

# JTI LEARNING REVIEW 2023

## FOREWORD

The scope of this learning review is to provide an update on what is being learned through the Justice Together Initiative. As a time-bound initiative, approximately halfway through its intended duration, it is a way to check-in with how grant partners are experiencing the initiative and to update the understanding of the wider working context for grant partners.

This review does not seek to evaluate the 'progress' of grant partners, nor is it a final evaluation of JTI as a whole. The learning questions were developed collaboratively with the JTI team through a staff inception workshop with a central focus on learning for strategy and adaptation. As such, the review includes both analysis and forward-looking questions.

The focus on Lived Experience and Anti-Racism are based on JTI's own prioritisation of those values in the design of the initiative. Likewise, for the focus on Funding Design & Grant Management and Peer Learning. The Review aims to broadly answer two questions: A. What is being learned about how to support organisations and coalitions doing advice, representation, influencing, solidarity, connectivity etc. on immigration? (pp. 3-15) and B. What is being learned about the immigration support sector? (pp. 16-22). Under each of these are subtopics. Each subtopic covers: Learning, Critique and Appreciation, Specificities and Exceptions (for some), What it Means / Lessons, Reflection Questions.

Knowing that reading long reports can be unnecessarily burdensome, this review is structured to allow readers to read the sections or subtopics independently according to their interest.

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The content reflects insights and analysis from grant partners based on JTI reporting and a small interview sample of twelve grantees. The sample is based on meeting the following criteria: a) organisations with large and small budgets, b) organisations with large and small staff, or with mostly voluntary staff, c) a grant partner network and individual organisations, d) organisations led by people with LEX of the immigration system and those without, e) organisations that support or represent specific affinity or demographic groups and those without a specific profile of service user.

As an external consultant, it is important to acknowledge that my positionality will inform the emphasis, interpretation and blind spots and that the analysis is of course shaped by this. The analysis reflects a snapshot of a sample of JTI grant partners feedback at a moment in time. Therefore, this review should be read as a contribution to existing learning and analysis being produced from within the immigration support sector and by other analysts of the grant-making. It is not, and is not intended to be, definitive. Furthermore, there is no single audience and I encourage each reader to engage with the report and take from it what adds to their own understanding. No more, no less.

Finally, I would like to thank the grant partners who participated in the interviews, knowing full well that their time is scarce. This review would not be possible without your generosity with your time, insights, and honest analysis. Thanks must also go to the JTI team for precise and valuable feedback and suggestions on earlier drafts.

I hope that this year's review will inform JTI's strategic thinking and adaptations as they refine - and define - their 'space to act' based on their positionality, the political context shaping the immigration support sector and the wider values they are seeking to strengthen.

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## OVERVIEW: JUSTICE TOGETHER INITIATIVE

JTI aims to strengthen the immigration sector and to influence wider changes to support a fair functioning of immigration, nationality and asylum processes. It has three goals to enable this to happen:

1. A more just and equitable immigration system
2. Immigration organisations are more sustainable, better networked and more representative of the communities they serve
3. More people are able to secure justice.

Two main types of grant are available:

- ◆ Influencing grants are aimed at funding a range of influencing approaches including, community organising, strategic litigation, political advocacy and strategic communications.
- ◆ Advice and representation grants support organisations to develop more capacity to deliver more, and better quality, advice services. This can be through hiring new advice staff (with a particular focus on those with lived experience), upskilling existing staff, and entering into partnerships with networks of local organisations to develop advice strategies.

Along with a new infrastructure support programme launched in 2023 for one-off grants of up to £20k to strengthen organisations' infrastructure with a focus on grassroots organisations. JTI also manages a Community of Impact learning initiative for grant partners, convening workshops and training designed to build capacity and networks across the sector. There is an explicit anti-racist element to JTI's work, together with an aim to increase the numbers of people with lived experience of the immigration system working in the support sector.

### Part A

## What is being learned about how to support organisations and coalitions doing advice, representation, influencing, solidarity, connectivity etc. on immigration?

### I. FUNDING DESIGN & GRANT MANAGEMENT

#### JTI (Original) Aims & Ambitions

Being 'a different kind of funder' that is more responsive to grant partners rather than asking grant partners to contort to fit into funder preferences and definitions. And putting emphasis on the human dimension of grant management, such as reducing (feelings of) pressure on grant partners, minimising burdensome conventions etc.

#### Learning, Critique & Appreciation

The grant partners that were interviewed overwhelmingly confirmed that they saw - or more specifically felt - a difference in JTI's approach to grant management. Some interviewees

commented on the listening skills of the JTI team, and saw how this led to proactive offers of help and efforts to respond to situations facing grant partners.

**“We had extra money given to us twice because JTI recognised when we were under pressure. I didn’t believe that level of support existed. They looked at the cost of living and gave grant partners the extra money. They are realists.” - Grant Partner**

Other aspects of grant management that were highlighted by interviewees:

- ◊ The ability to reach out spontaneously and get a response back quickly from JTI was appreciated.
- ◊ The team’s focus on long term outcomes in the interactions and supporting grant partners’ development

**“With JTI, it feels like we’re on the same side. There’s a feeling of trust that we can just get on with it and report what the issues are when they come up.” - Grant Partner**

- ◊ The flexibility of the fund and the fact that they don’t ask for elaborate reports.
- ◊ The approach to renewals, because it felt like an acknowledgement of the amount of time that organisations usually have to spend on preparing applications. (However, there was one point of feedback on the quality of the renewal application.)
- ◊ The grant managers’ pragmatic approach to unforeseen obstacles, which enables grant partners to adapt and respond to their context, such as staff turnover, time for recruitment processes

**“They understand that things aren’t going to go the way you outlined in an application form two years ago.” - Grant Partner**

Grant partners felt like they had space at the beginning of the funding for initiation and fine-tuning. For example, for one partnership, there was a lot of travelling at the start for the partners to get to know each other, to build, and consolidate relationships, and settle on division of labour. This is the invisible work that takes time and money, and the JTI grant allowed for that.

