

NEWS RELEASE

Ref: 2009/0311
Date: 3rd November 2009

Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants form the Focus of Community Cohesion Debate in the Midlands

Disconnected communities, hostility towards immigrants and how migrants contribute to making the Region stronger will be the subject of debate by frontline workers, experts and policy makers tomorrow at a seminar organised by the West Midlands Regional Assembly.

The seminar is the third of six thematic events being held as part of the OPEN project - a pioneering new programme that works to strengthen social inclusion and protection. Key issues and actions on how to reduce hate crime and improve community cohesion amongst different ethnic groups in the Region will be debated and later taken forward to Regional and European policy makers.

“The West Midlands has been home to people from migrant backgrounds for decades, and majority and minority communities have built coexistent relationships and understandings here despite social tensions. Recent incidents have shown that new migrants can face hostility based on difference, competition for resources and perceived preferential treatment.” said Olwen Dutton, Chief Executive of the Regional Assembly.

“This seminar is an opportunity for grassroots organisations to not only voice the real issues being faced by both new migrant and host communities, but explore ways of reducing tensions and working collaboratively to enhance the social and economic development of the Region, recognising the contribution that can be made by new migrants into the West Midlands.”

As a key speaker, Ranuka Jagpal, Assistant Director of the Community Safety Directorate at Government Office for the West Midlands, said:

"There are many opportunities for people from different backgrounds to learn from each other, build networks and strengthen society. The challenge for policy and frontline workers is around working in

partnership to promote an environment where this can happen and provide mechanisms where issues can be resolved speedily where they arise."

OPEN is a two year project funded through the Progress funding stream from Europe and works with partners from Italy, Spain and Germany. The programme begins with six thematic seminars in each of the partnering countries, based around children; the labour market; family policies; health for older people; job inclusion for people with disabilities; and ethnic minorities and immigrants.

ENDS

For further information please contact:

Hafsah FitzGibbon, Press & PR Officer on 0121 245 0181

Jo Kite, Head of Communications on 0121 678 1044 or

To attend the seminar or to arrange an interview with any of the speakers, please contact the above.

Notes to Editors

1. The West Midlands Regional Assembly ('the Assembly') represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands Region.
2. The Assembly's membership consists of 100 nominated representatives, with 68 elected members representing the local authority, 16 representing the business sector and 16 representing other economic and social partners.
3. The Assembly provides a platform for organisations to consider matters of common concern including: regional planning, transport, economic prosperity, sustainability, culture and Europe. It also supports regional policy forums and task groups on social inclusion, faith, housing, life long learning/skills, health, rural and community safety/crime reduction.
4. The Assembly works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) the regional development agency (RDA), the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) the West Midlands Leaders Board (WMLB) and other regional and local organisations from across the West Midlands Region.
5. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body.
6. For further information, visit our website www.wmra.gov.uk