weight or importance over time, though many will occur in parallel. It was anticipated, for example, that activities associated with Stage 1 would be particularly important in the early life of Migrant Voice and this proved to be the case.

However, we recognise that activities associated with Stage 1 will continue to be important where the capacity of migrants is being developed in new geographical areas and to enable new voices and experiences to come to the fore.

The foundation for our work is the ***Migrant Voices for Change Networks*** in London, Glasgow and Birmingham and the West Midlands. We mobilise and bring together migrants in the network who are concerned about the way their communities are portrayed in the media, public attitudes towards them and the impact of policies on their lives.

The Network aims to strengthen the voices of migrants in the media and in the public domain, by increasing their interest, skills and confidence in developing and conveying key messages about their realities to promote a more balanced media coverage and public debate on migration, including the production of own media work and strategies to make their case directly to the public.

STAGE 1 MIGRANT MOBILISATION AND TRAINING

The primary activities under stage one are the mobilisation of members in our network and media training and mentoring.

Our network meetings are safe spaces for migrants to come together to raise issues facing them, and to work together to build solidarity and strategies for engaging with and influencing the debate on migration.

We will work with groups of migrants to help them to develop a plan for how best to raise their issues of concern, tell their own story while also promote a particular policy or practice change.

Our training and mentoring in media skills takes place through our signature *Media Lab* and other projects in response to the needs of our members. The aim is to build the skills,

knowledge and confidence of migrants to engage with the media and with the public debate.

We will share the learning of our work supporting migrants in the media through our media engagement toolkit, which we will disseminate across the country to inspire more people to tell their own story.

STAGE 2 MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION-SHARING

The primary activities under stage two are the building of relationships with the media and facilitating and supporting migrants to engage with journalists and make their voices heard in the media. A good example of this is our *Meet a Migrant* project.

We build relationships with the media through providing useful sources of information including the stories of individual migrants, and through providing spokespeople, case studies and our opinion. Relationships are also built through engaging journalists in our work as mentors, trainers and advisors.

We pro-actively create opportunities for migrants to speak out on media platforms and support this at the stage one level with training and mentoring and debriefing before, during and after the process.

STAGE 3 INCREASING MIGRANT PRESENCE IN MEDIA AND PUBLIC DEBATES

The primary activity relating to Stage 3 is the contribution to influencing the media debate, building public support and understanding, and achieving policy or practice change on our strategic priority issues.

The main work takes the form of contributions by network members to the mainstream media ensuring migrants' voices are heard, are presented accurately, and we contribute to remedying the under-representation of migrant voices in the media.

We influence the media reporting through providing advice and information based on our members' experiences at the development stage of the story. Our own media platforms (website, twitter, Facebook) also provide a useful source of information for journalists.

We will enable migrants to work with editors to influence the media coverage of migration in order to change the prevailing newsroom culture, addressing structural issues that exclude migrant's stories from the media.

We will also support community organisations so that they can more effectively engage with their media and support the development of community champions to take this work forward at a local level.

Our network meetings and public events share migrants' voices with the wider public in order to build public support and understanding including strengthening solidarity between migrants themselves.

We influence policy change through migrants telling their stories on media and policy platforms to raise awareness of issues affecting their lives. We do so on our own, or strategically working with legal or policy organisations where we bring the voice, in order to amplify our overall impact.

Conclusion

We believe that we have a distinctive approach to working directly on achieving media, policy and/or practice change. Our most effective contribution is through the establishment of spaces where migrants can meet with key policy makers and media influencers. We believe that it is by giving such people the chance to listen to authentic voices talk about their own lived experience that we can really influence and promote change.

In working in these ways we feel that we will be making a distinctive contribution to the growth of a movement in defence of migrants across the country.

Through our theory of change the migrant voice will be developed, supported and heard to improve the lives of migrants.