The critiques often reflected wider frustrations directed toward funders in the nonprofit sector. For example, the design of JTI still seems to function according to the idea of quantity over quality in terms of the number of grants and partners versus fewer grants and larger budgets. This came through in the many comments around budget revisions, which often don’t reflect what’s needed to operate well. Many interviewees shared their experience of having budgets revised down, presumably, to be able to reach more grant partners.

**“Funders are trying to make the funds stretch too far. This isn’t strategic or sustainable.” - Grant Partner**

Another grant partner said that the budget revision process raised the age-old dilemma: *“Do applicants put what they actually need to do the work and risk the application being rejected? Or do they just write what they think they can realistically get and keep struggling to fill the gap?”*

Even with JTI’s approachable and flexible style of grant-making and grant-management, this power dynamic is still at play. It is a significant but often invisible problem because organisations self-censor their actual needs and take on the extra burdens to fall in line with funders’ internal assessments of what is necessary. Many organisations are perpetually operating on less than they need or on the edge of what they need to do their work. This promotes internal decision-making based on scarcity and precarity. In particular, grant partner interviewees raised low salary levels as a hindrance both for the mental well-being of staff and for the recruitment and retention of staff.

**“Salaries between the legal aid and the private law sector are so imbalanced that we’re at the point where lawyers can’t afford to do the work” - Grant Partner**

**“Salary levels need to increase. In real terms, salaries are going down. So people end up moving around from organisation to organisation, going wherever they’ve got a new and bigger grant.” - Grant Partner**

Continuing to fund at levels that sustain precarity and scarcity has ethical implications, for example, by maintaining low salary levels in an already under-resourced job sector. Coupled with a contemporary cost-of-living crisis and ongoing state austerity policies, this can end up relegating those who choose to work in the sector to financial or job insecurity.

The duration of the JTI funding was also raised by interviewees. Here, there was mixed feedback as many interviewees appreciated JTI’s three-year funding commitment, while at the same time, noting that this is not enough to provide the stability needed. One interviewee observed that cases can take 6-7 years to resolve.

## Specificities and Exceptions

There was particular praise for the support provided to a newly-established organisation, and the importance of JTI being able to function as an incubator, to provide advice on the funding landscape and act as a referee.

Likewise, the ability to fund pilots from a JTI grant was appreciated. The risk of piloting and launching new areas of work is usually too high to be borne by organisations with precarious funding, so the JTI grant can create space to experiment as well as sustain.

## What it Means / Lessons

- Organisational challenges and the wider political context were linked in the minds of grant partners. JTI's flexibility and approachability isn't just being interpreted as 'niceness' or 'kindness', it's being understood as a considered act, aimed at mitigating the stress and unnecessary burdens that people in the sector are currently experiencing.
- The grant can be - and has been - used to build new capacity, which has a sector wide impact. It contributes to helping organisations to be resilient from the ground up.
- At the same time, the JTI grants do not interrupt the long-standing scarcity and precarity of grant-making and the burden on organisations to make the puzzle pieces of multiple grants and durations fit together in order to keep everything running.
- Longer project durations for stable funding is still more desirable because it would release one of the biggest pressures facing the sector, and give organisations the space to experiment - rather than survive on - short-term project funds.

### Reflection Questions

- ◊ What approaches are funders such as JTI using to ensure that the design of their funding and approach to grant management aligns with their long-term goals and stated values?
- ◊ For funding aimed at building capacity, what approaches are funders pursuing to also sustain capacity? I.e. to promote and provide ongoing financial stability for organisations?
- ◊ Picking up on contemporary debates in the nonprofit sector around funding and philanthropy, what (implicit) assumptions about trustworthiness, competency, and power are still embedded in everyday funding and grant management decisions and practices?



## II. LIVED EXPERIENCE (LEX)

### JTI (Original) Aims & Ambitions

Having LEX as an explicit element for grant partners to respond to will a) stimulate organisations to engage more staff or stakeholders with LEX of the immigration system in their work, b) recognise and reward organisations who are already prioritising people with LEX of the immigration system

## Learning, Critique & Appreciation

One organisation gave a good example of how they used the JTI grant to decentralise their campaigning and support autonomous groups in ways that directly supported the agency of campaigners with LEX of the UK immigration system. It had a positive impact in terms of shifting power and in terms of safeguarding because campaigners were determining the direction and framing of campaigns themselves and had more control over saying 'no' to 'sharing their story' or personal lives as part of influencing work.

**“Lived experience comes with empathy and extra motivation to do this work.” - Grant Partner**

In many cases, interviewees from community-based organisations were already attentive and committed to increasing the participation and presence of people with LEX of the UK immigration system in the support sector. However, while grant partners from the legal sector also saw a need for a shift toward having more people with LEX working in the sector, they also saw additional hurdles to hiring and facilitating a good work environment in the legal sector, such as qualifications criteria, more rigidly-defined roles and career trajectories, as well as knowledge of professional conventions.

The overwhelming impression from the interviews with the sample of grant partners is that most organisations already understand - and have taken steps to improve - participation of people who have been through the UK immigration system in the immigration support sector. However, the interviewees also highlighted a number of concerns.

For example, that LEX is spoken about as an expertise in itself, without acknowledging the other skills, knowledges, or qualities that people are bringing. This feels tokenistic because it erases other aspects of their lives.

