

BME-Migrant Advisory Group (B-MAG); Safeguarding Children and Young People



Annual Report 2019

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B-MAG in 2019

Working to promote a sense of belonging in a more just and inclusive world

The significant task we undertake in B-MAG is our work to have recognised the needs of BME and Migrant Children, young people and families, and to enhance their care and protection. The work is often concentrated on the local level; it involves articulation of individual practitioner experiences, located in specific places, and professional contexts. However, these are always framed by the larger national and transnational picture.

Whilst during 2019 the crisis facing people in migration continued across the world, perhaps with less media attention than in the immediately preceding years, in the UK the issues of bordering, belonging and the conflict between inclusive and excluding paradigms were totally unavoidable. Brexit had become the headline and text, a theatre for the playing out of competing views of the aspirations for society; the maxim of ‘taking back control’ seeking to turn back the development of globalisation and internationalism, open borders, free movement of people and trade. UK national policy has become clearly paradoxical. On the one hand, the UK hostile environment constructs migrants and refugees as a threat to the security and social cohesiveness of the nation, yet it also participates, as a signatory to the United Nations 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, in an international system to protect and support migrants and refugees within a humanitarian approach and a human rights framework. The UN Global Compact on Refugees (<https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>) extols the “fundamental principles of humanity and international solidarity, and seeks to operationalise the principles of burden- and responsibility-sharing to better protect and assist refugees and support host countries and communities”; this 50-page booklet encapsulates the best of principles, and demonstrates the aspiration for global cooperation.

During 2019, the extent of the impact of the hostile environment policy on BME groups became evident, especially through the injustices experienced by the Windrush generation, and the threats to their sense of belonging and identity. Black racism, along with other racisms – anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic and anti-Roma – seem increasingly bound up with the construction of the figure of the migrant, a denial of belonging and of the necessity of crossing borders in a highly diversified world; the figure of the migrant has become an increasingly racialised category, irrespective of skin colour or culture.

B-MAG aims to ensure that connections are maintained in thinking and practice, between the notions of migration and belonging. The focus connects BME groups and migrants, as sharing lived space, communities, and cultures, existing with hybridity, as Stuart Hall described it, within and beyond national states and borders. We recognise that practitioners have a difficult task in retaining sensitivity in contradictory policy contexts, and we maintain the need to achieve this is paramount, even though support may be needed to question assumptions that can incipiently affect working practices. And when this does occur, we must challenge and also promote training, education and reflective practice.

During the past year, B-MAG continued to draw on the national and local expertise of the Advisory Group, to support - and applaud - initiatives to enhance the care and protection of BME and Migrant children, families and young people. The seminar series continued, reaching out to practitioners, teachers and researchers. Seminars this year discussed current developments in understanding and responding to faith based abuse of children accused of witchcraft and spirit possession, and the securitisation of child protection through the PREVENT programme. An international collaboration was begun with the University of Kassel, Germany, with Erasmus funding (yes, from the EU). The B-MAG website and social media have enhanced our communications; a series of blogs on the website has started. We have set strategic objectives for our overall activities and for those of the three workstreams – migration, culture and faith and securitisation and in this report we review and assess our progress against these objectives.

At the time of writing new challenges have appeared as Covid19 advances across the world; we anticipate difficult times ahead, but will continue to advocate for a more equal, just and inclusive world through protection of and enhancement a secure sense of belonging for children, young people and their families.

Strategic objectives for 2020

1. to combat the effects of the hostile environment and thus to positively influence practice and policy to increase recognition of the needs and the quality of care for these children, young people and families
2. to monitor and respond to the adverse effects of Covid-19 on BME and migrant children, young people and families
3. to meet the above objectives (1 and 2) through the activities (research, communication and campaign) of the three workstreams
4. to inform, and promote discussion and debate through the public seminar/webinar series
5. to strategically expand the B-MAG group and membership
6. to expand communication of B-MAG activities through the website and social media

What is B-MAG? Why is it important?

