

Leadership development in the UK refugee and migration sector

Needs, experiences and recommendations

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Acknowledgements

Steering group:

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Dylan Fotoohi, Refugees for Justice & consultant to
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Clore Social Leadership and **Centre for Knowledge Equity** (co-designers of the Leading Beyond Borders programme)

Background 2018 to 2023

MEX review of leadership development in the UK refugee and migration sector was published.

MEX co-designed funding plan for a sectoral leadership development programme.

Nine trusts and foundations funded a two-year leadership development pilot.

Alongside this, many funders started thinking more strategically about their funding of organisational leadership in the UK refugee and migration sector.



Purpose of the scoping review

1 Scoping:

explore leadership
development opportunities
for people who work in the
refugee and migration
sector in the UK

2 Knowledge exchange:

design and facilitate a space
for knowledge exchange
between providers of, and
participants in, leadership
support and development

Learning Questions

Mapping the current landscape of leadership development:

How is leadership developed across the UK migration and refugee sector and what are the different ways it happens?

Understanding the purpose of leadership development:

How has the purpose of leadership development in the sector changed since 2018, and what has been learned through the approaches taken so far in the sector?

Resourcing the future of leadership development:

How can leadership development in the sector best be sustained and resourced in the future, how and what should funders fund in the sector, and how does sharing learning best take place in the sector?

How we carried out this work

April – October 2022

- **24** people interviewed, including: funders, senior leaders, and individuals with lived experience working in the sector, organisations that provide leadership development programmes or support
- Rapid **desk-based scoping exercise**
- Online **questionnaire and video interviews**
- **Two** online community of practice events
- **Steering group**

Values and Principles

- ‘Leadership’ rather than leaders
- Expertise and advice from steering group
- Experiences of people working in the sector
- A ‘community of practice’ approach
- Recognising structural inequality and barriers related to race, disability, gender, age and immigration status
- Both lived and learned experience of the migration sector are important
- Discussions about leadership development take place in the context of debates about power and privilege, and challenging exclusionary and harmful practices in charities and funding organisations.

What are the ways leadership development happens?

Group or peer learning

Language-Based

Specifically funded sectoral programmes

Campaigning, social and community action

Structured training programmes

Coaching

Mentoring

Funded activities

What influences leadership development?

- Peer learning
- Leadership development activities have an indirect, 'ripple' effect
- Varying needs depending on experience
- A growing commitment to more diversity in leadership positions
- Innovative activity in small organisations
- Learning through doing and by chance
- A lack of line management skills and culture

Leadership Development – our key findings

1

Coaching, mentoring and action learning were cited as the leadership development activities with the greatest impact. Other approaches include language-based activities, campaigning, social and community action-based activities, peer-learning, structured training programmes, individual funding and specifically funded sectoral programmes.

2

People particularly value flexible, person-centred approaches to leadership development, as well as high quality provision and facilitators with lived experience.

3

Peer learning is highly valued, but ad hoc. Peer networks worked most successfully when someone had a specific role to organise the logistics and facilitation.

Leadership Development – our key findings

4

Leadership development needs vary depending on a person's years of experience and level of responsibility. In particular, CEOs and founders have different needs to others, and particularly value peer networks.

5

There is a growing commitment in the sector to having more diverse people in formal leadership roles such as senior management and boards, with a particular focus on racial diversity and lived experience of the migration system.

6

Further investment is needed to support leaders with lived experience of the migration system, to sustain existing efforts and address a growing priority shared by funders and providers of leadership support.

Leadership Development – our key findings

7

Line management and organisational culture are key aspects of leadership development, and managers need more support and training in this area. Good line management was cited as one of the most influential factors in leadership development, and poor line management can negatively affect mental health and career progression.

8

Burnout is one of the biggest risks in the sector, as a result of working in a challenging political environment, a lack of adequate funding, increasing demands on frontline services and the pandemic.

9

A challenging and negative political environment exacerbates the challenges experienced by people working in the sector, especially those with lived experience of migration whose day-to-day work may bring back traumatic experiences.

Leading Beyond Borders programme (case study)

Clore Social Leadership and Centre for Knowledge Equity

- Safe and supportive environment for leaders to enhance their work, build confidence, amplify collective strength, offering leadership development tools, a peer network and developing a commitment to continual learning.
- **Two pathways:** Emerging leaders and Experienced leaders

Leading Beyond Borders

Overview

	Emerging leaders programme	Experienced leaders programme
# of participants	48	27
Programme length	7 months	9 months
% of participants who identified as having lived experience of the migration system	41 people, 54% (total across both pathways)	
% of participants outside London	46 people, 64% (total across both pathways)	

Leading Beyond Borders

Elements

- Leadership Capabilities Framework
- Discover
- 360° review
- Learning days
- Action learning
- 1:1 coaching
- Peer innovation challenge
- Knowledge exchanges
- Residentials
- Mentoring
- Secondment

“The programme gave me the mental space to think about what's important to me in my work. I left a job that was having a negative impact on my mental health mid-programme, and I am now happy and thriving in a new role.”

Funders' perspectives and practices – key points

- Funders increasingly recognise they can help to make sure there are more leaders in the sector with lived experience
- Funders who focused on specific leadership development objectives said they strengthen the sector's impact
- Some funders are actively trying to remove funding barriers for smaller and unconstituted groups
- Some have provided additional funding, or pro bono consultancy expertise, for anti-racism training and similar
- Only one funder interviewed for this scoping work cited supporting leaders' wellbeing and resilience as a common purpose of leadership development activities, even though this was one of the most common themes mentioned by non-funders interviewed

Resourcing the future

How can leadership development be best sustained and resourced?

- Longer-term leadership support for individuals
- A clearer way of knowing what leadership support is available across the sector, and practical support to access it
- Making systemic changes at a sector level
- Filling specific gaps in existing support for leaders

Suggestions to improve funder practice

- **More long-term and core funding** to free up time and space for leaders to focus more on organisational development and impact.
- **Non-financial support** from funders, such as a funder 'plus' offer, which could include flexible and bespoke access to expert support or consultants.
- **All grants should include a budget line for leadership development** support and activities, which could be used flexibly depending on leaders' and organisations' needs.
- **Direct funding for group learning and leadership development to support leadership networks and networking,**

Ways to strengthen how learning is shared across the sector

- Organised spaces specifically for sharing learning that bring people together from diverse organisations and settings
- Mentoring is incredibly helpful but the sector has no formal mentoring scheme. Mentoring can take many forms, so more research and testing could be helpful to understand the most impactful approaches.
- Bringing people together to offload also has a value, in addition to formal therapeutic support.
- The logistics of organising spaces to bring people together is a barrier and a burden. Investing in someone to manage this improves both access and engagement.

3 key recommendations

1 Address current gaps in leadership development provision

2 Support wellbeing and tackle burnout across the sector

3 Tackle the additional barriers to leadership development experienced by people with lived experience.

If you're interested in connecting with us to learn more about this work or just have a chat, please contact us on mex@global-dialogue.org

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