More than one interviewee noted how LEX can end up being used interchangeably to describe anti-racism efforts. They said: *“if you want more Black people in the sector, say that rather than talking about lived experience”*. While it's clear that those most negatively affected - and targeted - within the UK immigration system have always been those who are downwardly racialised, the end goal for LEX initiatives and the end goal of anti-racism are not the same. The task of undoing racialisation (as an illegitimate way of organising people) and fighting against discrimination, exclusion, persecution, and harm rooted in racism encompasses a much broader range of work.

Two grant partners, separately, voiced concerns that LEX initiatives do not automatically transform power relations. For example, initiatives where people with lived experience of the UK immigration system are primarily a source of consultation rather than actors in practical implementation. This could still be seen as problematic because it doesn't address the heart of the issue: that those who live the effects of policies and structures are often furthest from decision-making power over those policies and structures.

Though not specifically addressing JTI, other feedback noted that funder requests on LEX can sometimes feel like a tick-box exercise. There's a concern that without guidance or clear evaluation criteria, there's no way to know whether it's being done meaningfully, and it's difficult for grant partners to see the outcomes.

JTI funds a bespoke wellbeing package for racialised people working within the immigration sector: the Black Wellbeing Collective and is currently exploring trauma-informed wellbeing sessions for those with LEX of the UK immigration system. However the initiative does not, at present, provide funding for ongoing pastoral care or clinical supervision as a core part of organisations' day-to-day operations.

While funders such as JTI are promoting more action to include people with LEX of UK immigration in the support sector, this request often overlooks the implications. For example, recognising that more staff in the sector will have experience of overcoming long-term insecurity caused by Home Office (HO) decision-making, more staff will have experienced - and will be experiencing - trauma, and more staff who are part of communities who continue to experience trauma. The interviewees who talked about trauma felt that funders in general aren't sufficiently thoughtful about impacts of trauma in the workplace and risks of re-traumatisation in this sector specifically. More than one interviewee noted that line managers often don't have the appropriate skills to counsel staff with LEX in the workplace. One interviewee described having to fund pastoral care through their reserves, because not many funders fund pastoral supervision, and when they do, it's often one-off. *"You rarely see a funding call for this aspect of the work"* - Grant Partner.

## Specificities & Exceptions

A subset of organisations in the immigration sector are supporting specific demographic or affinity groups. This involves supporting people who've been made especially vulnerable by intersecting oppressions.

On one hand, people who've experienced intersectional oppressions *and* been through the immigration system will have unique insights into unexamined harms and usability of the immigration - and support - system. On the other hand, those organisations have a responsibility to develop tailored safe-guarding, recruitment, management, professional development resources.

There are additional considerations that come from supporting people within an affinity group. Intersectional oppression creates niche needs and most general immigration support services are not set up to respond to those needs.

At the same time, affinity-group services who are not connected to the immigration sector won't have the expertise to address a person's immigration-related needs. This makes referrals extra challenging and puts pressure on staff within support services to find creative solutions.



## What It Means / Lessons

- People with LEX of the UK immigration system bring a perspective and understanding that people who've been brought up in the same country their whole lives just wouldn't know.
- The push to involve people with LEX has been around a long time. The concept isn't new. But by including it in the funding call, JTI does sustain momentum and incentives for organisations to look for ways to improve inclusion and support for colleagues and other stakeholders with LEX of the UK immigration system.
- Funders and organisations need to look more practically at barriers and needs, such as the reality that being through the UK immigration system recently may mean that you've not been able to work, study. This requires conscious design of organisational processes, environments, line management, recruitment etc. and the associated budget implications.
- Supporting people who face intersecting oppressions through an immigration process comes with additional and sometimes high-specific support needs that are not well-catered for either in the immigration support sector, nor in affinity- and demographic group services who don't have expertise in the UK immigration process.
- More comprehensive support for staff in the immigration support sector who themselves have LEX of the immigration system needs both dedicated initiatives for people with LEX *and* better mainstreaming of funding to enable organisations to budget for and sustain internal support for colleagues with LEX.

### Reflection Questions

- ◊ Do people who have been through the UK immigration system have accessible pathways into the organisation?
- ◊ How well do employers / colleagues / funders / peers understand the practical, emotional, and financial resources required to create a positive and healthy work environment for colleagues with LEX of immigration?
- ◊ How is trauma-informed HR being supported? What is known about the stressors, potential trauma, and additional 'accountabilities to community' for staff who've experienced the UK immigration system?
- ◊ (How) do funders make a distinction between success as 'the ratio of staff who have LEX in the organisation' and success as 'the degree of critical learning and organisational change resulting from the influence of staff who have LEX'?



### III. ANTI-RACISM

#### JTI (Original) Aims & Ambitions

Having anti-racism as an explicit element for grant partners to respond to will a) stimulate organisations to think about and make changes to take more anti-racist approaches in their work, b) recognise and reward organisations who are already prioritising anti-racism, and c) try to have a positive influence by challenging racism and racist practices within the immigration sector.

#### Learning, Critique & Appreciation

An organisation that received JTI funding for a dedicated consultant saw the value in being able to put anti-racism work into action. However this type of provision is the exception rather than the rule in JTI's grant-making.

Multiple interviewees spoke about the symbolic impact of JTI prioritising anti-racism and lived experience in their grant. It functioned as a "useful push". And, because of the power dynamic that exists and funders' influence, even naming anti-racism as a priority contributes to a climate of accountability. The more public and vocal funders are around anti-racism, including voicing critical feedback on funding practices, the more momentum is built and sustained.

However, more than one interviewee described the challenge of maintaining momentum on anti-racism and lived experience work during periods of sustained crises. Both anti-racism and work on inclusion and agency of people with LEX require critical reflection, interruption of conventions, and redesigning ways of thinking and working. Therefore, it's perhaps unsurprising that during periods of crisis, organisations fall back into default mode when time, head space, and energy to break conventions will be at their lowest. Rather than prompting defeat, this could be an invitation to consider what formats of support could be more appropriate to sustain momentum; perhaps ones that don't rely on dedicated moments of intervention, but rather sustained support and accompaniment.

