

Developing career pathways and progression for staff and volunteers

with lived experience
of the refugee
protection system

RESEARCH REPORT

JUNE 2024



SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES





Introduction	4
1. Exploring key definitions in relation to 'career progression' and Lived Experience	6
2. Understanding barriers to career progression and development	12
3. Exploring possible initiatives that respond to career development barriers	26
Appendix 1 Initiatives: Details and existing examples	34
Appendix 2 Research methodology	43
Appendix 3 Live illustrated visual summaries from co-design workshop	46

Introduction

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The [Refugee Council](#) is currently working with [WRKWLL](#) to undertake a major project to develop career pathways and progression for staff and volunteers with lived experience of the refugee protection system within the organisation and across the refugee and migration sector.

The project aims to pilot innovations designed to ensure colleagues with lived experience can achieve their full potential, with all the positive impacts this would entail for individuals, the refugee and migration sector and society more widely.

Figure 1: Project overview and timeline



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report sets out the key findings from the research phase of the project undertaken in the spring of this year. It is designed to provide a comprehensive summary of the themes that emerged from research interviews and a series of feedback workshops in order to:

- ◆ Inform the scope and focus of the pilot schemes to be developed by the project Steering Group.
- ◆ Aid the Refugee Council and other organisations across the sector to develop a clearer understanding of the barriers to career progression and development faced by colleagues with lived experience in order for them to consider their own potential interventions.

The report has three sections:

1. Exploring key definitions in relation to ‘career progression’ and Lived Experience
2. Understanding barriers to career progression and development
3. Exploring possible initiatives that respond to career development barriers

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The research findings are based on 23 depth interviews with a wide range of participants, including current and former Refugee Council employees and volunteers, others leading innovative practice in this space from across the refugee and migration sector and organisations with pioneering approaches to supporting those with lived experience in other sectors. The profile of our interviewees and details of methodology are set out in Appendix 2.

Our initial interview findings were shared with Refugee Council colleagues and stakeholders from across the sector at remote and in-person workshops in April 2024. The feedback from these workshops has been invaluable in ensuring the research findings are as comprehensive and well-evidenced as possible.

A selection of visual summaries of the workshop discussions, created by [Illustrated Live](#) is included in Appendix 3, with the full set of illustrations available [here](#). We were also invited to share the emerging findings from the project at the Reclaiming Lived Experience Leadership Conference, which provided a fantastic opportunity to gain detailed input and feedback from a wide variety of experts by experience.



WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL INTERVIEW AND WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS FOR CONTRIBUTING SO HONESTLY AND COURAGEOUSLY TO THIS RESEARCH.

1. Exploring key definitions in relation to 'career progression' and Lived Experience

To gain deeper insights into what makes a 'good job' and how people define 'career progression', we asked interviewees how they would describe these terms. Several recurring themes emerged, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of job satisfaction, and the nuances around individual understandings of career development.

1.1 DEFINING A GOOD JOB

Participants shared that a good job is one where passion and engagement are present, supported by effective, respectful management and a safe, conducive environment. It allows for innovation within defined roles, offering clear objectives alongside flexibility and creativity. Recognising and utilising individuals' qualifications, skills and experiences is key, whilst encouraging autonomy and open communication contributes to job satisfaction.

Moreover, a good job provides a sense of fulfilment through impactful work, personal growth, and alignment with values. Financial security, reasonable working hours, and opportunities for development are also integral aspects. Ultimately, a good job promotes individual well-being, empowerment, and a sense of belonging within a supportive community.

"A good job is one that allows for **20% autonomy** and **creativity**."

"Where people find such **flexibility** and **freedom** supported by their line managers, people tend to be happier."

"A good job is where your skills and knowledge are **valued** and **recognised**, and where you can bring your best to the role ...
A job is as good as your manager."

"A good job needs to be something **that stretches you**, enables you to do things that you thought you couldn't do."

"A good job is one where I can authentically **be myself** and where my **authenticity** enables me to excel in my role without worrying about conforming to expectations."

"What defines a good job is very **subjective**, people have different perspectives of a good job because **we are all different**, we come from different backgrounds, different motivations, practical needs, values and life circumstances. For people with lived **refugee experience**, a good job would also be shaped by different things."



1.2 DEFINING A CAREER PROGRESSION

Participants acknowledged that there are many factors to be considered when defining career progression, such as age and familial responsibilities, priorities outside of work, and levels of stability/security. All participants defined career progression as more than just staying in the same role, and always involving continuous learning and skill development.

However, they also agreed that career paths are individual, and influenced by personal circumstances, changing aspirations and personal ambition. Both more traditional vertical progression and horizontal growth were recognised as valuable progression pathways.

Adapting to changing organisational dynamics in contemporary society, especially in the charity sector, was highlighted as a shift in understanding and defining career progression. Where once loyalty was considered key, and staff followed in the footsteps of those before them, participants acknowledged that the world has changed. Organisations are much more dynamic, charities have to reshape all the time. Individual employability (horizontal growth) is arguably now more important, given people's journeys are less linear. Organisations need to be creative in the way they look at transferable skills, potential ambition, interests and work life balance.

Figure 2: Horizontal and Vertical Growth



Key facets of career development were highlighted as follows:

- ◆ Building networks of support and connecting with people
- ◆ Matching skills and experience to job description
- ◆ Gaining new knowledge and expertise
- ◆ Making impact
- ◆ Aiming for aspirations and personal goals
- ◆ Finding joy and fulfilment
- ◆ Different for everyone
- ◆ Challenging and motivating
- ◆ Including stretch and reward
- ◆ Gaining new, meaningful experiences
- ◆ Aligning activities with values
- ◆ Not feeling stuck

Additional factors shaping how people with lived experience understand career progression were also discussed by participants, including:

Realisation of Skills and Knowledge:

Recognising and utilising existing skills and experiences are crucial for job satisfaction and career progression. Many individuals with lived experience feel their skills are underutilised in their current roles. Starting points in the job market may differ significantly from their previous experiences due to language barriers, lack of knowledge around employment practices in the UK, lack of references, or qualifications from home countries not being recognised.

Financial Security:

Financial stability is a fundamental factor in determining job satisfaction and motivation for career progression, especially considering the financial trauma often experienced during the asylum and refugee journey. Refugees and migrants may have no choice but to prioritise immediate needs such as financial stability and secure housing over long-term career aspirations or pursuing a passion.

Language and Skill Development:

Limited English proficiency hinders career progression, emphasising the importance of time and resources for skill development, including language acquisition.

Inclusive Work Environment:

Access to supportive workplaces that understand and accommodate additional needs, such as parental responsibilities, mental health challenges and trauma-informed practices, are crucial for career advancement.

Cultural Norms and Values:

Cultural backgrounds influence perceptions of a good job and career progression. Understanding cultural differences is essential in supporting diverse career paths.



1.3 LIVED EXPERIENCE DEFINITIONS

We explored the importance of language in our project [background research](#), centred around Baljeet Sandhu's statement in her report '[The Value of Lived Experience in Social Change](#)':

"The language used to describe individuals and communities with lived experience can still serve to hold them back and pigeonhole them as 'victims' or 'service users', rather than drivers of change."

Our research showed that there are multiple definitions of Lived Experience across different sectors. A key output of this project will be developing an inclusive language guide to enable staff and volunteers at the Refugee Council to best communicate and learn together. For the purposes of the research phase, we are using the following definitions:

Lived Experience (LEx):

"The experience(s) of people on whom a social issue, or combination of issues, has had a direct personal impact."