B-MAG is a multidisciplinary working group which aims to promote good practice for BME and migrant children, young people and families. B-MAG recognises and aims to ensure that the rights to care and protection of children and young people are met, to the accepted standards of best practice. These children and young people may have experiences of asylum seeking, having irregular legal status, being victims of child trafficking, sexual exploitation, modern slavery and torture. They can also be subject to harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), and attributions of witchcraft and spirit possession. Some are vulnerable through having disabilities and many have difficulties in being understood by organisations because of language barriers and gaps in knowledge when working across cultures.

B-MAG also recognises that the needs for care and protection are crucial, not only in the immediate and short-term, but also through long-term support and investment. Longer term needs are to ensure that children, young people and families are helped to alleviate the effects of experiencing adverse circumstances, materially, emotionally and socially, so that they do not have to endure the effects of external and internal poverty, and cultural and political misunderstanding and discrimination.

Therefore B-MAG has identified a role that is vital, and not currently undertaken by other existing groups of focusing on the safeguarding needs of these children, young people and families, with regard to migration experiences, issues of faith and culture, and politically, especially in relation to the security question of radicalisation.

B-MAG Structure, Membership and Working Groups

B-MAG Workstreams

The Advisory Group identified three key Work Streams;

- (1) Children, Families and Young People in Migration
- (2) Culture & Faith
- (3) Securitisation (PREVENT and radicalisation)

Each use similar working methods - research, communication and campaign.

Each Work Stream is convened by a member of the Advisory Group, and members of the group express allegiances to one or more, based on expertise and current practice. It is recognised that there are important overlaps and cross-references between the themes, which are coordinated in the Advisory Group.

B-MAG Executive/Secretariat

The Victoria Climbié Foundation UK

University of East London Centre for Social Work Research

Member Organisations

African Families Service | Barnardo's (The FGM Centre) | Children & Families Across Borders (CFAB) | Diocese of Canterbury (Refugee Officer) | FORWARD | Pasolo Project, The | Coram | Together with Migrant Children (TwMC) | UEL Centre for Social Work Research (CSWR) | Victoria Climbié Foundation UK, The (VCF)

Current Members

Amma Anane-Agyei | Leethen Bartholomew | Professor Stephen Briggs | Dr Beverley Costa | Dr Mor Dioum | Dr Ana Draper | Dr Emilios Lemoniatis | Fatuma Farah | Dr Jo Finch | Laura Hamblin-Opaluwa | Carolyn Housman | Sheila Leighton | Dr Lisa Oakley | Toks Okeniyi | Domenica Pecoraro | Nick Watts | Dr Andrew Whittaker | Dr Stephanie Yorath

Reports from the Workstreams

Workstream 1: Children and Young People in Migration

Convener: Professor Stephen Briggs
CSWR Director

This workstream identified key strategic objectives for 2019, encompassing the ambition to build on the achievements of the previous year, including the strengthening of the Advisory Group through the introduction of a range of expertise. The objectives were:

1. Continuing to build networks
2. Increasing communication including through the website of key issues and developments, including addressing negative narratives
3. Building collaborations within UK and internationally
4. Offering events and training for practitioners, including a further seminar
5. Aiming to publish e.g. in Trade press
6. Exploring research opportunities including funding applications

The context for our activities is provided by national policies that continue to generate negative narratives about migration, through the hostile environment, nationalist and exclusivist policies, and turning away from the international, national and local needs. These policies have tragic consequences. We continue to strive, to challenge the assumptions and practices arising from these policies, to provide counter-arguments, to address the issues faced by individuals and groups and to connect and collaborate with other organisations in the field. We aim to support practitioners, often faced with intolerable conflicts and to challenge practices that reduce or deny individual rights, a sense of belonging and security.

Advisory Group members have actively contributed to the workstream objectives; we have focused on gathering knowledge of members' activities, sharing these and developing support for each other's initiatives in the group and through the B-MAG communication channels, including the website and social media. Some examples, and highlights, include:

Nick Watts, Together with Migrant Children (TWMC), reported legal work, including three judicial reviews for 'No recourse to public funds' (NRPF) cases, working with a group of six charities to write Section 17 guidance for families, and linking with other Advisory Group members to coordinate referrals for individuals seeking advice with their renewed immigration status. 80% of TWMC's current work is on challenging government including through judicial reviews, alongside outreach and casework addressing destitution and street homelessness, NRPF and age assessments.