From the interviews, there does seem to be an overall sense of organisations trying to do 'something'. Most responses focused on anti-racism as an internal, organisational action point or a named strategic goal. The review did not yield analysis of what racism and racialisation look like in the sector as a whole. Very few interviewees commented on the role that racism and racialisation plays in the assumptions that underlie differentiated UK immigration policies, policy discourse, and implementation. Within the confines of this review, it appears that there are two main framings of racism among grant partners:

- ◊ Racism as discrimination against people who are downwardly racialised, and therefore something to be addressed by examining incidents of discrimination and inequity against specific groups.

- ◊ Racism as a problem resulting from a lack of diversity and inclusion of racialised people in the sector, and therefore something to be addressed through increased diversity and promoting inclusion.

Only one interviewee referred to the role that racism plays in immigration legislation, decision-making and public discourse. That same interviewee touched on the issue of racial literacy, commenting that the drive to ‘deliver’ on anti-racism can be counterproductive when it pushes organisations to skip over their own learning and analysis. They felt that this was especially true for mainstream organisations. Related to this, they noted a trend of mainstream organisations wanting to ‘re-use’ anti-racism guidelines and templates developed by people of colour rather than building and developing their own anti-racist practices and contributions rooted in their specific positionality and context. This prompts the question of how funders like JTI who wish to promote more anti-racism engagement can strengthen guidance on process, design, and evaluation of anti-racism work in the sector.

Questions on the anti-racism aspect of the JTI funding noticeably provoked the most hesitancy, whether in terms of silences, an absence of analysis, or because an organisation has adopted a position of ‘pragmatic’ non-engagement in order to protect advocacy networks (not focusing on racism in external work or with external stakeholders).

### Specificities & Exceptions

**“Racism and extremism in migration policy has a huge effect on clients, staff within organisations and people with LEX of the immigration system who work in the sector” - Grant Partner**

In the interviews, there was no obvious correlation between interviewees who were negatively-racialised and the amount of feedback given on efforts to promote anti-racism. The most detailed feedback on anti-racism efforts and the approach of the JTI grant came from an organisation that was not only led by people of colour, but also had a history and practice of analysing racism and racial dynamics. Their own existing analysis of racism meant that they were in an easier position to offer a critique of how anti-racism is being promoted by funders in the sector.

### What It Means / Lessons

- Grant partners understand the positionality and power that funders have. When JTI as a funder prioritises a principle - and backs up that principle with money - it has a wider impact. In other words, funders have the power to ‘mainstream’ and JTI is choosing to use it to promote action on anti-racism
- There was less detailed analysis of racial dynamics and racialisation in the immigration sector beyond the internal and organisational (*i.e. little analysis of the ways that immigration policy and practices within the immigration support sector interact with racism and affect people's lives*). This could imply that grant partners

require more active support to strengthen racial analysis and build capacity to define their own, specific contribution to anti-racism in the sector.

- Even while many racial dynamics in the immigration system and immigration support sector are not easily shifted by grant partners, the power to publicly analyse and name racist and racialising practices in the immigration sector was not raised as a possible means of engaging in anti-racism. Here, there is potential for greater integration of anti-racism in influencing work, but this would likely also require guidance or support.
- Overall, compared with the detail and complexity of analysis shared on other aspects of the review, anti-racism seems to be the least developed aspect of the JTI funding support at this moment in time.

### Reflection Questions

- ◊ Are funders / organisations clear about their own framing and level of knowledge around racism and anti-racism, and its implications?
- ◊ Do funders / organisations make a distinction between diversity, equity and inclusion and anti-racism (which implies a commitment to critical analysis and interruption of embedded racialised logics and hierarchies)?
- ◊ How can funders support organisations in the sector who wish to expand their racial literacy? I.e. avoid the pitfalls of 'anti-racism without racism' where the context and impact of racism are less prominent than the 'solutions'
- ◊ To what extent are funders / organisations using their authority or legitimacy to name, describe, speak about racism or the racialising practices they see in their work context? And where are there examples of positive interventions?



## IV. PEER LEARNING

### JTI (Original) Aims & Ambitions

Having learning space (the Col) alongside the grant will build relationships across grant partners doing - different types of - work across the country. This peer learning will add value to their work and improve funder operations.

### Learning, Critique & Appreciation

The aim of peer learning seemed to enjoy widespread support. There was also feedback from the interviews that grant partners didn't feel pressured by the funder-beneficiary dynamic to attend JTI's Col sessions. This is positive as it is a practical signal that the JTI team's efforts to be approachable and flexible are understood.

Different learning needs were spontaneously expressed by interviewees throughout the interviews. As well as specific feedback on JTI's Community of Impact, interviewees' references to learning variously covered at least three different elements: 1. Peer Support & Networking, 2. Mentoring and Supervision for Lawyers and Advisors, and 3. Learning Exchanges.

Many interviewees expressed appreciation for peer support and networking opportunities where they could talk with others who were doing the same job, especially under similar circumstances. Multiple interviewees were working in smaller organisations where one person is working alone on an aspect of the support, and so they wanted the chance to bounce ideas off another person, or to 'let off steam' with people who would recognise and understand their challenges.

**"I can't do that with colleagues as I'm the only immigration advice person." - Grant Partner**

**"Being the only free Level X advice in the region also meant that we had no one to bounce ideas off of, no support network." - Grant Partner**

Mentoring and Supervision for Lawyers and Advisors was also raised repeatedly, especially by those whose work was focused on advice and representation. The emphasis on capacity-building within the JTI grant makes this a particularly relevant piece of feedback. Mentoring and Supervision was highlighted as a scarce but essential operational resource, not only for those entering the sector, and newly-qualified advisors and caseworkers, but for all colleagues because of the increasing complexity of client needs and cases. One peer organisation in the sector offers mentoring, but with one person mentoring hundreds of national advisors at the same time, it's clear that this provision is insufficient. One grant partner used part of their grant to hire a freelance solicitor as a OISC Level Three mentor which they have found invaluable for navigating complex cases. They commented that the ability to pick up the phone to get advice *"helped their sanity"*.