Lived Expertise:

"Knowledge, insights, understanding and wisdom gathered through lived experience"¹

Expert by Experience:

"People with direct, first-hand experience of issues and challenges of the UK asylum or immigration system. Experts by experience are interested in activating their lived experience of the issues to help address the unique needs, challenges, and injustices many refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants face in the hostile environment of the immigration system."²

¹ Report – Launch of the forthcoming report (thelivedexperience.org)

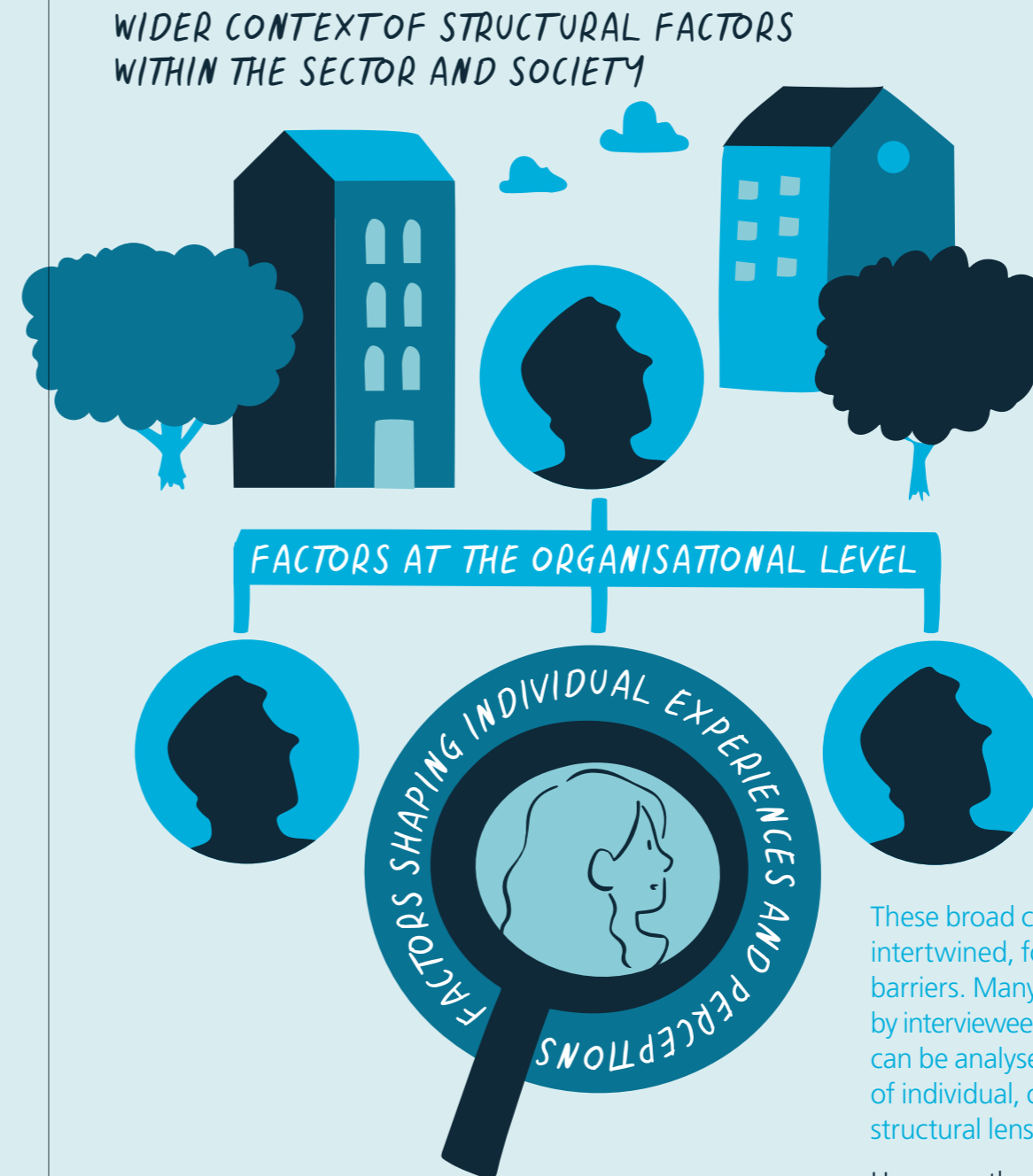
² Experts by Experience employment initiative (ebeemployment.org.uk)

2. Understanding barriers to career progression and development

To develop the possible scope and focus of the pilot programme, it was essential to build a detailed understanding of the factors currently hindering the career progression and development of colleagues with lived refugee experience. Insights shared by interviewees about their own lived experience or that of colleagues informed the development of an analytical framework, with barriers broadly grouped into three categories:

- ◆ factors shaping individuals' experiences and perceptions of career progression and development;
- ◆ inhibiting factors at the organisational level;
- ◆ and the wider context of structural barriers across the sector and broader society.

Figure 3: Framework to analyse the current barriers to career progression



These broad categories are deeply intertwined, forming a complex web of barriers. Many of the barriers mentioned by interviewees and workshop participants can be analysed through a combination of individual, organisational and structural lenses.

However, there was a strong sense that a hostile societal backdrop, structural racism and unconscious bias strongly permeates organisational and sectoral contexts. There, it meets with fixed mindsets and entrenched power structures to hinder systems change and therefore severely limit the career progression of individuals.

2.1 STRUCTURAL FACTORS

While we cannot comprehensively unpick the multitude of complex ways in which structural factors impact the career progression of individuals with lived refugee experience, we have tried to reflect the key themes that emerged from the interviews and workshops. The impacts and implications of the structural context on organisational and individual-level factors were also strongly recurring themes, and are separately discussed later.

All interview and workshop participants agreed that any exploration of career progression among those with lived refugee experience must be contextualised by a discussion of the realities of living in a society where refugees and asylum seekers are demonised. Participants highlighted the psychological impacts of existing trauma being compounded by living day-to-day in a hostile environment. The ways in which policies such as asylum seekers not having the right to work and repeated relocation around the country significantly impede career progression, were also flagged.

The intersection of the hostility specifically targeted at asylum seekers and refugees, with the systemic racism and structural disadvantage experienced by all who are racially minoritised, was another strong recurring theme. In addition to overt racism, participants highlighted the role of white cultural dominance in unconscious bias, and the ranking of knowledge systems and capabilities that disadvantages asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and people of colour. It was repeatedly argued that there must be an urgent paradigm shift to a structural approach to anti-racism and anti-oppression to drive systems change at the societal, sectoral and organisational levels.

"This is a **major issue** [racism] because it doesn't only cause burnout but also makes you doubt why you do things and why you are here. Also, being conscious of being racialised as a refugee is terrible and sometimes you wish you **were not** even aware or conscious to perceive and discern how racism and prejudice operates."

"So often **anti-racism** initiatives or initiatives around **anti-oppression** ask people to take their trauma and use that to weave the story back; rather than taking them out of the spotlight of oppression and thinking about what the system is that you're trying to change, and what's missing."

COLLABORATE WITH THE SECTOR

Participants emphasised that the refugee and migration sector is by no means impervious to structural racism and bias. Indeed, it was repeatedly suggested that the prevalent self-perception within the sector of being intrinsically values-led, can make it awkward to acknowledge and address challenges in relation to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB). Interview and workshop participants also highlighted the current lack of sector-wide, anti-oppression mechanisms and perceived a lack of collective cross-sector leadership.

"It's definitely there, it definitely exists, and across the sector too. If you look at charities across the board they're 'whiter', particularly at senior levels ... Organisationally, there is probably unconscious bias, **but we don't have space to talk about that**. The development work at Refugee Council is solely focused on 'what can we do to make them better at their jobs?' ... We don't talk about 'what is there in the organisation that is stopping people from doing their jobs effectively?'"

"There is **structural and systemic racism** and this is where the sector needs to shine a light and there is a lot of hesitancy and being very timid to call it out, and until we call it out for what it really is, we are not going to resolve these issues."

"These issues are entrenched and hidden within the sector. It's not always **flashing and visible** out there, and constitutes a major barrier for many people with lived experience and the sector needs to acknowledge and address it."

"So many people think they're doing well ... and doing a good job, **that it's so hard to tell them when they're wrong** and they take it so personally. Whereas in the corporate sector, when I had to tell a boardroom full of men why they were failing their female colleagues, they acknowledged it was sexist and asked how to fix it. In the charity sector, the reaction would have been 'oh god, I'm a bad person!'"