CFAB awareness initiatives included; National Kinship Week 5-11 October, and (2) Global Social Services Workforce 21-25 Oct; where CFAB focus will be 'children on the move'. CFAB developed an early help support project working with families reunited in the UK under the Dubs 3 regulation. The 3-year project will evaluate how local authorities should be working to support and enhance migrants' experiences.

Domenica Pecoraro addressed the current situation in Kent where arriving children and young people will now stay in Kent rather than being dispersed, as numbers are now not at the threshold for dispersal. Children, however, are at risk of exploitation with no support, often relying on friends or they disappear off the radar. There are moves for former unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) to be reunited with families. Numbers in Kent approximately 800-900 people, including 16-19 year-olds (and up to 25s).

Ana Draper, Coram and Tavistock, drew attention to the experiences of torture, sexual abuse and imprisonment experienced by young migrants on the journey, and the question thus raised about international safeguarding. The workstream is continuing to discuss and work on this and related issues.

We began a collaboration with Kassel University, Germany. Following a visit by Stephen Briggs in December 2018 to Kassel to work with the students on the social work course, Kassel students visited UEL for a three day event on working with Migrant and BME children, young people and families. This included presentations and discussion in UEL, including a keynote by Amma Anane-Agyei – ‘who am I? - exploring self and cultural understanding and knowledge. Visits to local organisations were arranged and the Kassel group, led by Professor Reinhard Lindner took part in an Advisory Group Meeting. Further exchanges and collaboration are planned.

In training, TWMC presented at an event focused on linguistics and migration in February 2019 and provide teaching for social work students at RHUL. CFAB also delivers training, funded by Esmee Fairbairn, aimed at local authority social workers who lack knowledge of cross-border cases, currently reaching out to 300, and a further 300 by the end of this year. Thereafter, the intention is to offer enhanced training on how to work with cross border families, and kinship placements for children overseas. CFAB also delivering training overseas, sharing UK models of practice/assessments and making it relevant for the specific country.

Ana Draper has written chapters on unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC); supporting social workers, and a psychiatric manual looking at the mental health needs of UASC.

In summary, therefore, in this workstream, the activities have addressed the strategic objectives of continuing to build networks, increasing communication including through the website of key issues and developments, including addressing negative narratives, and building collaborations within UK and internationally. Members’ organisations have contributed to training, research and some written outputs have been produced. An open seminar hosted by B-MAG, UEL and VCF is being planned for 2020.

For 2020, the strategic objectives are similar to last year.

1. to support effective interventions for individuals and groups through communication, practice and training
2. building collaboration in UK and internationally
3. hosting open seminars/webinars on the theme of migration
4. increasing publications from the group
5. identifying and developing appropriate research and evaluation projects, including seeking funding

Workstream 2: Culture & Faith (Beliefs)

**Convenor: Dr Mor Dioum
VCF Director**

The focus of the **B-MAG Culture, Faith or Beliefs** workstream is the safeguarding of children and young people, including, though not limited to those impacted by mental health, language, domestic abuse, disabilities, exploitation, and trafficking, in addition to safeguarding priorities affecting BME and migrant communities such as FGM, witchcraft & spirit possession, and radicalism.

This workstream report provides an update for 2019 and the contributions of advisory group members to these key objectives;

a) To review and evaluate cases which include PREVENT processes and assess the implications for practice within BME families.

The impact on children has been at the heart of work with families linked to radicalism, where safeguarding processes have encouraged wider debate as to political influence on such cases amid an increasingly hostile environment for social care practice.

Through its legally-based advocacy casework service, VCF – The Victoria Climbié Foundation UK supports a number of families navigating safeguarding processes and beyond, to assist practitioner awareness or to educate within the community. In the majority of VCF cases, parents have exercised their rights to opt out of the voluntary PREVENT programme – which seeks to reform and educate those deemed to be radicalised or supporters of extremist behaviours – particularly where safeguarding concerns have been addressed.