**"When you're one person, you run options through your head, and you keep reading the guidance and legislation over and over, but you still have doubts about the path you're choosing for someone." - Grant Partner**

It seems that many funder learning initiatives, such as JTI's Community of Impact, fall into the category of learning exchanges. In the interviews it was clear that despite enthusiasm for the concept of learning, it was a significant challenge for grant partners to find time to participate in exchanges. A number of grant partners commented on the value of hearing what other organisations are working on, but the primary message across multiple interviews was a call for greater coherence and less duplication among funders' learning initiatives. One interviewee commented that they saw the same group of people at a Col event as they did in other collaboration spaces, which suggests overlap between the Col and existing initiatives.

“It’s extremely good to see funders pooling resources on grants. But there are still too many separate initiatives for learning and development.” - Grant Partner

“All the grants we have, have an element of learning. Or they’ve employed evaluators. So engaging in those conversations is a standard feature of grants these days. But when you have fifteen grants, it can become too much. Nearly all have their meetings and their reporting on learning. It’d be good for this to be joined up.” - Grant Partner

On the JTI Community of Impact (Col), there was a lot of positive feedback on the networking aspects of the meetings, notably the in-person conference last summer. The format and facilitation of learning spaces play a huge role in how useful the Col can be for grant partners, which came across in the feedback of one interviewee, who felt that JTI could put more emphasis on facilitation and agenda design for online Col spaces. While another grant partner appreciated the Col online spaces as another networking opportunity to connect with funders and peers in the chat box. The networking aspect of the Col spaces was positively reviewed by many of the interviewees. Feedback on the learning aspect (or content) of the sessions was more mixed. One interviewee noted that the breadth of people working in the sector, ranging from very structured solicitors’ work to community advice centres makes it difficult to design learning spaces.

“It makes it a challenge to find things for people to coalesce around. Not all organisations need the same type of learning, in the same ways.” - Grant Partner

Another message in the interview feedback was on translation or application of learning. One interviewee said that they found it difficult to see the applicability of the sessions to their work, and that it could be difficult to justify taking time out of advice or representation to participate in exchanges and sharing experiences. This was often linked to a call for more clarity on the objectives for Col events, which would enable organisations to make informed decisions about scheduling.

“Maybe we could agree on four sessions a year - and have clarity on what it is designed for [...] There’s definite value in being with other organisations with the same goal to share experiences. But we need to know where it’s going, what it’s leading to.” - Grant Partner

### Specificities / Exceptions

Learning needs were often quite different when comparing feedback from long-established organisations versus newer organisations, organisations working with a specific subset of clients versus those with a broader mandate, community-based organisations and those in law centres. One grant partner working as a lawyer felt that the content of a JTI Col learning event had been too general to be useful for their work, even while the topic was important. On the other hand, another grant partner commented on the relevance of the Col events, saying: “*They did an event on ‘access to affordable legal*

*advice' recently, which our Executive Director appreciated. They have put on some genuinely useful events. We don't feel like we're going just for the sake of it."*

- ◊ In general, it seemed that smaller organisations, organisations with a limited mandate, or newly-established organisations were less likely to have broad and diverse networks across the UK immigration support sector, and so there was a greater need for external support for peer learning and networking. This is where JTI's learning exchanges have been particularly valued.
- ◊ Interviewees speaking from the perspective of longer-established, larger organisations, multi-mandate organisations were more likely to reference having their own established networks or sources of expertise that they could access. In this case, those organic networks were seen as more valuable than general exchanges or networking.

## What it Means / Lessons

- The type of learning promoted by funder initiatives doesn't always match the type of learning valued by grantee organisations.
  - ◊ There was a clear need for more everyday peer support and mentoring & supervision alongside the types of learning exchanges convened by funders, such as JTI's Community of Impact.
- In a context where organisations are dependent on multiple grants, attaching learning initiatives to grants can create a significant participation burden in an already-stretched support sector. It would be a welcome step for learning to be pooled or stream-lined among funders.
- It's difficult for grant partners to prioritise time for learning spaces, especially when there isn't time allocated for participating in learning initiatives in the budget (staff cover), specifically learning time factored into staffing or operating budgets.
- The questions and challenges that people seem to connect across the sector are more likely to be service-related, operational or highly-specific topics more than strategic.
- Trying to design spaces for everyone, all together can backfire may not be the most generative approach because what organisations need from learning initiatives seems to vary significantly. Learning initiatives could be more decentralised.

## Reflection Questions

- ◊ What learning needs does each grant partner have and how can funding better align with those specific needs?
- ◊ What different constellations could make learning spaces more relevant and applicable to staff within support organisations? *e.g. Learning initiatives for those working on OISC Two or Three? For frontline advisors? For advocates? For legal*

*professionals? For people of colour? For staff or leadership with LEX of the immigration system?*

- ◊ Is it necessary for funders to establish their own dedicated learning initiatives? How do funders incorporate or support existing fora, affinity groups, professional training and sector networking spaces into their own learning initiatives?
- ◊ What are the current practices on budgeting for participation in funder-led learning initiatives? Specifically, paying for staff time by including learning time as an item in staffing budgets
- ◊ What else could learning look like? E.g. making 'learning funds' available to self-organised grantee collaborations or cross-regional coalitions to pursue their own learning objectives?