Interviewees and workshop participants shared countless experiences of having felt discriminated against or marginalised when applying for roles and seeking career progression within the refugee and migration sector. These barriers are explored in more detail in our discussion below of organisational factors which hinder career progression and development.

"I faced **multiple rejections**, and couldn't help but notice a pattern among the successful hires. They mostly fit a certain profile; English being their first language and being white."

OH, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

"Wherever I go, when I open my mouth and people hear my accent the first question is 'oh, where are you from?' And this immediately makes them look at me in a different way and this has happened to other people here.

I can say that in some way is a kind of racism. When they look at you in a different way, that changes the kind of opportunities you are given."

"Why do you think you've been **discriminated** against? Is it because you don't have the skills? ... Sometimes they don't have the knowledge on the other side."

"Definitely, if you apply for work, they look at your name and there is **judgement**. Your chances of getting an interview are lower, this is proven by research that it takes way more applications for foreigners or people with refugee backgrounds to be invited to the interview than people with English names. There can be **an assumption** that you are not as capable of doing the job. Systemic racism affects career development and progress of people with refugee backgrounds definitely."

The research also highlighted the importance of understanding the broader context of intersectional disadvantage that shapes the daily lives of many of those with lived experience of the refugee protection system. The subjugation experienced as a result of being an asylum seeker or refugee, and of being racially minoritised, routinely intersects with other forms of marginalisation, including those derived from class, poverty, gender, sexual orientation, disability and mental ill-health. There was a strong sense that designing programmes that acknowledge the complexity of intersectional disadvantage is essential if such interventions are to be successful.

2.2 ORGANISATIONAL BARRIERS

The research highlighted the ways in which structural barriers interact with the culture, policy and practice of individual organisations to form an additional tier of barriers to career progression among those with lived refugee experience. There was a strong sense that it is at the organisational level that change can and should happen most urgently. Organisations have the potential both to proactively challenge the wider structural context and to respond and adapt to individual-level factors that form barriers to individual career progression.

Although the Refugee Council was the primary focus of this discussion, significant contributions about organisational-level barriers across the sector were made by interviewees and workshop participants. Our analysis therefore explores organisational barriers in broad rather than specific terms.

"It feels like so much has been put on **the individual** when it's bigger than that. It's like 'you do more, you be more, you've already had this experience, but you be more, you volunteer more, you do all the things more,' rather than the organisation saying 'OK, maybe we all have to do more.'"

"The lack of **career progression** opportunities, work flexibility, decent wages and covering work related expenses means that smaller organisations are **unlikely** to provide similar opportunities that larger well resourced organisations can provide. Also in big and well resourced organisations, there is often more possibility to create new roles/growth and increase capacity which enhances quality and reduces staff burn out compared to small organisations with limited resources."

Organisational culture and commitment

A strong theme to emerge was that barriers associated with organisational policy and practice are intrinsically shaped by the wider culture of the organisation. Participants felt that meaningful systems change must therefore be driven by whole-organisational culture change, rather than piecemeal, or vertically designed interventions. The view was that changes which permeate all individual interactions, systems and delivery across the organisation, would have the biggest impact. A recurring theme was that the culture of urgency that permeates the sector is a substantial barrier to meaningful reflection and culture change. There was also a sense that charity sector organisations may not have placed enough emphasis on the importance of structured approaches to career development, especially among those with lived experience. The particular challenges facing smaller organisations within the sector were also flagged.

"We're not investing in HR in the sector very well. It's not necessarily about intent, it's just that it's not where the money's going. As a result, I haven't seen career development structures - policies, meaningful activities, real schemes, bodies of work that are supporting people with lived experience in their career progression. **From observation**, it feels like individuals with lived experience are identified as strong, important, and then perhaps a few are mentored or supported, and that's brilliant, but it's by circumstance rather than planning, and the problem is that it might elevate and help one individual to progress, but there's nothing systematic about it. It's always dependent on the individual. It's very informal."

Interviewees and workshop participants highlighted that there are significant gaps between the rhetoric and reality of organisations' commitment to the career development and progression of colleagues with lived refugee experience. There was also a strong sense that the under-representation of colleagues with lived experience, as well as a broader lack of diversity at senior levels (both at the Refugee Council and other organisations in the sector), reinforce perceptions that power remains ring-fenced for those who have traditionally held it, meaning that there is a lack of role models for colleagues with lived experience looking to progress in their careers.

"I have colleagues who have explicitly stated that they are *less confident* about career progression because leaders are mostly white men and women, often of a particular social class and background. This lack of visibility of inclusive and diverse leadership is uninspiring."

There was also a strong sense that the lack of diversity among senior colleagues means that day-to-day decision making continues to reinforce existing paradigms rather than challenge established patterns of representation and power. Participants cited the impacts of these dynamics on areas such as recruitment, perceptions of the potential career trajectories of colleagues with lived experience and day-to-day working culture.

"Within the recruitment process, there's a general understanding that *diversity is good* because it will bring in great new thinking. But the minute they arrive, you tell them 'this is how we do things here', which is not helpful for the colleague with lived experience or the organisation."

"At an organisational level, managers express a commitment to supporting those with lived experience, *but when it comes to hiring* they go for the people who they feel will 'get the job done', who are often like them."

"Roles for people with lived experience are pigeon-holed to just translation or cooking, but *refugees have so much to give*. We don't give people with lived experience budgets."

Organisational systems and policies: The bigger picture

The research flagged the ways in which a wide range of systems, policies and practice within organisations can hinder the career progression of colleagues with lived experience. Issues highlighted included:

- ◆ How the insecurity created by short-term contracts hinders career progression.
- ◆ The additional importance of flexible working for those who may lack support networks to help with caring responsibilities.
- ◆ Trauma-informed approaches and meaningful mental health support within the workplace.
- ◆ The importance of high-quality development opportunities and protected time to undertake professional development.
- ◆ The role of consistently high-quality line management/volunteer supervision in understanding and supporting people to achieve their professional potential was highlighted as being particularly important.

"One of the barriers I feel like with the Refugee Council I would say is the lack of training and *upskilling* their staff."

"I learned on the job and also *gained insights* into the differences between applying for jobs in the UK compared to my original country, with the support of my coordinator."

"Non-supportive line managers could be a significant barrier for people with lived experience to develop and progress in their careers. *Line managers are critical* in creating a supportive environment for career development and progression for people with lived experience. I was very fortunate to have line managers who were passionate and flexible about lived experience and this has played a central role in my progression and this would be the same for every person of lived experience."

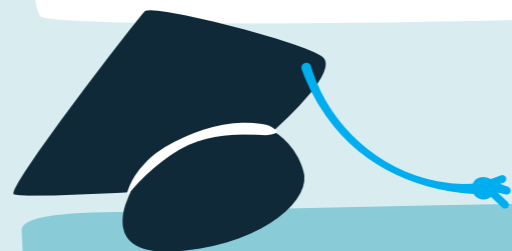


Recruitment systems and practice

Issues relating to navigating recruitment and interview processes were some of the most commonly-cited barriers to career progression and development among colleagues with lived experience. The wide range of barriers highlighted during the research included:

- ◆ The lack of information about roles they could apply for, the advantages these could bring and the relevance to them of their own experience and skills
- ◆ Being disadvantaged by a lack of experience of applying for jobs in the UK, including not being familiar with concepts such as a CV or how to link previous experience to a job specification.
- ◆ Widespread discrimination against those with names perceived as 'non-English.'
- ◆ Language barriers hindering the processes of applying for a job and successfully interviewing.
- ◆ Digital exclusion created by digitised recruitment processes.
- ◆ The difficulties for those who have fled their home country of providing references.
- ◆ The pressures of day-to-day life as an asylum seeker or refugee which may significantly limit people's capacity to consider career progression and apply for roles.
- ◆ Varying culturally-specific perceptions in relation to self-promotion and putting oneself forward for roles.

