

Migration Exchange Strategic Framework 2023–2028

Migration Exchange (MEX) is a UK-based charitable programme, established by independent funders in 2010.¹ Our **vision** is a country where people experience a migration system grounded in dignity, equity and fairness.

This strategic framework shows how MEX will contribute to this vision. It sets out the context, our mission, and how we will pursue our goals over the next five years.

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Context

People move and always have done – for work, love, family, study, for better opportunities or to seek sanctuary. The kind of immigration system we build as a country, and how that system functions, impacts our society, economy, national identity and communities.

The current UK immigration system does not offer dignity, equity or fairness to people who need it. The hostile environment has led to an increasingly harsh system, which is dysfunctional by design. Millions of people are excluded from living full lives due to their immigration or nationality status, and families, communities and the country suffer as a result. Those already experiencing structural inequalities stemming from race, gender, economic status, disability or age are most vulnerable to harm, as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Windrush scandal.

As we start 2023, trying to change the world around us for the better is a daunting prospect in the face of economic downturn, war, climate crisis, deepening inequalities, failing public services and fundamental threats to democratic norms.

Yet there are positives on which to build: the warming of public attitudes towards migration, the examples of compassionate and community-level welcome shown to those fleeing conflict, the energy and solidarity across progressive social movements and the leadership and activism of directly impacted communities.

In the absence of a fair and functional system, civil society organisations play a vital role. At the end of 2022, over 700 charities in the UK focused on migration and refugee issues with a combined income of £176 million. A further 700 have this issue as a key part of their wider work.² In the absence of state support, independent funders support a significant proportion of this activity. Together, charities and independent funders deliver vital welfare and legal services, campaign and advocate for reform, develop research and policy alternatives, distribute funding, and organise communities to mobilise for safety and welcome.

Combined, these actors have huge passion, reach and expertise. But they have limited ability to sustain, deepen or broaden their work in order to

create systemic change. Despite the current level of threat to the rights and safety of those who migrate, and the depth of change needed, there are limited opportunities for shared action. Unhelpful dynamics of short-termism, poor funder practice, competition, burn-out and institutional inequality persist against a backdrop of constantly fluctuating immigration rules, political failings, and overwhelmingly high demand for support and services by impacted communities.

1 Registered charity **Global Dialogue** has provided fiscal and administrative hosting to MEX since 2015.

2 Initial data from an independent review of the migration sector and funding landscape, Migration Exchange (forthcoming June 2023)

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Our response

In this context, our **mission** is to cultivate **insight, connection and action** across the UK migration and refugee field, working together with civil society to achieve positive change. We focus particularly on independent funders and charities to achieve this mission.

MEX recognises that the ecosystem working for justice and welcome in the UK needs **breadth, depth and interconnection to succeed in making change**.³ In such a challenging context, the abundance of desire for change is our best collective asset. We are inspired by movement-building, community organising, narrative change and strategic communications approaches. We take a 'systems change' lens which encourages us all to think about the wider ecosystem in which we act. This means connecting with other social justice fields, building solidarity and cultivating relationships. We aim to motivate and inspire existing and future funders of the refugee and migration sector to listen to and respond to the needs of frontline communities and organisations, working for the long term to help build the narrative and relational power of this field.

Insight: We enable partners to understand and respond to trends in the UK refugee and migration charity and funding landscape **so that ...** people can see where they sit in the wider system and refine their focus

Over the next five years, we will pursue our mission through the three elements of our strategic framework - **insight, connection** and **action**.

By setting a five-year framework, we aim to be well-positioned to support our networks to respond to opportunities and navigate a changing external environment, including in the context of and beyond the next General Election. Migration patterns and forced displacement can be unpredictable; we will remain flexible and leave space for both strategic responses and emergent opportunities.

We know that we cannot set our priorities alone. This strategic framework draws on input and analysis from charities, change-makers, charity

Connection: We nurture broader and deeper connections across communities, identities, geographies and intersecting social justice fields **so that ...** we are a more power-aware, equitable, inclusive and intersectional sector

data, funding data and dialogue workshops held in 2022.⁴ It marks an important shift for MEX towards being more explicit about our role as a cultivator and intentional about relationships and shared action as essential elements of a change strategy.

The strategic framework also recognises that we at MEX must change our ways of working to become a better cultivator. We commit to being inclusive and transparent about the way we work, and the way we choose our priority areas. Our newly established advisory group will help shape the detail of our work, and hold us to account for delivery in cooperation with the Board of Global Dialogue.

Action: We cultivate collaborative responses to shared challenges, co-designing actions which draw in new resources, skills and energy **so that ...** we are stronger than the sum of our parts and can make positive change together

³ Laybourn-Langton L, Quilter-Pinner H and Treloar N (2021) **Making change: What works?**, IPPR.

