



Delivery:

ICOS has been able to deliver comprehensive and responsive advice and advocacy, providing support to migrant people living in the North East of England (the vast majority of beneficiaries were from Sunderland).

We have provided one to one support with issues such as accessing benefits, applying for housing, dealing with official correspondence (e.g., from schools, the NHS, or government bodies, such as letters regarding council tax). It helped to connect migrant people to essential services and entitlements. Many of the clients have been refugees- often refugees who have just been granted leave following a decision on their claim. We have also supported migrant people affected by modern day slavery, workplace exploitation, domestic abuse and hate crime. This is a time of huge change in their life, as they only have 28 days to leave their current accommodation, and apply for mainstream state support. Very often, this is also the time when they are able to seek employment in the UK for the 1st time. These processes often must be navigated at the same time, which is immensely difficult for people who are also usually dealing with the effects of isolation from their friends and family back home, while also getting used to living in a new country. Many of the clients are also survivors of state oppression and torture. Other migrants we have supported include economic migrants, students, and their families. Many are facing intersectional issues and multiple disadvantage (e.g., migrant women who live in a deprived area, and are affected by disadvantage or discrimination based on ethnicity, as well as sex. Our advice and advocacy work has covered prevention (e.g., ensuring that clients access support before problems arise- e.g., when they need to ensure the immigration status of their children), as well as emergency situations (e.g., supporting someone who is already homeless).

As part of the wider advice work, we have delivered effective employability support. This support has focused on sending job applications, creating / updating CVs, filling in profiles on job sites, creating covering letters, preparing for job interviews, supporting clients to have their qualifications from abroad verified/accepted, and support with applying for courses and training from external providers (including English language skills). Our staff have also helped with practical aspects for looking for work, such as travel arrangements and securing childcare. Such a multifaceted approach is needed, as many of our clients have limited experience of the UK labour market and can easily find themselves at a disadvantage, or even excluded (e.g., when they do not know how to enroll on a course, or what to include/not include in a CV). Our support has been flexible and holistic, and we have also been able to support our clients with meeting their Universal Credit commitments to ensure that they are not penalized (which would also make it less likely for them to find employment). We additionally, our flexible and holistic approach is evident in our inclusive practice- we have been providing support not just to those out of work, but also people in work who would like to change their job. Notably, clients, especially women, have been able to access STEM opportunities with regards to both- paid employment, as well as training. Overreliance on AI to

create content such as CVs, applications and covering letters is a new problem we are observing, and for people unfamiliar with the UK, and perhaps struggling with the English language, this risk of overreliance is even greater than in the general population, while they are less able to scrutinize AI-produced content.

Outside of advocacy and advice work, we have also been able to make a difference in other ways, including:

- Providing a safe space for migrant (predominantly Eastern European) women as part of the ICOS Women project, which now also includes the Mums Club.
- Providing wellbeing (including a variety of sports) activities through ICOS sports. These activities are decided on by those taking part, and a high level of involvement means good attendance and engagement levels, as well as better outcomes.
- Enabling people affected by modern day slavery to rebuild their lives, including through supporting them to access entitlements, immigration advice, and counselling (through our partner- Impact North East CIC
- Delivering locally- focused environmental activities, predominantly based in Backhouse Park, St Michael's Ward (in Sunderland), including clean ups, awareness raising sessions, and practical environmental action such as tree planting.
- Enabling (predominantly) migrant people to utilize and improve their skills, and gain a track record through volunteering in a variety of areas, including administration, communications, environmental volunteering, event / activities organizing and content creation.
- Getting people from different cultures and backgrounds together through events and activities (including socials, environmental and wellbeing activities).
- Influencing policy and practice affecting migrant people through research (often co-produced) and strategic advocacy.
- Empowering migrant people to enable them to become local councilors, council candidates, school governors, volunteers and board members to make sure that local services become more effective at meeting their needs.

Impact:

Out of the 193 people who have benefitted from one-to-one advocacy and advice with recorded data, 81 have reported improved wellbeing

Out of 135 with recorded data, 54 have reported being in an improved financial situation.

Out of the 98 people with recorded data, 29 reported an improved housing situation

Out of the 191 people with recorded data, 54 reported feeling more optimistic about their future

Out of the 66 people with recorded data, 20 reported an improved confidence level

143 people who have attended wellbeing activities have reported meeting new people from a different culture.

24 people have progressed into paid employment (the projects directly supporting employability work at ICOS were only worth £7000 in total during that period, which supported a total of 50 people, and about 40% of them progressed into paid employment.

89 people have achieved at qualification or progressed into education or training

51 people have reported receiving a benefit award

25 people have received support with their immigration status (either directly or through referrals)

20 clients have also reported feeling safer (this is only measured for some projects)

We have provided an estimated 130 clients with material support, including sim cards, food vouchers, food bank referrals, clothing and toy items, or refunded travel costs.