*A seminar entitled *The impact of anti-radicalisation policies on safeguarding practice with children, young people and parents* was held in April 2019. A key question was the suggestion of racial bias implicit in the aims and methods of the policy that affects institutions – in health, education and social care – interacting with and responsible for children.*

A wider study planned for publication in 2020/21, will include summary detail for these cases (some still pending closure), including the impact on affected children, the role of advocacy within child protection, and recommendations for children's services interacting with BME families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the practice model has not changed in recent years in relation to extremely sensitive safeguarding issues and there remains a lack of effective engagement with the relevant communities and the notion of 'hard to reach'.

b) To promote current knowledge and understanding of FGM and witchcraft and spirit possession, together and separately

Opportunities to promote current knowledge and understanding of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) have increased dramatically for the government-funded national FGM Centre which now includes child abuse linked to faith or belief within its remit; this, in itself has not led to further exploration of possible links between witchcraft, spirit possession, and FGM although there has been fairly extensive work undertaken to-date on accusations of all faith-based abuse. What is being explored is the link between FGM and the underlying issues of domestic abuse, not specifically being addressed within the Violence against Women and Girls policy initiative.

In reporting back to the group, B-MAG members presenting their work at a witchcraft seminar in Lancashire; a 2-day event aimed at a global audience; have been heartened by the UN's continuing to move this topic forward in discussions – particularly the scale of human rights abuses involving harmful practices related to certain beliefs in witchcraft – towards a global definition for witchcraft and spirit possession, commonly known as abuse linked to faith or belief in this country.

Laura Hamblin (PhD student at UEL) presented aspects of her research to determine how it fits within the U.N. Harmful Practices framework. For example, in some of her research cases, children had not been abused yet they had been impacted by parental beliefs.

Leethen Bartholomew (Head, National FGM Centre) attended UK-based panels, which presented differing approaches, some more maverick than others particularly in relation to work around albinism in Tanzania. One of the key concerns, particularly for albinos, is focused around elections; these present a heightened risk of child sacrifice.

However, this is not confined to Tanzania; a similar prospect awaits children in West Africa, during elections in Senegal, particularly the Talibés (street children). Thus, we may need to consider international legislation to attract UN interest.

Advisory group members worked alongside statutory agencies and educators to assist understanding of faith-based abuse; these include such activities as providing input on a policing degree (Laura Hamblin, PhD student at UEL) and delivering training to constables involved in a case of a pastor using 'bath cleansing' to sexually abuse children (Amma Anane-Agyei, African Families Service) and submission of a chapter on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief for the University of Nottingham who are revising their child protection handbook (Dr Mor Dioum/Dr Stephanie Yorath, VCF).

c) To examine the recent census of cases of witchcraft and spirit possession data to explore implications for practice

Whilst there is a growing body of work and research to inform safeguarding policies and guidance, there is still scope for greater understanding of the nature of local authority recorded cases of witchcraft or spirit possession, more commonly defined as Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief (CALFB).

The most recent Children in Need Census (2018-19) indicates an increase in the numbers of recorded cases (for witchcraft and FGM). Yet there are issues with these recorded figures; namely that (1) the information is provided by practitioners in child in need and child protection cases, and not necessarily being reported by children and families who may be reluctant to speak to children's services, (2) the census contains a significant volume of statistical data yet difficult to obtain information behind the numbers, and (3) the need for examination of the recorded data for abuse linked to faith or belief.

A seminar entitled *Child Abuse linked to Faith or Belief; where do we go from here?* held 30 April 2019, further highlighted and debated these concerns. See the **B-MAG Seminar Series** section of this document.

Various written outputs (blogs/announcements) are available from the B-MAG website and were also distributed across social media and member networks.