⁴ Inputs included a review of literature on how change happens, public attitudes data, a context analysis, three external workshops in November 2022, 18 strategy interviews conducted by an independent consultant, and data from an independent review of charity commission data, and a funder and sector survey (Nov 2022, forthcoming).

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Our goals and how we will achieve them

We have two ultimate goals:

An equitable, power-aware and intersectional funding landscape, better able to resource systems change.

A connected and action-focused refugee and migration sector, better able to drive systems change

We will work towards these goals through the following activities:

- 1 Connecting people through convening, events and a funder network
- 2 Providing support to groups led by and for impacted communities
- 3 Commissioning research and analysis on trends and patterns
- 4 Sharing insights on trends and patterns
- 5 Developing and co-designing responses to shared challenges and opportunities
- 6 Offering practical support to implement responses to shared concerns
- 7 Delivering aligned funding initiatives
- 8 Providing critical challenge to funder practice

Through these activities we aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- 1 Improved field and funder understanding of current issues facing the sector and the role played by key actors
- 2 More and better collaborations between different organisations and actors in the sector
- 3 Richer data and analysis on sector resources, funding landscape, issues and priorities
- 4 Increased and more effective collaborations towards systems change
- 5 Improved access to funding for systems change work for a more diverse range of organisations
- 6 Increased sources and amounts of funding
- 7 Improved funder strategy, practices and accessibility
- 8 Improved connection between funders

Our objectives for 2023/4

Our **2023/4 delivery objectives** are to:

- 1** share data and analysis on the size and shape of the sector to spark action on key inequalities, gaps and opportunities and provide an evidence base for the sector and funders
- 2** co-design and deliver an intervention on leadership practice and resources
- 3** explore and strengthen at least two areas of intersectional practice – disability justice and racial justice, with an initial focus on extreme destitution
- 4** support a focus on policy and narrative change linked to the electoral cycle, national and regional/ local opportunities for influence

We will focus on the following **development objectives for 2023/4**

to ensure MEX is relevant, authentic and has the infrastructure to achieve our goals:

- 1** Implement reflective practice and action to deepen anti-racist, feminist and anti-oppressive understanding across all MEX internal and external work
- 2** Recruit an engaged and active advisory board, with a clear relationship to the Board of Global Dialogue
- 3** Improve equity and diversity of networks, supported by better administrative and operations tools
- 4** Strengthen and grow networks within the core sector, independent funders and key allied sectors
- 5** Establish a learning and accountability tool for reporting on MEX delivery and create mechanisms for challenge

Our values and approach

We are **collaborative, inclusive** and **anti-racist**

We **respect rights** and **equity** in all our work - staffing, grant-making, governance, delivery and partnerships

We will **co-design** all our interventions **in dialogue** with others

We **add value** to the bilateral relationships between funders and sector organisations by focusing on strategic issues and being relational, agile and responsive

We proactively **seek and engage with critical challenge** and **diverse perspectives**

We are **transparent** about our activities and choices

We are **open** about our successes and failures, and what we have learned

We will be **expert in the specific challenges** facing this sector as a result of the policy and legal context, but will proactively build common cause across issues

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Risks, assumptions and mitigations

Our current theory of change is a dynamic document that we will use to plan and reflect. As well as our objectives and goals, it sets out our key assumptions related to how change happens, how people and organisations behave, and how power dynamics play out.

The key risk we have identified is that our planned activities are not successful because our assumptions about people, power and behaviour are wrong. We will mitigate this risk by continuing to have open and reflective spaces to explore these issues.

By committing to a process of co-designing our interventions underneath this broad strategic framework, we think we can better contribute to our overall goals. To this end, we are open to challenge and feed back on this strategic framework and actively invite this over the course of 2023.

Past activities and history

Since 2010, MEX has provided a platform for funders to work together on shared concerns, field-building and infrastructure with a particular focus on public attitudes and strategic communications. MEX has supported work on communications, leadership development, emergency funding responses and crisis-preparedness. In 2021, based on feedback from the field and funders, MEX funder steering group and Global Dialogue board agreed a new staffing structure, advisory structure and development of a new strategic framework.

Working with a wide range of partners including charities, academics, think tanks, journalists and other funder networks in the UK and Europe, MEX has:

aligned funding and analysis through the network, leading to the formation of key infrastructure including The Migration Observatory, British Future and IMIX

developed a COVID-19 response programme for the migration sector, Respond and Adapt, distributing over £2.4m to 130 organisations across the UK and a legacy programme 'The Insight Hub'

developed a Leadership for Social Change programme tailored to emerging and established migration sector leaders, with a focus on lived experience

published Taking Stock in 2020, a report on infrastructure and resources of UK migration charities and funders highlighting leadership, collaboration and influencing as key focus areas for the future.

How to get involved

Join our mailing list for news of events, publications and opportunities to have your say.

[Get in touch with us](#) to explore areas of mutual interest or to give us feedback on this strategic framework.

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