◆ End of Part A ◆



## Part B

### What is being learned about the immigration support sector?

#### I. THE IMPACT OF PERPETUAL CRISIS

*“Funders have no idea how our world changes so quickly. Leak in the papers on Sunday and new policy change on Monday.” - Grant Partner*

The UK government has repeatedly created new crises that require resource-intensive responses from the immigration support sector. However, one interviewee did note that JTI's approach was more in line with the necessary flexibility to operate, saying: *“JTI's overall approach has been flexible and broad, which fits well with how unpredictable the sector and the political environment is.”*

For example, grant partners (particularly those working in the legal sector) highlighted both the unprecedented concentration of new legislation being introduced relating to immigration in the past years *and* the fact that most of this new legislation is not operational.

*“What happened with the Nationality and Borders Act and Illegal Migration Act both knocked the sector sideways.” - Grant Partner*

Multiple interviewees noted that the list of what can't be done is increasing, while the pressure and consequences of failure for their clients remains high. Deciding what aspects of the work to drop in order to stay afloat has become standard. For example, one interviewee said they'd moved away from the middle and spent more time at the extremes, either doing very basic legal education or highly complex casework, or doing targeted bits of one-off advice. This was their way to try to manage the impossibility of meeting ever-growing representation needs by focusing on advice and representation they could best provide with the resources and skills at their disposal. The same interviewee noted that it's creating chaos where everyone is trying to do everything rather than having the space to play to their strengths.

As well as turbulence for the advice and representation work, the manufactured crisis absorbs the sector's advocacy and campaigning capacity. For example, advocacy (re)directed towards specific government policies (versus wider self-defined campaign goals) involves a huge amount of collaborative staff time and energy to design and implement. Following government policy developments means that advocates are trying to influence a constantly moving target.

*“In the influencing part of the work, we can promise to work on something, but then these pieces of legislation come as a surprise and we need to adapt to the environment. Maybe it wasn't in the application, but it's what we need to do.” - Grant Partner*

“We worked on the Illegal Migration Act for six months and, in the end, it felt like it was wasted. So much work went into it. How can funders support organisations when it's not good news?” - Grant Partner

### *Destructive ambiguity*

Proposing and passing legislation is not without impact. There is the time spent advocating against proposed legislation, the time spent trying to mitigate proposed legislation, the time spent analysing the legislation once it is passed to determine its impact on individual cases and situations and finally, the time spent planning responses and strategy. This represents a significant amount of resources in a sector that is already overwhelmed and under-resourced.

One grant partner noted that it would, in some ways, be easier to counter the legislation if it were operational because they'd be able to strategise and coordinate litigation to challenge it. The state of ambiguity actually contributes to the crisis.

“The amount of new legislation is the current pressure. We're having conversations internally about how to manage existing cases - we have to figure out the different implications depending on when people arrived, their situation and profile, what laws were in place at that time and how to apply them. We don't even know how much of the new laws will be rolled out but we have to plan for it. It's exhausting and demoralising. We feel more under attack than previously.” - Grant Partner

As well as from immigration support organisations, the effect of constant change makes it less likely that public knowledge about changing immigration obligations or requirements is up-to-date. Changes are also affecting people who would otherwise be eligible. Legislation can now affect people who've been in the UK from childhood, who might have had parents who didn't understand the bureaucratic processes. Or, people having to suddenly prove their entitlement to citizenship, even though they've been in the system.

It's a new client group that organisations are having to reach. And in areas of the country with advice 'deserts', affected people have fewer sources of information and advice that could help to understand what the rules are and how they might apply to them. Public information can rely on people 'hearing it on the news' and many people can easily fall through the gaps. This has a knock-on effect of increasing the ratio of complex cases as delays in reaching out for immigration support may also complicate someone's immigration case. Missed deadlines, new requirements for documentation that was never recorded or kept, inadvertent violations of conditions that someone wasn't aware of, new restrictions on access to basic services; all of these can add to the complexity of a case, and multiply the support needs of a client.

## What it Means / Lessons

- The intensity and ambition of legislation targeting immigration and the immigration support sector is not necessarily reflected in the objectives of grants, the design of grant-making resources, and the approach to grant management. *I.e. The challenges undermining immigration support work do not seem to be fully understood as 'a feature rather than a bug' of UK government immigration policy.*
- The sense of perpetual crisis may be affecting the strategy and coherence of the sector, with organisations feeling pressure to respond to the twists and turns of immigration policy, events and developments. This pressure appears to be a mix of self-imposed pressure from committed staff, expectations from service-users, and funders (to some extent). More compassionate grant-making, acknowledgement, and more appropriate funding conditions could help to alleviate some degree of pressure.
- The increased demand for immigration support services does not match the available capacity, and so organisations are having to make choices about where to restrict their advice and representation resources. As organisations with an overview of the sector, funders and funder collaborations such as JTI could be a useful guide or analyst to support organisations in playing to their strengths and contributing to a wider division of labour for the sector
- The contemporary context means that organisations cannot deliver at the same level with the same funding as in previous years. Fire-fighting crises, cyclical burnout, diminishing senior staff, short-term funding, and the increased complexity of work slow everything down, demanding more time to achieve minimal implementation. This could be better reflected in goals and objectives of grants and in grant management relations.
- As well as the impact on advice and representation, the constant need to advocate in opposition to government proposals is especially strong in this period of heightened policymaking around immigration. This may imply alternative definitions of success, more strategic choices around policy advocacy, and more support and collaboration around wider, self-determined campaigns in order to make the best use of scarce influencing resources.