"Information and opportunities are **not easily** accessible to refugees for a range of reasons, some personal and organisational. Therefore the prospects of progression are **restricted** when you have restricted access to information about opportunities and how you prepare for them."

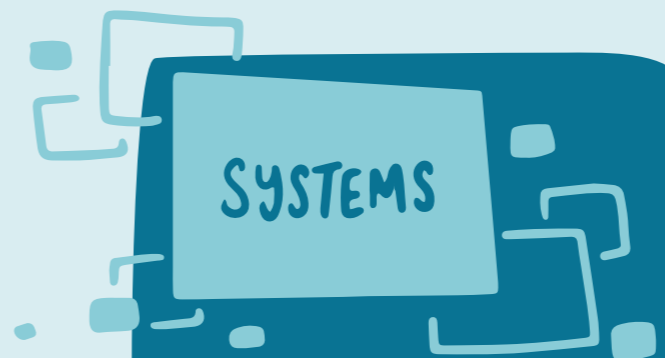


"I think the charity sector is made for people who can perform in a **British way** and to **British standards** ... So it doesn't even matter if you've studied ... because maybe I don't speak the same way as somebody. I wouldn't answer the interview questions like them or maybe just my name just sounds different."

"The fact that English wasn't my **first language** played a role in them not feeling confident in hiring me."

"My colleagues are frontline workers and they cover different areas. So that often means that they are driving around trying to get from one area to another and then they support different families, at least 10 families ... They are usually **exhausted** and they also don't have much time to be in front of their desk. So, if you're so tired, 'like when are you going to apply for a new job?'"

"Your **cultural norms** are really important. For example, in Afghanistan the concept of a CV doesn't exist; how you get a job is completely different."



"People with lived experience don't always have the support or knowledge of **the system** to know what to include in an application or at interview."

"There is also something cultural at play here which is that is often the case that people, especially Middle Eastern cultures, find it problematic to appear **overtly courageous and confident**. As such... even when people know they have enough to at least attempt, they wouldn't want to do so because they don't want to be seen as 'showing off' in this process. People don't sell their skills and often talk in terms of collective and communal achievements rather than individual assets. In Western cultures, most people would put themselves forward, market their skills and abilities even if they were not fully confident about their abilities."

Participants considered the rigidity of requirements to demonstrate qualifications and experience acquired in the UK to be harsh. There was particular frustration about this barrier given the sector's understanding of the circumstances in which many colleagues with lived experience of the refugee protection system may have arrived in the UK. There was a strong sense that these requirements deter colleagues with lived experience from applying for roles to which they know they could offer a wealth of experience. This is another factor which can lead to people remaining pigeon-holed in frontline and lower status roles. Many also expressed frustration that the sector had not yet pioneered possible solutions to this administrative issue.



"Lack of evidence that you studied back home, we don't have any proof. Once you say you have qualifications they ask if you **studied in the UK**. And that you must have qualifications from here and that takes time and if you try to use your time to get qualifications here, you have a small chance to do so."

"As a foreigner you need to be given the opportunity to **prove that you qualify** for the job, to be invited to interviews. Also the qualifications and experience from other countries should be recognised. Here in UK I am considered as uneducated, even with my law degree."

"Most people I know with lived experience, they've got a **higher level** of qualifications and experience than a British person in a similar role."

"Some individuals within the organisation may feel a **sense of security** and opt to remain in their current roles, even if it means sacrificing potential career advancement or higher salaries elsewhere. The organisation may not have actively communicated to these individuals about the potential benefits of seeking opportunities elsewhere, such as increased earning potential or career growth. **Encouraging discussions** about career goals and exploring different opportunities could help individuals make more informed decisions about their professional paths."

Interviewees and workshop participants repeatedly emphasised that the onus should be on organisations to actively facilitate individuals' career progression by proactively working to remove the barriers experienced by those with lived refugee experience.

2.3 FACTORS SHAPING INDIVIDUALS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

While the importance of addressing structural and organisational barriers to achieve systemic change were key themes to emerge from the research, there was also a strong sense that the focus should not be exclusively on macro-level factors. Participants suggested that it could lead to the development of an erroneous 'one size fits all' approach that overlooks the nuance of individuals' unique perceptions and experiences of the barriers.

This section therefore explores a range of personal factors that may shape the career progression and development of individuals with lived refugee experience. The aim is to highlight the need for individual organisations and the sector to lead change that recognises and responds to these factors rather than suggesting that individuals should be expected to overcome these barriers in order to progress in their careers.

"If you are still coming to terms with the **experiences** you had in **your home country** or journey here then that's gonna take its toll in terms of how much time and capacity you've got to put into developing your career."

"It's common for individuals, particularly those with **refugee backgrounds**, to experience burnout as they often strive to give their best, sometimes over-exerting themselves, especially in the initial stages. **Challenges** such as language barriers and the **pressure** to communicate effectively in English can contribute to this. Additionally, **comparing** oneself to British colleagues in terms of language proficiency may exacerbate these feelings. Furthermore, working with clients who share the same language can present unique challenges."

The research highlighted the unique set of burdens and challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees that can significantly inhibit career progression and development, including:

- ◆ The long-term mental and physical health impacts of having left your country to escape persecution or human rights violations.
- ◆ Missing home and the ongoing anguish about the safety of family and friends in your home country, as well as a common responsibility to financially support those back home.
- ◆ Alienation and loneliness, lacking a sense of belonging (often exacerbated by repeated resettlements) and support networks.
- ◆ The struggle of navigating unfamiliar systems and processes in every aspect of day-to-day life, often compounded by English by being a second language.
- ◆ The potentially re-traumatising impacts of working in the refugee and migration sector with clients who may have similar experiences to your own and a sense of additional burden and responsibility when working with clients from your home country.

"Many times there's people who are working with similar experiences that brought feelings out or maybe affected **my mental health** in ways where it's like vicarious trauma, but then also having someone that looks so similar to you, comes from a very similar region to you, and they have **similar experiences** that can like indirectly affect or directly affect your mental health as well; and I think maybe at times that can prevent a career progression because there are times in the four years where I found it really difficult trying to **navigate** and **manage** those feelings without getting any additional specialised support."

"There are many **challenges** as an individual such as missing your family back home, after years, it hits you hard. When am I going to see my family? Thinking about your country and **the life you had.**"

A theme participants repeatedly highlighted was that the understandable desire for stability and financial security among those who have experience of the refugee protection system can have a negative impact on career progression. It was felt that a sense of feeling grateful for employment, especially in the refugee and migration sector (often viewed as a more supportive place to work than other sectors), can lead to colleagues with lived refugee experience being reluctant to apply for new opportunities. In addition, the daily pressures of life as an asylum seeker or refugee can limit people's capacity to meaningfully consider their career progression.

"Some colleagues may also face the **added pressure** of supporting family members back home financially, which can create a sense of being trapped in a job solely for the income it provides, despite potential dissatisfaction."

"Also, in some cases, people are either content and are too grateful for what they have hence don't **actively engage** in career progression and as a consequence, there is no motivation and aspiration."

"Concerns about discrimination in **less diverse organisations** can deter them from seeking new opportunities. An example of this is one individual who took a pay cut to join the Refugee Council due to discrimination in their previous job, despite not being fully satisfied with their current role."

One of the strongest themes to emerge was the role of language barriers in inhibiting the career progression of those with lived refugee experience. Participants explained how language competence and confidence contribute to the day-to-day workplace challenges and can act as key barriers to career progression.

"They'd expect me to take minutes because I'm the administrator at the meetings ... Now I can manage, but you know people are **speaking with different accents** and I don't understand it and I had to buy recorders with my own money to record ... I spent all my weekends typing minutes and listening over and over for a two hour meeting."

"Firstly, **language barriers** are key, I have a personal experience of this. If you don't have a good mastery of the language and communication, it constitutes a **major barrier** in terms of how you express yourself but can also impact on how effective and efficient you are. As such, people with lived experience have to work extra hours and work hard to be able to produce the same quality of work like others without language barriers."

