

Europia

Case study: Small charities and social change
Field: Migration

At a glance

Europia provides information, advice, guidance and advocacy work for the European expatriate community in Greater Manchester. Europia's income of just under £50,000 is provided by a mix of charitable trust funds and statutory funding, and they employ one full-time and one part-time worker.

Focus of the case study

The case study tracks the journey the organisation has been on to get to where it is today – to undertake a piece of policy work called The Greater Manchester Brexit strategy.

What does advocacy mean for them?

Europia was originally formed to deliver an advice service for Eastern European migrants, providing information on welfare rights and entitlements within the UK. Over the years the organisation has developed a positive reputation within the area for providing free and accessible specialist support to the community, comprising a drop-in service and outreach work, and holding community awards. Their workforce understands the different cultural behaviours and needs of this group, and has relevant language skills, both of which have helped to break down barriers and create trusted relationships within the community. As welfare reform has increased in complexity, demand for their service has grown.

Very few organisations are doing this work, and Europia has been recognised for its role as an expert in the community. It is a trusted gatekeeper into Eastern European communities and can reach individuals other services often find challenging to access. This has led to invitations from external agencies to participate in different projects and activities.

They have been contacted by universities to take part in research projects on, for example, the Roma communities, or over-50s Eastern European migrants. Such research has built the organisation's knowledge and evidence base. They have also been asked to contribute to the monthly Eastern European Hate Crime Reference Group, set up and organised by

the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), to tackle the rise in hate crime in the area.

The majority of Europaia's work is aimed not at a national level but rather at empowering and building the confidence of individuals to advocate for themselves and their community. The organisation's strapline has been very carefully chosen: 'Empowering - Supporting - Training - Representing European Expats in Greater Manchester'.

What's worked?

Over the last five years, Europaia has steadily been undertaking various types of advocacy activities, mainly through gathering evidence, representing the voice of communities, advocating for the rights of individuals, and forming a network to bring community leaders together.

In previous years, Europaia did not favour adopting an active outsider approach in order to influence social change. However, the UK's decision to leave the European Union left the organisation in a valuable position to demonstrate the potential risk to East European migrant groups in the North West. This, and the organisation's growing confidence, expertise and connections, is what inspired them to undertake the Greater Manchester Brexit strategy. As one Roma community leader said, Europaia's work *'has been making people feel confident that we have rights like everyone else ... then Brexit comes and all that gone, we don't have rights, you can't be in the country. And ... the disappointment is even worse now'*.

Europaia's first thought is always for their service users, so they are bringing in psychological support for them while they fill in the resettlement forms. On the strategy side, Europaia will conduct a policy review and draw on evidence from consultations and their work with Eastern European migrants to highlight the current situation and identify potential gaps post Brexit. This will enable them to outline possible solutions to address these concerns and challenges.

Part of this recent push has come from the leadership within the organisation, which recognises the positive reputation and identity the organisation has created within the sector and local community, and values the work the organisation has done. To make the project a success, the Director has had to step back from doing frontline work, acknowledging that policy work requires dedicated resources, networking, and a more strategic overview on how to inform change. This has been reinforced by support from the board of trustees, which recognises the value of Europaia being involved because it fits with the organisation's mission.

As a small, fairly isolated organisation with limited confidence, it was essential for Europaia to build informal and formal relationships with other migrant organisations. As the sector is quite fragmented in Manchester, they turned to London, and the Director has found it extremely useful to share experiences and expertise with other groups. In turn this has built the Director's knowledge about the environment and how to operate in

various ways. It has also provided the Director with a sense of solidarity and moral support which fuels the commitment to this social cause.

Challenges/what we've learnt?

It has been a learning journey for Europaia to reach a position where they feel confident to do external advocacy work. The operating environment for migrant charities in the North West is rather fragmented, which meant the Director had to look elsewhere for peer learning networks. Personal safety has become more of an issue, and the hostile environment and the rise in hate crime has made them very wary about making overly political public statements.

The Director also recognised a skills gap: *'Lack of awareness that this work needs to be done. Lack of confidence that they can do this work. A fear of failure, and just the unknown. So in any successful organisation you want experienced, skilled, confident staff'*.

As head of an organisation, *'It's totally, totally lonely ... to be a leader, and you're constantly dealing with so many different emotions'*. He realised other leaders felt the same, so he was inspired to set up the Eastern European Leaders Network. The network provides community leaders with a space in which to talk, listen, reflect and learn from one another. Bringing people together in this way can empower them individually, but also enables them to unite and create a stronger, shared, representation.

The organisation has very limited capacity, and it is only recently that the Director has refrained from doing frontline services to concentrate on policy work. Although there is buy-in from the leadership team, lack of resources has presented a huge challenge to completing the policy strategy while fitting it around running an organisation. For the Director, *'money would definitely give motivation for me to set some time aside to do this'*.

There are some advantages in being small, however. Europaia values its niche position, which it has used to create trusting relationships with the local migrant groups and give them different channels to share their voice. Their wealth of knowledge on the cultural issues and needs of the group, and their extensive relationships with service users, community leaders and external agencies, mean that they are completely embedded in those communities.

Getting to where they are now – to develop the Greater Manchester Brexit strategy – is something they are proud of. They have achieved it by gathering evidence and expertise over the last five years from projects, activities on the needs and issues of Eastern European migrant groups, and the consultations they undertook to understand these concerns in relation to the potential development of Brexit. They have learnt that you need confidence, awareness and skills to do influencing work.

This is the case study of one of 11 organisations we spoke to from four fields: criminal justice; homelessness; migration; and violence against women and girls. These case study organisations had annual incomes between £50k and just over £1m. We are incredibly grateful for the rich and open insights that were shared with us.

The case studies are part of IVAR's study *Small Charities and Social Change*, which builds on existing research, drawing on the experience of 11 organisations, to explore the role and contribution of small charities in more depth. It asks how and why small charities are challenging, shaping and changing policy, practice and attitudes. It discusses the challenges and opportunities that they face in doing so.

The report and case studies can be found here www.ivar.org.uk/social-change.