REFUGEE ACTION GOOD PRACTICE

A STRONGER UK MIGRATION SECTOR

A research report into learnings from Covid19

April 2022

Report written by Helen Barley

Learnings from Covid-19: Building a stronger UK migration sector

The pandemic brought together hundreds of frontline refugee and migration organisations to share data, information and resources. How can this new 'infrastructure' become the foundation for a solid sector support system, fit to tackle future emergencies?

This is the second of three blogs summing up key learnings from the 12-month Respond and Adapt Programme (RAP), run by Migration Exchange, Refugee Action and NACCOM from April 2020.

📑 **Related reports**

- Carry on adapting
- Inspiring new funding approaches

What is 'shared sector infrastructure'?

"Infrastructure is about building our confidence and sense of unity as a sector."
– Ros Holland, Boaz Trust.

As well as securing funding for frontline migration organisations during Covid-19's first year, a key RAP goal was to strengthen our sector's shared support networks, resources and platforms.

The [Information and Data Hub](#) hosted by Refugee Action is one example of this 'shared sector infrastructure', alongside new strategic initiatives supported by RAP grants, such as:

- [Hope Not Hate](#) tracking the risk of far right attacks.

- [Asylum Matters](#) connecting organisations working on asylum accommodation and support.

- [Doctors of the World](#) improving access to Covid-19 vaccines for people in the UK immigration system.

- [Act Build Change](#) leading workshops on care and well-being.

- [Brap](#) running anti-racism training.

- [ACEVO](#) providing support for charity leaders.

To capture insights and learnings, several of these organisations recently joined a roundtable discussion with [Boaz Trust](#), [Bristol Refugee Rights](#), [Brushstrokes](#), [Migrants Organise](#) and [Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)](#). All either have experience of accessing and/or of creating shared sector initiatives.

They gave their perspectives on how their organisations used shared sector infrastructure during Covid-19, how programmes like RAP enabled this type of resourcing, and how we can best strengthen our work so far to create future, sector-wide systemic change.

Time and money

For many, including [Asylum Matters](#), RAP funding was a key enabler when Covid-19 hit.

It freed up valuable time to organise nationally, boosting partner collaborations on asylum accommodation. For example, the online #CloseTheBarracks event became a galvanising moment for the sector. The team also created regional and local online groups to signpost and share resources, supplemented by fortnightly summary email updates.

For Hope Not Hate, new funding was the key to better tracking and responding to right wing threats. This sparked a more coordinated sector-wide effort, for example, by sharing information on asylum accommodation and how hotels are managed.

For JCWI, Hope Not Hate's email updates saved a lot of time, and the RAP grant helped them use resources more effectively. In future, more ongoing, unrestricted funding would enable overstretched grassroots organisations to feed in meaningfully

to sector advocacy and policy work. Cutting down on meetings and freeing up time for new projects remains a real challenge.

Migrants Organise supported nine other groups to apply for RAP funding, leading to more power and decision-making for activists with lived experience. One challenge now is how to meaningfully maintain emerging types of infrastructure, such as a growing women's WhatsApp group with 100+ members.

Connecting and sharing

Doctors of The World noted a positive change in sector collaboration, with fewer, more focused meetings, exchanging learnings and avoiding duplication.

The Information and Data Hub was a vital forum, including for sharing vaccine resources, and discussing emerging issues, like vaccine passports for people not registered with a GP. Regular hub survey insights helped the organisation to tailor information on social media and create a new vaccine toolkit for community leaders.

The Info Hub and NACCOM helped the Boaz Trust forge crucial new links with homelessness and migration organisations, boosting learning and reducing isolation for home-working employees in the process. The Brap and Act Build Change training sessions on anti-racism and self-care were 'invaluable'.

In future, funding for participating in meetings, and clarity on the purpose of different infrastructure groups, would help.

Brushstrokes echoed the importance of sector-wide training. The Info Hub also provided strong data evidence to support policy development. Overall, accessing shared infrastructure allowed the organisation to learn from how other local groups adapted, including on tackling digital exclusion and securing accommodation for people refused asylum.

Better signposting to shared networks and resources would help small organisations in future, alongside funding for community leadership and supporting employees under constant pressure in a crisis.

Leadership and advocacy

Having supported RAP grantees on leadership and governance for six months, ACEVO suggested creating a support network of charity leaders, within and beyond the migration sector, as an invaluable source of advice, learning and inspiration.

Refugee Action reflected on how the Good Practice Community has evolved through a stronger focus on co-production between over 300 participating organisations. The next step for the RAP-initiated Insight Hub is to keep developing as a shared sector space providing insight and peer support.

In the longer-term, a key challenge will be to build on the achievements and learnings of this new unique community to create wider, future impact.

With thanks to Rosie Carter/Hope Not Hate, Zrinka Bralo/Migrants Organise, Paul Hook/Asylum Matters, Lora Evans/Refugee Action, Matteo Besana/Doctors of The World, Ros Holland/Boaz Trust, Anne Wallis/ACEVO, Zoe Gardner/JCWI, and Dave Newall/Brushstrokes community project.