"**Hybrid working** might have exacerbated the difficulties of people with lived experience. Learning a language is much harder when not doing it **face to face.**"

The profound impacts of unfamiliarity with the norms and culture of British workplaces and wider society and the effects of feeling like an outsider who does not 'fit in' were eloquently explained by interviewees.

"After the lockdowns and I wanted to work from home because ... when you have lived experience and you're working with people; they're very good people but you don't feel like you fit in ... These people are very very kind people that I work with but **they're different and I felt different** so I don't get the jokes. I don't know any food when they're talking about some food."

"I have a degree from my country of origin ... and I had a very good job. But because we're not educated here it's different when you want to **articulate yourself**. The way that people do it here is different ... It's a **barrier** because being able to articulate the stuff in a way and it's not the same way that people who are brought up here articulate themselves ... I'm still catching up with the cultural kind of subtlety or different kinds of cultural difference."

"Firstly, we need to understand **how different the UK work culture** is and also more specifically the charitable sector. It is very different from what happens in other places where it is largely civil service and private sector oriented and the third sector (charity/voluntary sector) is often non-existent except the presence of some international/non-governmental organisations. So understanding the UK work/employment culture is a challenge and I struggled with this myself and continue to see how my colleagues are also struggling with this. Therefore you are constantly having to play catch-up as compared to your colleagues who don't face the same challenge and are most likely to progress faster than you."

3. Exploring possible initiatives that respond to career development barriers

The shape of responses/solutions that emerged from the interviews and workshops is a combination of genuinely meaningful macro-level culture change at the organisational/sector level, paired with support which factors in individual circumstances. Aligned with the key findings around barriers, all responses put the onus on organisations to offer meaningful career development opportunities, as opposed to asking colleagues with lived experience to conform to existing structures.

“Do we want people with lived experience to *fit into the existing system* or to *broaden* the system so that people with LEx can be meaningfully included? We need to work on the system rather than the individual.”

When asked about key drivers of successful career development, the majority of interviewees and workshop participants emphasised that initiatives only work well when developed in an ecosystem of holistic support. Barriers must be tackled on all three levels (individual, organisational and collective societal), with different initiatives pulling on different levers to make sustained change.

The scale and impact of different initiatives can and should vary, seamlessly align with one another, and be agile enough to fit the size and nature of an organisation; however, mechanisms for accountability must always be embedded. A foundational element highlighted by all participants was the importance of raising both systems awareness and self awareness around the barriers faced by colleagues with lived experience. Initiatives cannot happen in a vacuum if they are to be successful.



3.1 WHAT WORKS WELL

Participants shared the overall key factors that they've seen drive successful career development initiatives. These included:

- ◆ Building in flexibility and agility, plan to iterate
- ◆ For sustained progress, ensure the initiatives have strategic longer term backing, accountability and resource, and won't be shelved
- ◆ Coordinated, agile work streams that tackle barriers at different levels will affect change more holistically than one big project
- ◆ Authentically co-produce initiatives
- ◆ Maintain values driven approach
- ◆ Ensure transparency, expectation management and excellent communication with all staff (not just those directly involved in initiatives)
- ◆ Each initiative should, at its heart, feed into an ecosystem that is building a sense of belonging for people with lived experience
- ◆ Build in monitoring, evaluation and impact reporting
- ◆ Ensure aligned top-level systems change is guiding the initiatives, eg. a theory of change
- ◆ Work to fix the issues faced by people facing multiple barriers, and the ecosystem will be improved for everyone else too
- ◆ To challenge systemic barriers, we need collective action
- ◆ Good practice and insight must be collectively shared, to avoid duplicating efforts

Several participants also highlighted that at least some initiatives should be made available to all staff; recognising that some colleagues face similar intersectional barriers but do not identify as having lived experience. Creating a holistic ecosystem of support also involves raising overall staff and volunteer awareness of the integral and wider issues at play. Building knowledge and understanding of barriers should therefore be aimed at the whole organisation (or wider).

"Of course there are **additional barriers** for people with lived experience and we shouldn't lose sight of these, but we need to ensure that it doesn't exclude people who do not have lived experience of the refugee protection system. Also, adopting a **decolonial** approach to this work that transcends refugee protection and embracing the fact that there are a lot of people coming from countries who have been **impacted by colonial practices** not only of the UK but other western countries that have shaped and undermined their career progression. As such, how do we embrace employment practices that also speak to the values of **anti-racism, anti-oppression and other harmful practices** and treat them as humans. So we need to have an expansive view of this which does not create exclusive groups which unconsciously harm other groups."

3.2 OVERALL CHALLENGES TO NAVIGATE WHEN DESIGNING INITIATIVES

Participants highlighted key challenges or examples of bad practice they'd witnessed or experienced, to be learnt from in order to co-create better initiatives. These included:

- ◆ Tokenistic initiatives that became 'checkbox exercises' rather than meaningful change
- ◆ Initiatives that only treated the symptoms, rather than the cause of barriers to career development
- ◆ Poor visibility of leadership commitment or risk averse leadership, lack of willingness to tackle structural barriers or those requiring culture change
- ◆ Lack of resources - funding, bandwidth, energy, motivation
- ◆ Deeply embedded structural racism
- ◆ Gatekeeping by managers (preventing both opportunities for development, and meaningful feedback from staff)
- ◆ Lack of buy-in and collaboration from the sector for wider cross-organisational initiatives
- ◆ Underfunded or non-existent Human Resources and Learning and Development departments across the sector
- ◆ Digital exclusion
- ◆ Balancing the value of both lived and learnt experiences; recognising intersectionality and avoiding positive discrimination
- ◆ Shame around admitting where one might be struggling and being confident in asking for help; shame around not feeling confident to give support in culturally sensitive ways
- ◆ Balancing preservation of stability versus benefits of growth



3.3 OVERVIEW OF POSSIBLE INITIATIVES

For a detailed overview of all initiatives shared by participants and specific examples cited, please see Appendix 1 below.

More than half of the participants cited specific skills development or tools to facilitate reflection and mapping of career development options as a very practical, useful initiative. However, there was also a strong sense that interventions and programmes with a skills and development focus alone are likely to be tokenistic and ultimately unsuccessful in achieving meaningful change, unless they take place in the context of genuine and significant cultural change at the organisation and sector level. Participants highlighted the importance of improving a combination of overall awareness, processes, line management, wellbeing support and access to opportunities in order to build a holistic ecosystem where complex intersectional barriers to career development can be addressed.

These included:

- ◆ Raising awareness of the value and importance of embedding lived expertise across all strands of the organisation's work and deepening overall understanding of the barriers facing colleagues with lived experience
- ◆ Strategic commitment to career development; specific resource dedicated to learning and development and holding accountability
- ◆ A wider anti-racist and anti-oppression culture with accountability, including training and awareness-raising programmes for all staff, eg. reverse mentoring programmes
- ◆ Visible presence of colleagues with lived expertise at senior levels of organisation
- ◆ Trauma-informed working culture and environment
- ◆ Empowering marginalised groups within organisations
- ◆ Inclusive language and shared definitions around lived experience and EDIB
- ◆ Tackling systemic sector-wide culture of urgency versus reflection; intentionally creating capacity within all roles to participate in awareness-raising and career development



- ◆ Ring-fenced paid trainee roles for people with lived experience, with resourced upskilling built in, especially in non-service departments
- ◆ Clear and consistent volunteer to employment routes within organisations
- ◆ Flexible, informed policies and processes that take into account the specific challenges of being a refugee in the hostile environment, and support development needs (such as flexible hours to attend ESOL classes)
- ◆ Building, supporting and investing in lived experience peer networks (both digital and physical), to share learning, support, opportunities, and increase community of belonging within the sector
- ◆ Inclusive recruitment and induction policies and processes; including cross-sector mechanism to convert overseas qualifications and/or removal of requirement for UK based qualifications/experience
- ◆ Engagement with wider campaigns around refugee and asylum seeker employment rights, eg. 'Lift the Ban' campaign
- ◆ Cross-organisational lived experience advisory group to hold sector-wide accountability and consistency in anti-racist mechanisms, support lived experience trustees, advise funders
- ◆ Organisational accreditation scheme for 'Refugee Employers' to recognise good practice and raise awareness (this could be across multiple sectors)
- ◆ Sector-wide hub to provide central source of resources, tools and signposting to existing initiatives
- ◆ Sector-wide call for funders to invest in career development initiatives, with the long term vision of increasing lived experience in funded leadership roles

"LEx are much more likely to be encouraged to apply for more senior roles if they see **diversity** within the boards, trustees and SMTs of organisations."

