Appendix: Further details on research methods

What we aimed to do

Our research began in 2013, with the following aims:

• to document high-profile Home Office campaigns against irregular immigration, in six local areas of the UK and at a national level
• to identify how government communications on migration interact with public debate and activism
• to produce analysis that informs debates, community action and policy, and that is useful to community organisations
• to develop new research methodologies that link digital, face-to-face and ‘traditional’ communications and policy channels
• to evaluate the effectiveness of the research and dissemination methodologies used in the project, and the project’s impact.

Our research questions

We wanted to investigate these main questions:

*What are the impacts of the Home Office high-profile publicity campaigns about migration?* How are the messages of these government campaigns understood by residents in targeted areas? What forms of activism and community organising are being developed in response to these campaigns?

*What are the relationships between public attitudes to ‘illegal’ migration, migration policy, racism and good community relations, particularly in a context of austerity?* Who is aware of the government campaigns and activist responses to them? What are the class, ethnicity and gender dimensions of public debates at a UK level on migration? Do these differ at a local level? What is the role of social research in this?
What we did

Our qualitative research was based in six places: Barking and Dagenham; Bradford; Cardiff; Glasgow; Ealing and Hounslow; West Midlands (Birmingham and Coventry). Some of these (Barking and Dagenham, Ealing and Hounslow) were targeted by the Go Home vans. Others (Glasgow, Ealing and Hounslow) included reporting centres for migrants where similar advertising was used. All of the areas had experienced high-profile immigration raids; immigration had been covered in local news items with reporters accompanying border agents; signs about the limitation of migrant rights were displayed in public places (such as hospitals); and/or the areas had been involved in national debates about race and migration.

Across these areas, we conducted 13 focus groups with 67 people (including new migrants, long-settled migrants, ethnic minority and white British citizens), to understand the local effects of government campaigns on immigration. We also interviewed 24 local activists about the effects of Operation Vaken and other immigration enforcement initiatives on their work, and we spent time documenting local events and protests.

Nationally, we interviewed policy-makers about the intentions and thinking behind such campaigns (one MP, five civil servants located in Treasury, Business Innovation and Skills, Home Office and three people from Westminster think tanks) and attended two Westminster roundtables discussing immigration, organised by think tanks and lobby groups.

We also commissioned a survey from Ipsos MORI to investigate awareness and reactions to the government campaigns. Questions were placed on the Ipsos MORI Omnibus (Capibus) amongst a nationally representative quota sample of 2,424 adults (aged 15 and over). Within this, a total of 580 black and minority ethnic individuals were interviewed. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in peoples’ homes between 15 August and 9 September 2014, using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing software. All data are weighted to the known national profile of adults aged 15+ in Great Britain.

As the project got under way, we participated in and documented online debates about key elements of the campaigns and reactions to them. We took our interim findings back to the communities and organisations with whom we had done the initial research, and included their responses in the findings.

From the outset of the project we worked with community organisations as partners. This helped to guide the direction of the research, ensuring that it had some value and relevance beyond academia, and
that it also included invaluable practical research support. Through the project we hoped to unsettle or at least bring into question the division between ‘activism’ and ‘academia’. We tried to think carefully about the sort of contributions academic researchers can make to the groups and individuals we work with – because of the time, resources and specialist skills to which we have access – and to recognise that research partners and participants may have similar skills but are in different situations during the project, because of their personal circumstances, political commitments, institutional priorities, or pressures of time, workload and resources. In being able to attach funds to the work done by the community partners, we could recognise and value their expertise and time commitment to the project.

Such partnership working took place in a context where there are immense pressures on the voluntary sector. We were very conscious of adding to the workload of these groups. Therefore being clear about roles within the project and managing expectations on both sides was crucial. In addition, for groups working on asylum issues with specific goals there was sometimes a mismatch between our interests (anti-immigration campaigns) and the very specific and urgent issues groups were dealing with (such as destitution and deportation). This is an ongoing question, which needs to be continuously negotiated in research projects like ours.