In providing an update to the advisory group in January 2020, Dr Lisa Oakley, Chair of the National Working Group on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief identified areas of potential collaboration for the year ahead – informed by work being undertaken by advisory group individuals or organisations with similar aims – in event delivery,

publications and co-representation of the issues relating to this topic, including wider examination of data.

d) To communicate the impact of current legislation and policy on FGM to improve understanding of the issues in practice

On 1st February 2019, we saw the first conviction of FGM in this country since the introduction of legislation in 1989, updated in 2003 and again in 2015. Considered to be a landmark case, involving the mother of a 3-year-old child, it was important to consider the impact of this conviction and why it was applauded, raising concerns and the need for wider reflection. Leethen Bartholomew (National FGM Centre) and Toks Okeniyi (FORWARD) contributed to the continuing debate with written responses from their perspectives.

As a group, there is a view that there are unanswered questions amid other contributory factors within this case, including the importance of following the right processes, with FORWARD citing the Bristol case and undue haste and desire to get a conviction, and from VCF's perspective the discrepancy between findings in the family and criminal courts; an emerging trend as this is the second known case in recent times where an individual condemned in the family court has gone on to be cleared of criminal charges.

A positive measure for those in need of support and counselling for FGM reversal procedures, was the launch of 6 specialist FGM clinics on 10th September 2019. Fatuma Farah is delivering psychotherapeutic support in Brent, alongside her PhD studies on FGM and will be able to report on developments in due course.

In summary, this workstream will continue its efforts in support of the group's overall priorities to highlight the needs and the quality of care for children, young people and families, within the contexts of their cultural values and beliefs.

Strategic objectives for 2020 building on those set in 2019, are to:

1. Monitor, comment upon and communicate concerning developments in practice and policy regarding cases of witchcraft and spirit possession, including CIN census data (to explore implications for practice, including the prevalence across ethnicities)
2. Actively communicate widely and effectively to promote good practice for cases involving witchcraft and spirit possession, based on current knowledge and understanding
3. Actively communicate widely current practice including developments and findings for FGM reversals within NHS supported clinics, alongside therapeutic and holistic approaches
4. Further explore links between FGM and other policy areas including witchcraft and spirit possession, mental health and domestic abuse cases
5. Build collaborations nationally and internationally

Workstream 3: Securitisation/Radicalisation (PREVENT)

Convenor: Jo Finch
Deputy Director, CSWR

2019 witnessed significant criticism of and calls for changes to the PREVENT policy, though the planned governmental review was delayed. Within B-MAG, the year's work focused on Dr. Jo Finch's continuing conceptual publications, with David McKendrick. These have led to aiming to develop a wider symposium to consider the challenges of writing about this subject. Debates tend to be polarised, on one side of the argument or other, and very few occupying the space in between.

Jo Finch also has developed an international collaboration with Mid Sweden University and involvement in policy discussions, including an invitation only consultation event on PREVENT held at St Georges House, Windsor Castle, and a report to be submitted to the PREVENT review.

Publications include:

Finch, J. and McKendrick, D. (2019) Securitising Social Work: Counter Terrorism, Extremism and Radicalisation, in Webb, S. (ed) Routledge Handbook of Critical Social Work, Routledge, London)

Research:

Jo Finch, with Mid Sweden University: joint application to Scandinavian funding stream to continue research work on 'hostile states'

Jo Finch, exploration of parents experiences of social service involvement following a PREVENT referral, Leverhulme/British Academy Small Grants Award

A seminar in the B-MAG seminar series, planned for November 12th was postponed and then held on 28th January 2020. The seminar explored the relationship between the aims of PREVENT and child safeguarding practice. The keynote speaker, Dr Tarek Younis, discussed his research on Islamophobia in the National Health Service (NHS) and how PREVENT's counter-radicalisation enters into clinical logic. PREVENT must engage in performance colour blindness, the active recognition and dismissal of racial logic which associates radicalised Muslims with the threat of terrorism. Institutional racism is introduced and operates in the NHS, why it is difficult to address racism embedded within colour blind policies, and how mental health and psychologisation are integral to the performance of colour blindness. Discussant Nick Watts responded to the paper. A feature of the discussion following was its inclusiveness, unusually perhaps as PREVENT tends to polarise; practitioners shared their dilemmas and the complexity of working with securitisation in this system

Further, there has been discussion in relation to VCF-supported cases that, for a cohort of parents opting not to engage with the PREVENT programme – presented as a voluntary undertaking for those suspected of being radicalised – extend well beyond the norms of standard safeguarding processes and timelines with no discernible changes to case law, amid increasingly discordant voices around the Home Office PREVENT policy and its links to child safeguarding under the leadership of the Department for Education.