"**Language skills** are absolutely key; it opens up not only job opportunities, but connection with the rest of society more broadly. It's crucial."

"Developing a network of peers where **communication** about more senior roles can be passed on so that these opportunities are not missed - this would encourage LEx to stay in the refugee sector where their expertise is most valuable."

"Peer support **networks** are vital and should be accessible for people with lived experience where they can meet with peers and share learning, information and practice but also receive **encouragement** and support from their peers. The impact of peer learning and experience is **powerful** because they have a shared experience of the barriers they are confronting."



With this backdrop of responding to more structural barriers, individual and organisational level responses have a greater chance of success. A strong theme to emerge was that organisations need to respond in ways that recognise individuals' unique combinations of experience, skills, ambitions and the broader context to their life. The most prominent specific suggestions of how to achieve this were:

- ◆ Consistently high-quality, informed line management
- ◆ Asset-based approaches that assess and recognise individuals' education, skills and experience gained within and outside of the UK and identify areas where support may be needed to facilitate career progression
- ◆ Transparent and easy-to-navigate internal recruitment processes with practical accountability
- ◆ Coaching and mentoring programmes
- ◆ Career Development Toolkit; including templates for CVs, goal setting, interview tips, UK workplace culture guidance, skills auditing
- ◆ Training and upskilling courses; including English language business / advanced professional writing courses, and central budget to fund it
- ◆ LEx tailored development courses, eg. self advocating, 'story of self' training

"It is crucial for line managers to have a nuanced **understanding** of the reality of the people with lived experience because this will help create a reflective environment where there is mutual learning by the manager and the person with lived experience. This will also help shift the mindset whereby people with **lived experience** are not seen as 'burden' requiring extra work to develop them, rather they should be seen by managers with no lived experience as assets with **tremendous value**, not least because they understand better the issues that the organisation is working towards addressing."

"You're never going to be able to get inside every manager's head, so how you create **systems and tools** that have checks and balances is key."

"I have a friend from Rwanda who initially struggled to pursue her **ambitions** until she received mentoring and coaching support. With encouragement, she **overcame** her doubts, pursued further education, and ultimately succeeded in her field."

"When we have lived experience, and especially for black women, the sector isn't designed to allow us to be **outspoken** – so we get problematised, and without mentorship it's really hard not to take that personally."

"There was some good work in **mental health** around helping people think through their experience and their story and what they were happy to share and what they didn't want to share and how they wanted to share it."

"You need to give an **action plan** and keep checking. People forget. This is about leadership, checking if you are satisfied with your job, do you have ambition, and we start to simplify using calendars, action plans, and **training**."

"I would say something that people really enjoy are **in person training** opportunities and like skillshare days and things that bring people from different teams together and because you're often **inspired** by other people."

"Don't **underestimate** and ignore small stuff like CV management, how to write a purpose statement, using LinkedIn, networking, and interview skills – the toolbox my mum never got to teach because we were in **survival** mode."

"Providing resources such as career audits, skills assessments, and roadmaps can **help individuals** identify areas for growth and access the support they need to advance in their careers."

Appendix 1

Initiatives: Details and existing examples

This is a detailed overview of the initiatives shared by participants, that could be put in place to tackle barriers to career development; and specific existing examples cited. Where there are gaps in the table, participants did not provide examples. The [project background research](#) also highlights many more existing initiatives, and we acknowledge that there will be further initiatives happening across the sector and beyond that this research has not captured.

Description of initiative	Existing examples
<p>Inclusive Recruitment Practices & Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Overseas qualification conversion included / qualification removed as essential from job descriptions ◆ Simplify applications ◆ Blind scoring processes ◆ Ask only skills based questions at interview, sending questions in advance ◆ For managerial roles, include key people skills in JD eg. empathy ◆ Clear expectations on what a good interview answer looks like ◆ Advertise roles in range of diverse spaces, offer briefing on roles ◆ Clear values driven induction programmes, including workplace behaviour expectations ◆ Clarity on level of English language competence needed for role ◆ Fair job titles that reflect the role, and ensure market compatibility (eg. people officer rather than administrator) 	<p>Organisations with known inclusive practices or resources: Refugee Council ; Refugee Action; Routes; Retas; Safe Passage; University of Sanctuaries approaches to qualification equivalency</p> <p>Existing Tools & Guides: Inclusive recruitment: Guide for employers CIPD www.diverseeducators.co.uk/inclusive-recruitment-toolkit/ EbE Employment initiative www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk/blog/quick-guide-to-inclusive-recruitment/</p>
<p>Mentoring / Coaching for staff with LEx</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Mentoring programme (could be within organisation or cross-organisational) with a pool of mentors and mentees ◆ Mentors/mentees would agree clear purpose, goals, expectations and areas of upskilling, development and/or confidence building ◆ Programme should be managed by central resource to ensure accountability, and match people with relevant skills/interest levels eg. if an LEx colleague wants to move from services to fundraising, pair with fundraising mentor ◆ Where using professional coaches, diversity of coaches should be considered ◆ Mentors would receive clear guidance, support and training on key mentoring skills (eg. active listening) 	<p>Outversing – mentoring programs for LGBTQIA+ professionals</p> <p>EbE Employment initiative www.charitycomms.org.uk/mentoring</p>

Description of initiative	Existing examples
<p>Consistently strong line management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Combination management expectations of their role in supporting direct reports to develop within their careers ◆ Top-down accountability to ensure managers are supporting staff (eg. included within managers supervision/appraisals) ◆ Clear feedback mechanisms in place and understanding of preferred communication methods between manager/direct report/team ◆ Management training specifically raising awareness and understanding of barriers facing LEx colleagues in career progression, and value of LEx ◆ Mutual learning spaces between manager and LEx colleagues ◆ Access to and training to use a toolkit to enable development support ◆ Values-driven, person-centred, holistic management styles ◆ Clear guidance for managers to ensure direct reports have: clear role expectations, objectives and deliverables, behavioural expectations (eg. working hours and self care), regular check-ins on development potential, skills auditing for current role, skills auditing for potential future roles, clarity around training/mentoring options available and budget for it, understanding how to apply to internal roles ◆ Checklist for reference of activity a manager should be doing 	<p>Refugee Council leadership development programme</p> <p>Clare leadership programme</p> <p>On purpose</p> <p>Refugee Action – focus on supporting managers to strike balance between quality performance and deep understanding of LEx</p> <p>Management training – Directory of Social Change</p> <p>Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership</p>
<p>Growing awareness and shifting mindsets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Communications strategies / training / language shifts to embed the value of LEx within all areas of work ◆ Educating all staff on barriers facing colleagues with LEx, eg. root causes of stress, mental health challenges, exclusion; but ensuring framing is empowering / framed around resilience ◆ Reverse Mentoring scheme - with guidance, support and training for both parties (including clear purpose, timelines and capacity); involves either senior staff being mentored by junior staff / non-LEx by LEx staff member, actively listening to challenges ◆ Training for all staff around unconscious bias and power/privilege; resisting racism; understanding the rights of refugees in the workplace ◆ Lunch & Learn sessions with anti-racist speakers, sharing of good practice from other organisations 	<p>Refugee Council leadership development programme – management training focusing on power/privilege and identity</p> <p>Antiracism toolkit</p>