### Reflection Questions

- ◊ What is the ratio of resources in the sector being spent on reacting to developments and crises versus giving people space to look at long-term collective strategy and wider political analysis?
- ◊ What does a realistic budget now look like, taking into account what it costs to operate under crisis and scarcity conditions?
- ◊ What forms of influencing work and support are necessary to address the root cause of perpetual crises, which are political rather than technical? *I.e. Going beyond traditional lobbying and advocacy targets of politicians, political bodies and civil servants*

- ◊ (How) does the way of defining and measuring 'success' need to shift to fit the context of significant political opposition to the sector and the intensity of policy efforts to undermine immigration system and immigration support? *E.g. To what extent are funders supporting organisations to 'hold-the-line' in the face of opposition as well as to try to effect positive changes?*



## II. PEOPLE POWER

### *Recruitment and retention*

*"We were able to fund the new X Director role, but then the person left. Since then, we've worked with a recruitment agency and headhunter but we haven't been able to fill it." - Grant Partner*

The challenge of recruitment was a thread running through almost every interview. But even beyond recruitment, the human resources involved in onboarding and supporting new staff do not fit neatly into a lot of short-term project funding. A number of interviewees spoke about the long timelines for training: *"It takes a year of time investment into onboarding, but because people can't get a mortgage on a three year contract, they look to move onto something more stable."* Grants also play a role here as one grant partner noted how staff can end up following funders' money to new organisations.

In addition, the pathways into the sector have changed. Staff may start out as clients or volunteers. For organisations, this represents a long-term commitment to someone's professional development. However, because funding provisions don't travel alongside a person's career trajectory, it is particularly risky for small organisations to invest in the professional development of new people entering the sector. And at the same time, they face the equally real risk of a staffing gap if they don't. For immigration lawyers or newly-qualified lawyers, the financial and job security offered in private and commercial roles is almost absent in the immigration support sector, making it hard to recruit and retain lawyers.

*"The idea of going into the legal aid sector is almost lost. So the route into immigration advice is more likely to be people who've been through the system or people who are politically-committed and not necessarily people who went to university. We just look for people who have the motivation and ability to learn." - Grant Partner*

### *Stressed and stretched*

*"The cost of living crisis. Reduction of funding. Individual burn-out. Organisational burn-out. The overwhelm. The noise. It's really hard to work through. We are having to say 'no' more and more. The need is so high, but the risk is also high." - Grant Partner*

**“We have to acknowledge the context and how bad it is. We see the impact on clients, and we see the interlinked crises, such as cost-of-living crisis, immigration policy and homelessness.” - Grant Partner**

The impact of staff and wellbeing is significant. Ultimately, funding work in the immigration support sector is funding the people who do - and are willing to do - work that faces constant political, legislative, media, and operational obstacles and opposition. One interviewee spoke about the many depressing conversations with clients who can't believe this can be happening, and how demotivating these conversations are for advisors. It adds to staff pressure and the risk of burn-out.

Support services are not only providing practical support, they are also taking on emotional support roles. This is particularly clear for support services working with specific affinity groups and organisations that are based in their own community whose clients are often also their peers. Being part of a community, especially ones dealing with multiple sources of oppression at once, comes with an additional sense of pressure, responsibility and commitments that goes beyond the professional. So when staff are approached by service users and have to refer them to others or search for solutions to avoid having to turn someone away, this takes a particular toll on their mental health and wellbeing.

**“There's no acknowledgement of the toll of saying no. It's even harder for small organisations that are based in communities. There's a lot of expectation management.” - Grant Partner**

### ***The capacity-building conundrum***

One grant partner described the conundrum for capacity-building, saying: *“Even though experienced case workers and senior staff are the ones best positioned to handle complex cases, they also have to supervise other peers or new trainees (at level 1 or 2), so they cannot take on the complex cases.”*

There is a particular problem recruiting experienced or senior staff. Multiple grant partners spoke about difficulties in filling senior posts, accessing expert advice on complex cases, mentoring for those entering the sector, and providing supervision for newly-qualified advisors and caseworkers. There were also many examples of higher-than-expected demands on senior staff on onboarding and line managing people in new roles.

**“It needs more management than you could ever believe possible. I can get a post filled, but I cannot get funding to manage that post, so people who are new in post don't get day-to-day supervision that would help them. I wish funders would understand that. But instead we have a totally exhausted senior leadership team, with no succession planning.” - Grant Partner**

A similar message came through in another interview: *“Very few new people are coming into the sector. People in it have been there a long time and have been under constant pressure. I don't know how we sustain that and avoid losing all that knowledge.”*

### Spotlight

*“There's so much Level One work that needs doing. And despite the definition, it's still complex. In reality, it's not just initial advice. But it's really difficult to get funding for Level 1 work, so a lot is falling through the cracks.” - Grant Partner*

### Spotlight

The legal arm of the immigration support sector comes with its own unique challenges. One grant partner described how their law centre often ended up with the cases that everyone else thinks are unwinnable, meaning their cases are rarely straightforward. On top of that, as a law practice, they have legal responsibilities to continue a case, regardless of whether they have the resources to do it or not.

Another grant partner working in the legal arm of the sector highlighted the severe lack of legal representation:

*“Funding is money but it's not time. Even with a million, there simply aren't enough experienced lawyers in the sector to do the volume of necessary work”*

## What it Means / Lessons

- People are the single most important resource, yet interviewees shared a picture of staff working in the immigration support sector who are working in a perpetual crisis context, with survival-mode resources, on emotionally-charged cases and issues, without enough new people entering the sector, without enough senior and expert-level support for the new people that do, with low prospects for financial and job security while navigating the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing political opposition to their profession.
- A people-focused context analysis is essential to be able to design funding and grant-management that seeks to alleviate each of the burdens and obstacles noted by people working in the sector. In some ways, this trumps the resources needed to technically implement projects, as that also relies on staff being able to function in a healthy and sustainable work environment.
- Funding the back-bone of organisations - instead of specific projects or initiatives - is urgent for the sustainability of the sector. *“It's difficult for an organisation to self-fund their back bone from short-term, piecemeal grants.” - Grant Partner*
- The invisible demands on time (recruitment, coordination, administration, participating in learning and networking, time-off for well-being) are often not factored into HR budgets, nor into the timelines and grant management flexibility.