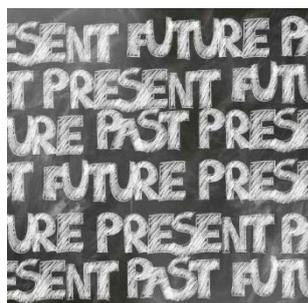
For all families who come to the attention of the authorities, through alleged links to radicalised or extremist behaviours, there is the realisation that a national database exists, although the process by which names may be added or removed is less clear, and concerning for children who may be included within such data, regardless of safeguarding outcomes.

On 12 February 2019, the government committed to an independent review of PREVENT alongside the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, and for that review and the government's response to be completed by 12 August 2020.

Strategic Objectives for 2020

1. Review and evaluate VCF cases, which include PREVENT processes, to examine the implications for practice
2. Continue to research, including making funding applications, to explore the impact of PREVENT on families
3. Communicate widely through seminars and online to disseminate findings from research
4. Build and maintain collaborations in UK and internationally

B-MAG Seminar Series: seminars in 2019



Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief; where do we go from here?

30 April 2019: Discussion on the increase in witchcraft and spirit possession cases recorded in the Children in Need Census for 2017-18 and a snapshot of where we are now in the timeline for child abuse linked to faith or belief in this country spanning almost 20 years. Increasing awareness of the problem and greater transparency in recording episodes and cases are important developments, but many key questions remain. Beyond our current awareness and understanding of this harmful practice, through public interest cases and research, the aim is to further explore the gaps for policy and practice. The three speakers and the title of their talks;

Dr Maria Clark: 'Mind the gap: practitioner-research perspectives on child abuse linked to faith and belief' | Superintendent Sean Russell: Harmful Practice – Learning from a Child Death KI (2008) | Melanie Adegbite: 'Lets talk: social work practice and faith-based abuse'



The impact of anti-radicalisation policies on safeguarding practice with children, young people and parents

12 November 2019, rescheduled to 28 January 2020: The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 placed a duty on specified authorities to have due regard to the need to PREVENT people from being drawn into terrorism. This is known as the PREVENT duty - and extends to protecting children from radicalisation. In seeking to explore the relationship between the aims of PREVENT and child safeguarding practice; a key question is the suggestion of racial bias implicit in the aims and methods of the policy that affects institutions - in health, education and social care - interacting with and responsible for children.

Dr Tarek Younis: Islamophobia in the National Health Service; How PREVENT's Counter-Radicalisation Enters into Clinical Logic | Nick Watts: Discussant

Seminars planned for 2020

Event planning is in progress; all upcoming events will appear on the B-MAG Website.

Keeping in touch with B-MAG

B-MAG has a dedicated website for online news and updates.

News and announcements posted on our website are distributed through social media channels and email networks.

We welcome contributions from all our members and followers



B-MAG website: <https://bmagsafeguardingcyp.com/>



Follow B-MAG on Twitter: @safeguardingBME



Group chat (B-MAG members)

Acknowledgements

Sir Keir Starmer, Labour Party Leader and MP for Holborn and St Pancras (formerly Shadow Brexit Minister) **Parliamentary Roundtable, Jan 2017** Toks Okeniyi, Millie Patel and Fatuma Farah **FGM Symposium, April 2018** Dr Ana Draper, Nick Watts and Oliver Briggs **CYP in Migration seminar, October 2018** Carolyn Housman, Ben Archer and Domenica Pecoraro **B-MAG Meetings 2017/2018** Dr Maria Clark, Superintendent Sean Russell, Melanie Adegbite **Culture and Faith Seminar, April 2019** Professor Reinhard Lindner, Dr Beverley Costa, Professor Jean-Marc Dewale, Dr Lisa Oakley **B-MAG meetings 2019** Dr Tarek Younis, Nick Watts **Radicalism Seminar, January 2020**