Description of initiative	Existing examples
<p>Specific upskilling / training courses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ English language training; including advanced writing skills and business English (could be delivered by partners in ESOL) ◆ Informal English language upskilling; language clubs or budding schemes ◆ Skillshare days ◆ Self-advocacy training program, empowering LEx colleagues to advocate for themselves ◆ ‘Story of Self’ training, learning how to use experiences for storytelling, campaigning and applying for new roles in empowered way ◆ Clear learning and development budget (either per team or per person) ◆ Tailored training on digital skills and tools ◆ Technical courses, such as accountancy ◆ Training on facilitation / public speaking 	<p>IPPR – recommendation around language clubs and budding schemes</p> <p>Routes – Expedited ESOL within workplace</p> <p>Refugee Council Resettlement skillshare days</p> <p>Transplus Solidarity Alliance – self-advocacy training</p> <p>Story of self (training) - Unbound Philanthropy</p>
<p>Networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Building, supporting and resourcing LEx peer networks both inside organisations and across organisations ◆ Enable peer learning and spaces for reflection, as well as safe spaces to resist racism ◆ Networks specifically focused on employment opportunities can share resources, adverts and tailored guidance, as well as track progress of refugees in employment to share impact and growth of cross sector LEx leadership ◆ Links to cross organisational mentoring or coaching programmes, and provides opportunity for more informal mentoring 	<p>EbE Employment initiative</p> <p>Learning Exchanges supported by Unbound Philanthropy</p> <p>Safe Passage Young Leaders</p>

Description of initiative	Existing examples
<p>Inclusive language guide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Glossary of inclusive definitions around LEx and identity; eg. Experts by Experience, Lived experience, Lived Expertise, inclusive gender terms etc. ◆ Language embedded in inductions, staff conferences and meetings, internal communications, quizzes ◆ Make glossary available as part of overall missions, ambitions, values and language used ◆ Emphasise that definitions around LEx should be framed around empowerment, moving away from victim or service user 	<p>Bloody Good Employers program</p> <p>Scottish Refugee Council</p> <p>Peer Power Youth</p>
<p>Inclusive policies and processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Flexible working policies ◆ Inclusive health policies ◆ Clear actionable processes for staff experiencing discrimination in workplace ◆ Inclusive refugee involvement policies and processes around expenses ◆ Offering job share / part time options (and ensuring hiring managers understand these options) 	<p>Refugee Council's Refugee Involvement policies, processes and systems</p>

Description of initiative	Existing examples
<p>Strategic Commitment (organisational level)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Dedicated resource for Learning and Development at senior enough level to affect whole-organisational change – accountable for equitable L&D opportunities for all staff ◆ Specific strategy, delivery plan and development framework for staff and volunteer career development ◆ Responsible for ensuring policies and processes are in place, and to evaluate feedback, adjust programmes as relevant ◆ Monitoring progress of staff with LEx to evaluate impact of initiatives and ensure alignment with anti-racism practices ◆ Central space to manage and update toolkits, training, specific support for managers ◆ Responsible for managing clear communications plan, to embed consistent understanding of value of LEx colleagues & their development ◆ Anti-racism strategy is central to career development ◆ Support/lead cross organisational spaces such as Reclaiming Lived Experience Conference ◆ Centres empowering refugees at centre of organisational commitments ◆ Enable holistic system change 	<p>Reclaiming Lived Experience Leadership Conference</p>
<p>Ring-fenced roles LEx staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Paid internships/traineeships specifically for LEx applicants with training and upskilling included ◆ No prior qualifications, experience or reference needed – applications based on interest in area and behaviours ◆ Paid work placement or 'ambassador' programmes where candidates can spend time in several different departments and then 'graduate' with confirmed skills and references 	<p>TERN's Refugee Development Track</p> <p>Safe Passage – work placements for young people</p> <p>2027 – paid apprenticeship scheme</p> <p>KRAN Youth Ambassadors programme</p> <p>Oxfam trainee program (funded by kickstart)</p>



Developing career pathways and progression for staff and volunteers with lived experience of the refugee protection system

Description of initiative	Existing examples
<p>Tailored development toolkit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ CV / job application templates and examples ◆ Interview guides ◆ Skills audit tool ◆ Roadmapping from here to desired career (identifying gaps/support) ◆ How to network ◆ Guides to using linkedin ◆ Where to look for roles ◆ Time management and forward planning guidance / templates 	
<p>Capacity building within roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ensuring percentage of time is protected for career development within all roles (updating JDs, management expectations) ◆ Strategic funding for protected time from dedicated central pot, or included in bid applications / services contracts (either unrestricted or specific funding sources) ◆ Leading culture change to frame learning and development as a priority, with role modelling from leadership ◆ Sector-wide collaboration around best practice to tackle culture of urgency, burnout and firefighting vs reflection and growth 	
<p>Volunteering to Employment Routes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Offering skills training to volunteers in asylum system to prepare for right to work status ◆ Embedding language support (formally or informally) ◆ Including LEx volunteers in asylum system in work with clear transferable skills for job market (such as administration, budgeting, coordination) ◆ Offer to be formal reference as part of volunteering scheme ◆ Include volunteers in internal job advertising, and ensure advertising is in accessible spaces ◆ Build capacity into volunteer coordinator roles to assist in career development of volunteers where wanted (following same guidance as managers) ◆ Offer set of certificates to prove skills as a volunteer, which can be used in job applications 	<p>TERN's Refugee Development Track</p> <p>RETAS</p>

Description of initiative	Existing examples
<p>Wellbeing support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Support LEx networks, LEx mentoring and staff groups; recognising refugees less likely to have social communities ◆ Ensure Employee Assistant Programs are available in multiple languages, and available for volunteers as well as staff ◆ Offer 1:1 clinical supervision to staff with LEx ◆ Ensure management guidance/training is clear on how managers can confidently check in on direct reports' wellbeing, especially around how LEx staff are feeling at work (given likelihood of triggering context) ◆ Ensure internal trauma trends are reported up to leadership at least annually, from clinical supervisors ◆ Training for all staff on how to support and signpost colleagues with ongoing trauma, vicarious trauma or PTSD 	
<p>Cross-Sector Systems Change Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ LEx Advisory Panel to provide advice, support and guidance to sector Boards of Trustees, holding accountability on commitments to anti-racism, inclusion and value of LEx leadership ◆ Coordinated sector-wide anti-racism mechanism to monitor, advise and respond ◆ Formal 'Refugee Employers' accreditation scheme for employers who meet specific criteria, making them a 'good employer' for refugees (this could include other initiatives listed, such as specific policies, inclusive recruitment, tailored career dev) ◆ Coordinated campaigning engagement on employment rights for refugees - ie. 'Lift the Ban' 	<p>IPA Institute of Practices of Advertising</p> <p>IPPR recommendation for accreditation scheme</p> <p>Refugee Council lean employment initiative for accreditation scheme</p> <p>LEX Scotland</p> <p>Families Together Coalition</p> <p>City of Sanctuary's awards scheme for good work environments</p>
<p>Increasing LEx Leadership Representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Specific strategic target to have agreed percentage of senior leadership roles filled by staff with LEx (either by ring fencing or not) ◆ Can be achieved through career development pathways, sustained support for staff to progress internally and culture change focused on value of LEx 	<p>Women for Refugee Women</p> <p>Refugee Council (Head of Refugee Involvement)</p> <p>RETAS (70% staff have LEx)</p>