We have delivered a total of 54 wellbeing activities, including a Coastal Walk, Tennis, Bowling, Seal Sands Walk, White Lea- Farm walk, Bowling, Souter Lighthouse, Sports, Santa Day, Snowboarding, Ceramics, Go Karting, Coastal Walk, Creating Bird Feeders, Kayaking, Water Sports, Spilmans Farm Trip, Rowing, Diggerland, Coastering and many more.

Sports: Through the Together Fund/RISE project, we have involved 139 BME people in sports activities. Through the evaluation of the project, we have learned that:

- almost 80% of the clients have said that the project had improved their mental health
- almost 90% of the clients have said that the project had improved their physical health
- almost 90% of the clients have said they had befriended new people during the project
- over 90% of the clients have said that the project had made them more active

Environmental: We have delivered a total of 78 environmental activity days through the East Rangers project alone, engaging a total of total of total of 350 people. 64 people- 70% of those we were able to ask asked took environmental action as a result of the project.

Projects which did not fully fit into the scope (e.g., due to their length, or being delivered by more than 1 partners)

Shared Sunderland:

Since February 2022, it the project has provided direct one-to-one support to 280 people, and provided support with a range of issues, including benefits, housing and healthcare, as well as immigration support/advice. Out of the 142 have left the project: 72 have reported improved financial situation. 61 have reported improved housing situation. 98 have reported improved wellbeing. 24 were in need of immigration advice and support, 58 needed support with housing (including registrations with housing associations, presenting to the council as homeless and general advice on housing, such as disrepair), 82 needed support with benefits, including applying for benefits and understanding decisions, as well as reviews and appeals, 16 needed support with accessing the health service, e.g., GP registrations, 33 needed support with managing their universal credit account, 36 were facing other problems, such as domestic abuse.

Most accessed more than 1 type of advice, and often struggled to navigate the system, hence, our holistic help enabled them timely access vital support in one place, providing an effective and streamline service.

The project has also made progress in empowering migrant and minoritized people in Sunderland, and making Sunderland a better place for them:

-21 migrant people have become Community Voting Champions, enabling them to learn about the importance, and the process of voting, and to engage with others to vote. This workshop was delivered with Tyne and Wear Citizens (TWIC).

-5 have become Project Steering Group members and taken part in project planning/shaping, creating the microgrants scheme, and appraising applications.

-3 have become school governors.

-30 are involved in working on the Shared Sunderland microgrant-funded-project, including applying, designing their projects. This includes one-off events, regular activities (e.g., coffee mornings).

-9 have become research champions/members of the PSG, working on a project researching the impact of the cost of living crisis on EE families.

-2 people have become board members (e.g., at a local regeneration charity) and 8 volunteers of mainstream organisations (e.g., Children's Services).

-2 BME individuals have been elected as councillors. 6 have applied to become candidates with various parties in the 2026 all-out elections.

-We have delivered Intercultural Sessions to staff at 7 local public (including schools) and voluntary/community sector organisations; these included information on cultures, such as East Asian, Eastern European, and African, and were delivered by lived-experience staff.

-We have worked with TWIC and 2 local schools to encourage them to implement the Antiracism Charter (<https://neu.org.uk/latest/library/anti-racism-charter-framework-developing-anti-racist-approach>).

70/100

The 70/100 project, inspired by 70 years of Her Majesty The Queen's reign and 100 years anniversary of the founding of Backhouse Park, run from May 2022 till June 2024 ICOS has worked with the local community to design and deliver a series of events and activities in Backhouse Park, Sunderland, including training sessions. This has included events such as the Family Day Picnic, smaller sessions like the birdwatching sessions and planting trees. The project was funded through the Jubilee Fund at the National Lottery Community Fund. The project has achieved significant outcomes and met- and exceeded its targets:

TARGETS:

- Enable 70 individuals from the local community to acquire environmental skills, with 25 of them obtaining accredited training.

351 participants took part in environmental workshops and awareness to acquire environmental skills

128 people have acquired environmental skills, including 30 people, who took part in training and obtained an accredited qualification.

- Organise 25 events or workshops that will actively involve a minimum of 100 participants.

42 events/ workshops have been delivered

890 participants took part in events, 67 volunteers helped with preparation, setting up and delivering the events, and 351 participants took part in workshops/environmental awareness sessions.

150 clean ups/ litter pick organised where people took part in environmental action.

A total of 401 people have volunteered, including 67 who have volunteered on a more regular on in-depth basis (e.g., supported the planning and running of various events, or volunteered more than 3 times).

Many volunteers and additional ICOS staff members have gained valuable environmental skills.

We have been able to gather accurate data for 151 adults (we had missing data for 15 clients, and we were unable to contact 33 clients) who have stated that the project had the following impact on them:

-55% stated that their environmental awareness had improved

-59% stated that their environmental skills had improved

-59% stated that their wellbeing had improved

-37% stated that their financial situation had improved. While economic inclusion was not a major part of the project, we associate this change with people taking part in other /additional projects we deliver, such as advice/advocacy work, and employability work. We also know that some clients were able to progress into paid work as a result of the project, or sustain their employment (e.g., when it required them to perform regular training/refreshers which are expensive or not readily available).

-77% stated that they had taken action to protect the environment since the beginning of the project. The most popular types of environmental action were reported as recycling (41%), community litter picks (17%), and volunteering for community groups/organisations concerned with the environment (7%).

-Additionally, 87% rated the project at least 10, on a rising 1-10 Likert scale.

-We have planted a total of 290 trees on the park. While the initial batch of 105 planted in 2022 was unfortunately largely lost to antisocial behaviour, the trees planted since have mostly stayed intact.

-We have restored the sensory garden in Barley Mow Park, restored the fountain– turned – plant holder in Backhouse Park, and created a new fairy trail in Backhouse Park, much enjoyed by local children and families.

-We have installed a total of 20 bird houses, and 2 bird feeders, which have been made by the local people as part of the project (including children).

Many of the clients we have initial registration data for were still being supported at the end of March 2024, and they have now been able to achieve their outcomes.

Strengths, achievements and opportunities:

We have a very motivated, focused, and skilled workforce. Our staff are also committed to our organization's mission, and often willing to go an extra mile for the clients they support, and for the sake of the projects they deliver. Our staff members are also interested in upskilling themselves, and in their continuous professional development.

We have also got an increasing number of volunteers supporting our delivery, including many dedicated regular volunteers. Many of them are current students or recent graduates, but some come from other walks of life, including unemployed or economically inactive people, as well as the over 50s. This increasing volunteer base has enabled us to increase our capacity, notably in areas such as running events and some communications functions, such as social media and the newsletter. This is a vital resource to ICOS, and it helps us to deliver more services, and better services for the people. The main areas our volunteers have been involved in include wellbeing activities, environmental activities, women's activities, and sports, as well as office volunteering (e.g., administration and communication).

ICOS has been able to develop new partnerships with several organisations from the VCSE sector, as well as the private companies. These partnerships are enabling us to tap into more potential and increase our capacity to deliver our projects, including through accessing extra funds, accessing corporate volunteers, and applying for funding together. Organisations we have recently started working closely with include Newcastle Building Society, Durham Wildlife Trust, or British Gas.

Despite funding challenges outlined below, we have been successful in receiving long-term funding from several grant funders, including Smallwood Trust, Leeds Building Society Foundation, and Lloyds Bank Foundation, which should enable ICOS to sustain some level of service until at least January 2028.

We have started working on our strategic review, and have been able to gather feedback and input from our clients in order to plan future activities, and articulate our value. The review is currently in progress.

ICOS's has been able to amplify the voices of our clients and communities to influence processes affecting them. For example, we have been invited to participate in the North East ICB equity strategy. We have also been able to show the impact of different societal issues on our clients, such as hate crime, discrimination, access to healthcare and domestic abuse- notably migrant women (<https://www.itv.com/news/tyne-tees/2024-09-23/mum-called-prostitute-on-school-run-amid-eastern-european-discrimination> , <https://www.audible.co.uk/podcast/Domestic-abuse-and-Eastern-European-women/BOCMDTCT1L>, <https://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/17445/>, <https://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/17445/>). We are able to use this knowledge to ensure decision makers are aware of the importance and the depth of the issues our clients face. We also use them to plan our activities, and create an evidence base testifying to the need for our work. ICOS has also featured in several good news stories in the local media, e.g., regarding our environmental work: <https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/volunteers-invited-to-be-good-natured-in-sunderland-4510479>.

The ICOS Women project is growing in size and impact, and the women benefit not just from one to one support and social meet ups, but also co-produce the project through the Project Steering Group, currently consisting of 8, which decides the direction of the work. The group now also influences external bodies through research, including research projects focusing on the impact of poverty on Eastern European families.

Women have also been able to find a space within this group to develop their own projects and initiatives, including the Mum's Club (which was originally developed by a volunteer who had young children).

We are pleased that the Back in Control 2 project's Project Steering Group has continued to contribute to effective delivery of the project through enabling co-production with the clients. The

group currently involves 6 members, or all who have the experience of either modern day slavery, workplace exploitation, and in some cases- both. Through working with the PSG, we are implementing changes to the project in areas such as more effective wellbeing support, and or employability support.

Challenges:

Our clients are facing significant challenges accessing entitlements, benefits, housing, services and status. They are facing multiple challenges, as migrants are especially affected by the cost of living crisis and the housing crisis due to lack of resources they could fall back on, and having less community links they could benefit from (such as family members). Additionally, they are being profoundly affected by restrictive, inflexible, and outright hostile immigration rules, and the cost associated with being a migrant with a restricted immigration status (e.g., the NHS surcharge).

The financial outlook the charity is facing has been challenging. This is because of the lack of EU funding, the restrictive nature of the replacement UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), and its smaller size, the cost of living crisis, and many funders pausing their grant giving. Due to inflation (which has been especially high in recent years), the value of the grants awarded by many funders have dwindled in value (e.g., a £10 000 grant is now not enough to support a 20 hours' post, paid at a living wage level).

ICOS lacks spare capacity in many areas, especially when it comes to core functions, such as communications, data, and basic administration, and, to a lesser degree- finance. This is largely the result of the aforementioned funding challenges. Even when we do have enough money to pay for increased capacity, we cannot always make it work, as often such funding is short term, or our staff members cannot increase their hours (e.g., due to care commitments, studying, or their immigration status. Staffing changes and the need for unexpected recruitment has also affected the capacity. Most of them incurred due to personal circumstances of the staff, including their immigration status, caring responsibilities, as well as the impact of the racist riot (as described below).

We have had extended the delivery timescales for several projects due to capacity issues within our team, as well as when it comes to subcontractors.

About 10% - 15% of our clients on each of the projects disengage. This is due to the fact that we are dealing with a mobile, transient population- e.g., refugees often leave the area after being granted status, due to family connections elsewhere in the UK, availability of work, or employment prospects, as well as real and perceived discrimination. However, it takes up time and resources to engage with them (and make sure they are safe).

The financial situation of many of our clients has been negatively affected by the cost of living crisis, hence their financial situation is often reported as worse than at the point of registration. However, we know that in many cases, their situation would have been different if it was not for our intervention, as reported by our clients.

The 2024 racist riots have had a significant negative impact on community cohesion. Sunderland was one of the northern cities most affected by the riots (<https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/24496976.six-people-appear-court-charged-sunderland-riots/>). While the violence appears to have ceased, our community, including clients, staff, and volunteers have been deeply affected, and are worried that the violence will return, or that those who hold racist views will be emboldened to act on their hatred. The riots took part close to the train station, and most of our clients live in this area. Our staff and volunteers have been truly

frightened, and we had to close the office early several times, due to fear of our staff, clients and volunteers being attacked. We have also had to pay for taxis for our staff and volunteers. As a result, several volunteers have stopped coming, and one of our paid staff members quit and moved away to another city in the UK where they felt safer due to it being more multicultural. We are worried about the long term impact of these riots, and whether they will embolden racism, including criminal behaviour towards our clients.

External communications have been identifying as requiring improvement by clients (including volunteers), staff, and external agencies. Lack of capacity and focus on this area has been evident, and we need to improve our external communications, including communicating via multiple channels, social media, and the website.

Future plans:

- Undertaking a strategic review of our work to establish the importance of our work to our clients, and set out a vision for our organisation for the next 5 years
- Celebrate 15 years of ICOS, using this opportunity to gain more support and buy in from stakeholders, energize our organization, and plan for the future.
- Utilizing also the workstreams described above, to create a workplan for ICOS for the next 5 years, and a more detailed business plan for the period of June 2025 (when the current business plan ends) – June 2028.
- Further advance plans for income generation in order to secure the core of our work in the light of the financial challenges described above. These plans include establishing a coffee shop to generate extra income, and being commissioned by local / regional commissioners.
- Utilizing greater financial resources to create spare capacity within the organization to meet current and future challenges, and ensure good outcomes for our clients, and the wider community, as well as good staff wellbeing and morale.
- Improving external communications
- Building on our recent success, including the popular and well performing projects, such as ICOS Women, ICOS Sport / Wellbeing and our environmental work, as well as research and influencing work.

Case studies and quotes:

Employability:

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Northumbrian-Water-Case-Study-1.pdf>

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Northumbrian-Water-Case-Study-2.pdf>

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Northumbrian-Water-Case-Study-3.pdf>

Advice and advocacy:

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/M.-Northumberland-Village-Homes.pdf>

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/A-case-study-NHVF.pdf>

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Case-Study-for-Northumberland-Village-Homes-Fund-2024-.pdf>

Environmental:

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/70.100-Case-study-Kelly.pdf>

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/70.100-Case-study-Anna.pdf>

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Greener-Activities-Programme-Olusegun-Case-Study.pdf>

Volunteering:

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Sandra-M.-Asare-Case-study.pdf>

<https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Volunteer-Case-Study-Folashade.pdf>

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