- Knowing that recruitment and retention is particularly challenging for the sector, this needs to be better reflected in grant-management and grant timeline flexibility. When someone resigns, or a new post needs to be filled, time is needed for the recruitment process. Building new capacities and supporting new people into the sector requires a lot of coordination and resources to do safe-guarding well.

### Reflection Questions

- ◊ Shortages of people mean that recruiting for roles, even when these are funded, is still a challenge. How can grants be designed to better address the critical shortage of new people coming into the sector? *I.e. Including horizontal career shifts as well as newly-qualified people*
- ◊ Are the grant durations and timelines flexible enough to incorporate time for recruitment and onboarding?
- ◊ Given the shortage of senior- and expert-level staff, does the current design of capacity-building grants sufficiently address succession planning and professional development? And reflect the real investment of staff time needed for supervision?
- ◊ How can funders better support career progression and development once people have come into the sector? *I.e. through both sustained individual mentoring resources and through professional development resources.*
- ◊ How can funders (collaborate to) ensure that staff have sustainable budgets for pastoral care, trauma-informed care, clinical supervision, wellbeing, and burn-out recovery? *I.e. to make these resources a more integral resource for people working in the sector*

◆ End of Part B ◆

## Concluding Thoughts

Proactive support and solidarity from JTI is proving to be a grant management success. There are threads to be picked up in the efforts to promote agency for people who've experienced the UK immigration system and anti-racism that can contribute to sustainability and sharpen political strategy. Given the fragility in the sector, the overriding design approach to funding, grant management and learning initiatives has to be an emphasis on facilitation over demands for implementation. And on this note, JTI appears to be working well and representing the possibilities of 'care' as a tangible political practice.

JTI grants seem to have different support effects depending on how well-established grant partners are. For established community organisations it has helped to maintain and plan long-term capacity. For smaller and newer organisations, it has enabled growth and development, increasing capacity to do systematically what they used to do ad hoc. While for grant partners in the legal sector whose work flows and processes are more likely to be

well-established, it can be the chance to experiment with new ideas or initiatives. Each of these has its own grant management needs and learning potential.

But, what has been most striking from the learning review is the domino effect of every small weakness in the immigration sector as described by grant partners. In some ways, starting with the absence of resilience and the increasing presence of organisational vulnerability in the immigration support sector. It appears that most grant partners are having to put their focus and energy into harm reduction and survival, i.e. immediate service provision and problem-solving. During the interviews, definitions of success were essentially *anything* that was more positive than expected, such as a sign of fairness in the Home Office decision-making or a successful referral leading to someone being able to assert their rights. Given the circumstances, the analysis, suggestions, and requests on improved funding design and grant management coming from grant partners seem like the floor and not the ceiling of what is reasonable.

JTI grants are enabling organisations to do what is necessary and to try to grow service delivery to meet the growing needs around immigration policy. But, what they don't currently address is the root cause of those growing needs; they don't address longer-term strategy or coalition-making necessary to challenge the erosion of the UK immigration sector.

## Final Reflections

As scarcity and precarity take a toll, what's clear from this year's learning review is that JTI buys organisations a moment to breathe, but not to necessarily strategise.

- ◊ Looking at the trajectory of the wider political context (*beyond UK party politics*) and the contemporary fragilities in immigration support sector, what would a generational investment in people look like for this sector? And is this thinking already reflected in the funding strategy?
- ◊ Given that immigration support faces significant contextual challenges on top of operational challenges, to what extent is funding acknowledging the well-organised and -resourced opposition to a functioning UK immigration system and immigration support services? *I.e. Beyond resourcing capacity-building and policy reform*

This leads to the final - and perhaps most urgent - question:

- ◊ If this crisis is here to stay, what kinds of capacities, resources, collaborations and legacy-planning around immigration support **cannot easily be defunded, dismantled or undone** by government legislation or policy? *I.e. connections, learning, coalitional politics, skills-development, professional development*

◆ End of Learning Review ◆



## ANNEX: FOCUS OF LEARNING REVIEW

### A) What is being learned about how to support organisations and coalitions doing advice, representation, influencing, solidarity, connectivity etc. on immigration?

- **Aspects of the design of the Initiative that help / hinder** grantees in their work. *I.e. duration, criteria, focus areas, theory of change, conditions etc.*
- How **JTI's implementation / approach to grant-making** helps / hinders, or adds / reduces the burden on grantees
- How / whether the mode of JTI support is helping grantees to **mitigate harm / reduce negative impacts of the system as it is.**
- How / whether the mode of JTI support is helping grantees to **generate sustainable knowledge, capacities (resilience).**
- How / whether the mode of JTI support is helping grantees to **form connections and solidarity networks (resilience)**
- How / whether JTI's promotion of (more intentional integration of) lived experience is **influencing the analysis, positions or approaches within grantee partner organisations** or within the sector.
- How / whether JTI's promotion of anti-racism is **influencing the grantee's internal functioning or approach to implementation.** *And under what conditions.*
- How / whether JTI support is **enabling grantees to work towards political, systemic change in the Uk immigration system.**



### B) What is being learned about the immigration support sector?

- How grantee partners **are reacting and adapting organisationally to contemporary pressures** in the immigration system. *I.e. starting / stopping / doing more of / doing less of*
- How grantee partners (themselves) **explain what helps and hinders their work**
- How grantee partners (themselves) **define success or effectiveness**
- How - and in what settings - grantee partners (themselves) **communicate what is needed to do their jobs well**
- What values or principles grantee partners (themselves) **emphasise in their work.**