Description of initiative	Existing examples
<p>Financial security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Commitment to strategically moving towards longer term contracts wherever possible, with clear internal redeployment routes for staff on shorter term contracts ◆ Increasing both fundraising and funder awareness of impact of short-term funding on staff already facing intersectional barriers ◆ Offer career development opportunities that are centrally funded, to ensure equitable access for all colleagues (irrespective of their contract) ◆ Work with funders to build protected time for career development for staff into all funding criteria applications ◆ Open letter to funders to bring awareness to barriers facing LEx colleagues and systems change required to sustainably improve landscape of LEx leadership by investing in career development 	
<p>Sector-wide hub / central space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Online space to share toolkits, networks, linktree signposting, opportunities, good practice ◆ Open to collaborators from across the sector ◆ Space to coordinate cross-organisational specific training (ie. skilling up HR teams) and events eg. Reclaiming Lived Experience Leadership ◆ Include resources such as overseas qualification conversion - enabling smaller organisations to use for free 	

Appendix 2

Research methodology

- ◆ Our research interviews took place during March and April 2024.
- ◆ We undertook 23 interviews with a wide range of colleagues at the Refugee Council, from across the refugee and migration sector and from other organisations with relevant insights and experience in relation to lived-experience career progression and development. We also spoke to people with lived refugee experience who had left the sector because of the barriers they faced. (See Table 1)
- ◆ Interviews were undertaken by project steering group members Roula Kheder and Tanja Odobasic, WRKWLL associates Amina Kadogo, Fidelis Chebe, Maddi Cassell, Pete Nash and Naomi Pollard and Abi Long from the Refugee Council. As far as possible those with lived experience were interviewed by interviewers with relevant lived experience.
- ◆ All Refugee Council interviewees were interviewed by WRKWLL team members. All participants were offered the option of contributing anonymously to the research.
- ◆ In order to recognise their important contribution to this work, those with lived experience not participating in a professional capacity were paid for their contributions.
- ◆ The interviews explored participants' experience and observations of barriers to career progression & development for those with lived refugee experience and the responses that could address these. Please following the links to the interview discussion guides and workshop materials.
- ◆ Interviews were recorded with participants permission, with findings charted by each interviewer into a shared analysis framework. The findings were then analysed to draw out the high-level themes to emerge across the dataset. Abi Long (the Refugee Council) and Naomi Pollard (WRKWLL) led report writing, with input and support from the project team and steering group.

Table 1: Research interviewees

Current employee, Refugee Council

Current employee, Refugee Council

Current volunteer, Refugee Council

Former employee, Refugee Council

Rena Mann, Executive Director of Services, Refugee Council

Yusuf Ciftci, Head of Refugee Involvement, Refugee Council

Adrian Sell, Head of Practice Development, Refugee Council

Corinne Lee, Project Manager, Refugee Council

Tomasz Gliński, Resettlement Area Manager Hertfordshire, Refugee Council

John Cuthbert, volunteer, Refugee Council

Ghino Parker, Director, Barnardos and Refugee Council Trustee

Alphonsine Kabagabo, Director, Women for Refugee Women and Refugee Council Trustee

Amina Kadogo, Founder ANC Admin Solutions and former Refugee Council volunteer

Silvia Tomova, former migration charity volunteer, now working in retail

Former migration charity volunteer, now studying

Mark Goldring, Director, Asylum Welcome

Yasir Mohamed, Volunteer Services manager, RETAS Leeds

Mohamed Omar, Head of EBE & Partnerships, Refugee Action

Rawand Ahmed, Refugee & Migrant Participation Officer, Migration Yorkshire

Office Manager and Volunteer Coordinator, Bristol Refugee Rights

Sue Jenkins, Charity Sector Consultant

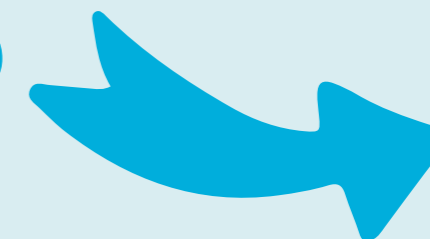
Marty Davies, Joint CEO, Outvertising

Jake Lee, Deputy Director of the UK Program at Unbound Philanthrop

Appendix 3

Live illustrated visual summaries from co-design workshop

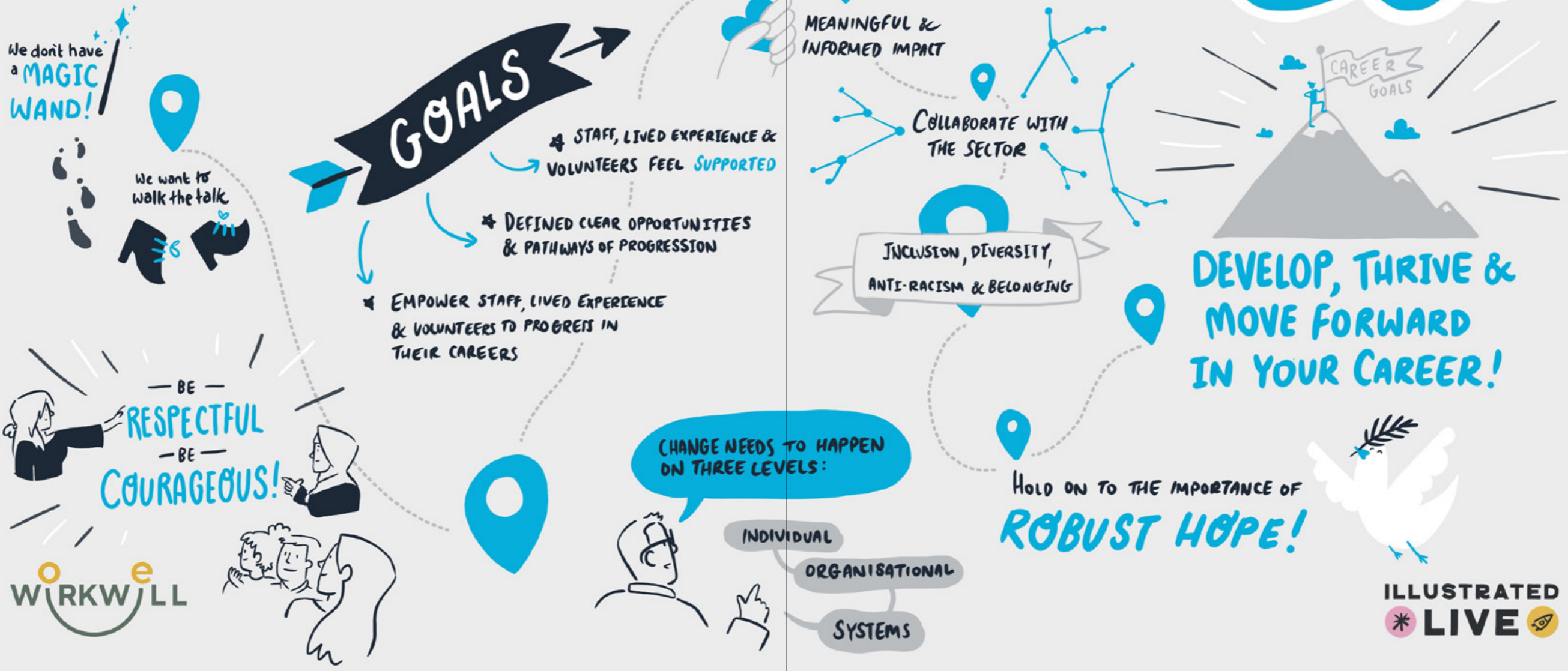
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Developing career pathways and progression for staff & volunteers with lived experience of the refugee system

Feedback & co-design workshop



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Developing career pathways and progression for staff & volunteers with lived experience of the refugee system

Feedback & co-design workshop





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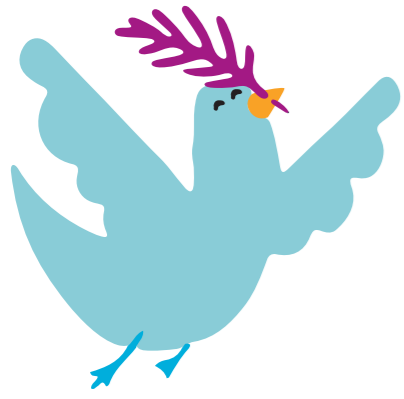
katiechappell.com



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SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES

