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# The Role of Talent Intermediaries in Accessing and Developing Refugee Talent Pools

*Purpose:* The purpose of this paper is to understand the role talent intermediaries can play in supporting the access and development of talent from forcibly displaced backgrounds.

*Design/methodology/approach:* The authors draw on a single case study design of UK charitable organisation, the Council for At-Risk Academics, to consider the global talent management of academics in exile.

*Findings:* This paper finds that specialised intermediaries can facilitate access to and the successful performance (individual and organisational) of refugee talent. Findings reveal a major shift in talent recruitment processes which are required in order for refugees to take up international work opportunities and highlights the importance of viewing individual potential, organisational support and opportunity access as a precursor for talent development and impact.

*Practical Implications:* This paper shows that profession-specific intermediary support that fosters cross-sector partnerships, better addresses the talent development and workforce integration challenges of refugees.

*Originality:* Application of a multi-level relational framework shows the reasons for, and reality of forced displacement for academics in exile. Focusing on the academic sector demonstrates the importance of protecting both individuals and values at the heart of professions subject to persecution during war and unrest. In highlighting how refugee talent intermediaries can support individuals to breach the canvas ceiling and facilitate the global mobility of refugee talent, a contribution is made to existing debates in diversity, global talent management and migration studies.

*Keywords:* Academics in Exile; Forced Migration; Global Talent Management; Intermediaries; Refugees; The Council For At Risk Academics; UK.

## 1. Introduction

Reasons for migration are multiple, dynamic and complex. The field's overbearing focus on expatriates has led to assumptions and perspectives that simply do not reflect the realities of other groups crossing borders which has led to substantial 'conceptual blindness' (Szkudlarek *et al.*, 2019). Some individuals are 'pulled' by professional or educational opportunities. However, other individuals are 'pushed' from their homes due to war, discrimination or unrest (Reade *et al.*, 2019). Latest figures show that there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019 (UNHCR, 2020a, 2020b). Seeking refuge and integrating in a new place brings many challenges. There are several important factors that help facilitate this process including workforce integration (Ager and Strang, 2008). A joint report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (2018) contends that sustainable employment for refugees is a global issue. Workforce integration of refugees, referred to as the 'refugee talent pool,' is a collective responsibility (Lee *et al.*, 2020) obliging commitment from refugees, governments, NGOs and organisations (Betts, 2010). The notion of the 'canvas ceiling' (Lee *et al.*, 2020) has been developed to depict the systemic, multilevel barriers that specifically impact refugee workforce integration and their professional advancement. Yet, the dynamic processes involved in supporting refugee workforce integration are yet to be adequately explored (Baran *et al.*, 2018). To address this gap, this paper focuses on the support of intermediaries in accessing and developing the refugee pool of talent.

Talent Management intermediaries play a role in shaping the labour market outcomes of migrants and global talent (Groutsis *et al.*, 2015). Described as 'agents of human development' (Agunias,

2009, p. 2), intermediaries can be an important lifeline to migrant workers and global talent alike. Whilst there are recent studies that focus on refugee support organisations broadly (Nardon *et al.*, 2020), little is known about talent intermediaries that specifically support refugees with workforce integration and career development. Furthermore, recent research positions Talent Management as a social practice ‘concerned with empowerment and social justice realms’ (Metcalf *et al.*, 2020, p. 9), calling for a more inclusive and responsible approach (Swales, 2020) that could account for refugee experiences. However, the dominant concerns to raise productivity remain which can lead to narrow, exclusionary Global Talent Management (GTM) practices. Therefore, further exploration is required to understand the instrumental and humanitarian role management processes and intermediaries can play to support the refugee talent pool.

Refugee research remains predominantly atheoretical and the dominant theoretical positioning of current scholarships grounds itself on individual refugee agency (Lee *et al.*, 2020). To reposition and share the responsibility, recent calls advocate societal-, institutional- or organisational-level theories to better conceptualise the variation and complexity of barriers to refugee workforce integration (ibid, 2020). This complements the increasing use of a multi-level relational framework {Formatting Citation} in migration workforce and diversity management research. This valuable framework allows exploration of the intersections between macro, meso and micro factors. Instead of privileging any level, the relational approach assumes interconnection (Nardon *et al.*, 2019). We employ a multilevel, relational framework to foster an understanding of the interdependent factors effecting the global mobility and workforce integration of the refugee talent pool.

Whilst the success of expatriate adjustment is linked to the extent of support offered by the firm (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016), more work is still needed at the meso, organisational level (Loon and Vitale, 2021). In addition, previous organisational literature has focused on expatriates and taken greater prominence in International Business (IB) rather than Human Resource Management (HRM) literature (Al Ariss and Sidani, 2016; Szkudlarek *et al.*, 2019) meaning less is known about the integration and development of refugee talent in host organisations. Lee *et al.* (2020) call for more research into support organisations playing an intermediary role between refugees and employers. To address this gap, we draw on a real-life organisational case study of UK charity, The Council for At Risk Academics (Cara) and their work with academic stakeholders in facilitating the global mobility of academics in exile. We ask, *how can intermediaries play a role in accessing and developing the refugee talent pool?*

This paper argues the case for specialised intermediaries, that work across a sector to galvanise support and resource to support the development and integration of the refugee talent pool and confront the challenges of the canvas ceiling. We term such organisations ‘Refugee Talent Intermediaries.’ Cara’s case provides an example of how such an intermediary functions, demonstrating the benefits of profession-focused and sector-specific support. Furthermore, we contribute to debates on talent management and development by exploring the potential of refugee talent in host organisations. We highlight a major shift in talent recruitment processes which are required in order for refugees to take up international work opportunities. This demonstrates the importance of viewing individual potential, support and opportunities as a precursor for talent and impact. We urge GTM practitioners to take a multi-stakeholder response as this helps foster relations across the sector, build understanding as well as mobilise support, ensuring global talent from forcibly displaced backgrounds can find safety and excel in the new country. Exploration of the sector context, in this case academia, demonstrates the challenges of the sector for refugees and GTM intermediaries, and the disproportionate effects this has on certain marginalised groups. We emphasise the importance of acknowledging the various experiences of marginalisation and how they intersect with migrant worker subjectivities (Tapia and Alberti, 2019). Engagement with political

and economic analysis shines light on the reasons for, and reality of forced displacement which helps to unpack dominant assumptions around the nature of global mobility.

To ground our work in the literature, we engage with global mobility, HRM and migration scholarship to understand the context of forced migration for GTM. The Methodology includes justification and exploration of the organisation case study. We explore the experiences of academics in exile and the role Cara plays. We conclude by discussing contributions, limitations and areas for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

*Unpacking the Refugee Category: Reconceptualising Talent*

Categories such as ‘forced migrant’ and ‘refugee’ wrongly represent individuals as displaced, victims and homeless (Pherali, 2020). Dehistoricising and homogenising the refugee category underpins the victim narrative and plays a role in painting refugees as a threat to ‘societal security’. This can fuel anti-refugee media campaigns and right-wing vilification of refugees as well as the rise in ultra-nationalism (Pherali, 2020, p. 89). Furthermore, Rodriguez and Scurry (2014) postulate that ‘societal responses and policies of localisation can result in negative portrayals of non-native workers as job snatchers’ (p. 99). These views can play out in national policy discourse, preventing refugees’ access to education, employment rights and health services. Hostile immigration policies and misconstrued media representations paint refugees as unskilled, unemployable and undesirable. As a result of these narrative, refugees are rarely considered as global talent or by managers (Haslberger and Vaiman, 2013). Yet, a recent study in the UK reported that up to a half of all refugees entering the country hold a previous qualification and around a quarter hold a higher education qualification (Stevenson and Baker, 2018) and examples of global talent from refugee backgrounds are notable, such as scientist Albert Einstein, political philosopher Hannah Arendt and former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright (Refugee Week, 2020). This has important implications for talent theorising.

Talent identification has exclusive tendencies as it relies upon subjective judgements about individual’s past, present and future worth (Swales, 2020). The notion of talent can be masculinised and reproduced to exclude some groups and privilege others (Makarem *et al.*, 2019). These search practices lend themselves to bias which can disadvantage women (Festing *et al.*, 2015). However, recent scholarship introduces the notion of responsible talent management (Swales, 2020) underpinned by notions of inclusive talent management that focus on the talents of everyone rather than a small pool of talent (Swales *et al.*, 2014) and nurture talent by providing opportunity through participation. This approach of identifying and nurturing individual strength can result in enhanced happiness, fulfilment and well-being amongst employees (ibid, 2014). Drawing inspiration from a capability approach, inclusive talent management is based on the idea that people deserve the potential to flourish in all areas of life, be they public or private (ibid, 2014). Drawing on these developments in talent theorisation enables us to consider the refugee talent pool.

In addition to migration experiences, intersecting categories of difference such as gender, ethnicity, nationality (Rodriguez and Scurry, 2014) as well as class (Vickers, 2020) shape individual experience and influence key structures of global labour markets. Kirk’s (2019) study of globally mobile, talented women, highlights that external pressures and internal conflicts act as glass ceilings and borders to career progression. These challenges are compounded by the experiences forced migration. Known as the canvas ceiling (Lee *et al.*, 2020), refugees face multilevel barriers to workforce integration and professional advancement. This systemic marginalisation cuts across multiple levels. This demonstrates the need to understand individual subjectivities as well as the power structures that work to exclude and marginalise.

### *GTM at the Individual Level – Micro Conceptualisations*

Efforts to theorise and develop effective practical support for refugee workforce integration necessitate knowledge of the particularities of this group (Szkudlarek *et al.*, 2019). What sets refugees apart from expatriates and skilled migrants, is the push factors forcing individuals to leave their homes to seek safety. Unlike expatriates and skilled migrants, pulled to relocate for professional reasons (Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss, 2018), refugee experiences differ greatly as individuals encounter a multitude of challenges that negatively influence their integration, satisfaction and performance at work. Furthermore, global mobility choices vary depending on the life cycle needs of the individual such as caring needs, family responsibilities and spouse's career (Kirk, 2016). There is also a call for GTM practices to recognise that the expectations of individuals may differ given their varying motivations and experiences of the different forms of global mobility (Rodriguez and Scurry, 2014). For example, refugees may not be able to prepare for expatriation or other forms of global migration for work due to the realities of their displacement.

Existing research shows that many refugees are unemployed, under-employed (Junankar and Mahuteau, 2005; Vinokurov *et al.*, 2017), under-paid (Kone *et al.*, 2019), working in the informal economy or dependent on public assistance. The disappointing and consistently low employment outcomes for refugees (Tomlinson and Egan, 2002) points to a lack of knowledgeable support and advice regarding training, education, professional development opportunities and the process of converting qualifications. It also points to the lack of bridging courses and the requirement of further local education experience. Job precarity amongst refugees ultimately leads to demotivation (Willott and Stevenson, 2013) and dissatisfaction, and mental health issues (Baran *et al.*, 2018). Poor mental health makes settlement and integration more difficult. Taking years to fulfil criteria to gain employment can lead to deskilling (Campion, 2018) and talent waste or the so-called 'brain waste' (Carr *et al.*, 2005).

As Newman *et al.* (2018) posit, 're-establishing themselves in their host countries can represent significant challenges that exacerbate the traumas that triggered their flight from their country of origin' (p. 4). Several studies highlight discrimination, prejudice and social exclusion experienced (Campion, 2018; Newman *et al.*, 2018) that is commonly linked to precarious legal status and embodied otherness such as gender, ethnicity and accent. Factors that support integration include family, language, organisation policies and practices, social support, climate for inclusion (Hajro *et al.*, 2019) and employment, but work integration is more complex because refugees are pushed to change their home country. The hardships faced limit opportunities for individuals to proactively manage resettlement and integration process (Lee *et al.*, 2018). Recent findings emphasise the role of social capital and trusted social networks in refugee career adaptability (Dunwoodie *et al.*, 2020) but highlight that sector specific support is more effective in ensuring professional employment rather than having to go through social networks which can result in lower status jobs and low pay (Campion, 2018).

### *GTM at the Organisational Level - Meso Conceptualisations*

Refugees are seldom considered strategically important by employers so forego the support traditionally provided to expatriates (Szkudlarek, 2009). Furthermore, challenging and time-consuming processes are the cause of employer reluctance to recruit refugees (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006). Studies also demonstrate that employers are unaware of discriminatory practices for refugee applicants. Recent work demonstrates the importance of inclusive workplaces and socially responsible business practices (Shore *et al.*, 2018) including emphasis on the inclusion of marginalised groups in the workforce (Moeller and Maley, 2018). A diverse workforce is linked to positive organisational outcomes (Sheehan and Anderson, 2015). Studies have shown that employers who recruited refugees were satisfied with their performance (Lundborg and Skedinger,

2016) and were likely to recommend to other employers. However, despite equal opportunity policies, refugees experience isolation and exclusion in the workplace (Knappert *et al.*, 2018).

The migration literature points to the support organisations that assist refugees with resettlement and workforce integration, also termed newcomer support organisations (Nardon *et al.*, 2020). These organisations often act as intermediaries amongst refugees, employers and other relevant stakeholders (McAllum, 2017), including NGOs, non-profit organisations, social enterprises, governmental initiatives, and government-sponsored or government-contracted organizations (McIntosh and Cockburn-Wootten, 2019). In addition to other resettlement and integration support, newcomer support organisations help refugees to find employment through job counselling, language and training programmes and employment and volunteering initiatives. Studies also shine light on the benefits of cross-sector partnerships and industry collaborations, boosting the capability of refugee support organizations to act as an intermediary between refugees and employers (Hunter and Mileski, 2013). Such stakeholder partnerships across private, government and nongovernmental organisations seek to tackle the challenges of migration integration, highlighted by firms like Chobani and Ikea training and hiring refugees in receiving countries (e.g., Lagorio-Chafkin, 2018).

Despite the empowering role of refugee support organisations in assisting individuals in the receiving economy (Lacroix *et al.*, 2015), migration scholarship reports on their sometimes ineffective and disorganised nature (Tomlinson and Egan, 2002). In addition, scholars report the drawbacks of support providers such as lack of experience and expertise; the absence of customised assistance; funding structures that restrict service provision and create unhealthy competition across the sector (Mukhtar *et al.*, 2015); funding outcome criteria and integration measurements that favour immediate economic outcomes but limit refugees' future career choices (Steimel, 2017). However, many of these support organisations assist the integration process holistically and are therefore not specialised in employment support, lacking sector or profession-specific expertise. Increasing scholarly work in HRM and GTM literatures brings forth arguments for more research into the role of intermediaries in facilitating the global mobility, employment and integration of migrants (van den Broek *et al.*, 2015). By extension, more focus is required to understand what role refugee organisations play, as intermediaries in assisting workforce integration and access to the refugee talent pool.

#### *GTM at the Policy Level – Macro Implications*

Recent work on global mobility calls out the assumption of perceived control over the macrolevel environment by demonstrating how refugees lack control over their resettlement (Szkudlarek *et al.*, 2019). Refugee experiences of resettlement and the labour market are influenced by the socio-political context. Policy can be used to deter refugees (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan, 2017), leading to marginalisation and discrimination in the workplace. Immigration policies work to regulate and enforce different political agendas leading to 'regulatory regimes' that govern international mobility and enforce state borders (Rodriguez and Scurry, 2014, p. 98). All demonstrating the influence of regulation, institutional and societal arrangements on global talent (ibid, 2014).

Immigration policies specifically, are, on the whole, defined by economic goals, such that neo-liberal aims outweigh human rights and humanitarianism (Shachar and Hirschl, 2013). In an era where there are intensifying concerns of corporations' genuine commitment to human and economic development, there is an increasingly common practice of governments favouring those with high potential, referred to as 'picking winners through fast-tracked, strategic grants of citizenship for those with exceptional skills and extraordinary talent' (ibid, p. 71). Whilst supporting highly skilled immigration policies, the government has largely pursued restrictionism with refugees and low-skilled labour migrants (Cerna, 2016). This demonstrates the practice of pursuing economic goals over human rights and humanitarian ethics. Furthermore, the government policy tendency to group refugees as low-skilled, causes recruiters to miss out on the refugee talent pool.

### 3. Methodology

The aim of this paper is to explore how intermediaries play a role in accessing and developing the refugee talent pool. To achieve this purpose, we chose a single case-based methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018) and selected charitable organisation, The Council for At Risk Academics (Cara). Such qualitative methods are employed with the aim of theory building (Maxwell, 2012) and 'for the most effective use of limited resources' (Patton, 2002). Adoption of a single case study approach is consistent with the claims of Yin (2018) who highlights that this method allows for thorough understanding of a unique case. We adopted purposive, convenience sampling to identify and select an information-rich case, such as Cara. Furthermore, Eisenhardt (1989) suggests that the choice of the case study should be done to 'extend emergent theory' (p. 537).

#### *The Council For At Risk Academics*

For over eighty years, Cara has been facilitating success and impact at both the individual and societal level. Working internationally, Cara is a leading advocate for supporting the global mobility of academics in situations of forced displacement. Cara is a small charitable organisation, with limited status that was originally set up by a small group of academics and scientists in the UK to provide short-term grants to refugee academics fleeing Nazi persecution to support finding employment. For more background information on the organisation see Cara (2020a, 2021b).

Reasons for selecting Cara are manifold. Firstly, as much of GTM research has been conducted in classical organisational settings including private and for-profit, we focus on the third sector because research on these organisations is vital in understanding the basis of major global issues as well as dealing with them (Brewster *et al.*, 2016). Secondly, Cara was chosen given its focus on supporting the refugee talent pool. Cara's (2020a) founding statement and aim is 'to prevent the waste of exceptional abilities exceptionally trained.' Diverse talents are celebrated and Cara Fellows have made significant global impact over the years, for example sixteen of Cara supported scholars have won Nobel prizes (Boyd *et al.*, 2009). Thirdly, Cara is a unique charity with no counterpart in Europe. Cara is firmly embedded within the UK Higher Education sector, with sixty-five percent of institutions actively engaged in their work (Cara, 2021a). Cara's unique position and reputation within the sector merit further exploration. Fourthly, focusing on academics in exile is relevant given that highly skilled workers are essential to the (global) knowledge economy (Kerr *et al.*, 2016; Welch and Zhen, 2008). Talent is vital for the higher education sector, particularly given some labour shortages but also to foster innovation and creativity and include diverse perspectives (Yeow *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, we add to debates on marginalised experiences within academia by responding to the call to understand the experiences of academics from forced migrant backgrounds (Ferede, 2018). In addition, academics are some of the professionals that are subject to persecution during war and unrest due to the politicised nature of their work. It is a priority to understand how such a targeted profession can be assisted via GTM practices so that we do not 'miss out' on talent and to overcome the underemployment or unemployment of this group.

#### *Analysis*

We adopted secondary source analysis in this study. The digital age has become even more relevant for researchers due to the constraints and challenges inflicted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Secondary data therefore provides an attractive avenue for analysis as it is more accessible and offers flexibility given the temporal and financial constrictions on researchers. Furthermore, primary data collected at high prices are often underutilised (Wamba-Taguimdje *et al.*, 2020). This design has allowed us to undertake initial theory development and map out areas of further study where additional time and resources would be needed. We started by reviewing migration, refugee workforce and HRM literatures to understand key themes and scholarly debates regarding global mobility, global talent, refugees and workforce integration. Next, we turned to the Cara case study. In October 2020, we

collected our sources to undertake data analysis. We drew on publicly available information on Cara's website (Cara, 2020a) and their latest annual report 2019/2020 (Cara, 2020b) that contain a wealth of organisational information as well as rich personal accounts from various stakeholders including individuals supported by the organisation detailing their experience with Cara and the academic sector. By drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, the case study provides a more in-depth account of the impact and magnitude of Cara's work (Ridder, 2017).

We employed a multilevel, relational framework (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011, Nardon *et al.*, 2019) during the coding and analysis phase. This was to foster an understanding of the interdependent factors at the micro - individual (experiences of the academics in exile), meso – organisational (Cara as the intermediary) and macro - institutional (political, economic and sector) levels. We used thematic analysis to make sense of the secondary data. This allowed flexibility for identifying themes and provides a rich and detailed account of data. In our approach, we followed recommendations by Braun and Clarke (2014) which included; familiarisation with the data, development of initial codes, integrating the codes into key themes, reviewing and finalising the themes, and articulating the findings. The first and the second authors were involved in developing the codes and themes. Precise attention was awarded to ensure balance between the depth and breadth of the findings in order to provide substantial level of meaning. Both authors would review each other's themes to check for consistency of coding and replicability as well as understanding of the code name and decision to group codes within a certain theme. The following coding table is indicative of the analysis process and is based on two example extracts from Cara's (2020b, pp. 20-21) Annual Report, entitled 'A Cara Fellow's Story: From Palestine to "Global Talent"' and 'A Cara Fellow's Story: Leeds.' Some themes cut across the micro, meso and macro levels which highlights the relational dynamic. We discuss these interconnections in the next section.

#### INSERT TABLE | CODING EXAMPLE HERE

We used iterative triangulation (Lewis, 1998) to generate understanding and meaning through the corroboration of literature, Cara case analysis, interpretations and perceptions. Triangulation is often called upon as a measure of good practice when conducting case study research (Farquhar *et al.*, 2020) and is said to offer validity (Hammersley, 2008; Yin, 2018) and reliability (Miles and Huberman, 1994). We also recognise our positionality and how it interacts with this research topic and influences the depiction of the refugee experience.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### *Macro Level Factors*

#### Economic and Political Turmoil

Cara Fellows report fleeing due to occupation, fighting and destruction and can confront violence, unsafe working environments, destroyed infrastructure, policing and significant impacts on salaries. One Fellow said: '*Mosul was occupied by ISIS and my family was forced to flee*' (Cara, 2020b, p. 21). Wars can lead to HE sectors being decimated in physical and human terms (Parkinson *et al.*, 2020). This view was demonstrated by another Cara Fellow: '*The conflict in Syria caused major devastation. Many lost their lives and livelihoods, including academics. This also had a major impact on the infrastructure for academic work in Syria, most of which was destroyed or seriously damaged*' (Cara, 2020b, p. 11). Individuals must remain silent, are compelled to keep low profiles; leaving the country poses great risk; there is mandated conscription and temporary check points, individuals may have difficult socio-economic circumstances preventing them to leave the country (Pherali, 2020). Highlighting the factors that push Cara academics to cross borders demonstrates the complexity of global mobility and the necessity of including refugees in international mobility conceptualisations (Szkudlarek *et al.*, 2019).

The very nature of individuals' education and profession can put them at risk of persecution, imprisonment and even death in regimes that seek to control knowledge and influence. Certain professionals, academics in this case are targeted specifically because of the nature of the conflict; for example, a Fellow from the Syrian Programme said, '*two of my students were detained, tortured and burned... My life was in danger, and I had to leave my job, my city and my dreams*' (Cara, 2020b, p. 14). A recent report by Scholars At Risk (2019) highlights the extent of attacks on higher education communities around the world including violence, wrongful imprisonments and prosecutions of scholars, pressures on student expression and restrictions on academic travel. These factors push academics to find employment elsewhere and continue their academic career in safety. However, this does not always ensure safety as the power of dictator networks across countries can discourage university administrations from hiring these academics in exile (Pherali, 2020).

#### Sector Reflections: Academia

The higher education (HE) landscape has many challenges for which intermediaries like Cara cannot solve due to their structural and institutionalised nature. In the UK context, Stevenson and Baker (2018) report the 'blockages at every level with regard to making the kind of cultural and structural changes that are needed to make HE a viable and attractive option for the many, rather than a struggle for the few' (p. 21). The 'massification of HE' and zero-hour contracts mean there is more to do in less time (p. 44). Furthermore, challenges facing postdoctoral researchers have recently been recorded, particularly in relation to mental health concerns due to the isolating nature of postgraduate research and the importance of the supervisory fit (Mackie and Bates, 2019). These challenges are exacerbated for migrants; individuals confront new working cultures, language challenges and the pressures of publishing (Welch and Zhen, 2008). One study reported that the fear of being let go or not being able to renew residence permit, lead one academic in exile to work 80-hour weeks (Pherali, 2020) leading to an unhealthy work-life balance. These sector challenges can exclude marginalised groups and create barriers to career development and progression (Vatansever and Kölemen, 2020).

Responding to these challenges, several HE institutions have established practical interventions to support refugees with, 'access, meaningful participation and post-study success' (Stevenson and Baker, 2018, p. 104). Some universities are part of the University of Sanctuary network, a body of work that is part of UK charity, City of Sanctuary (Universities of Sanctuary, 2021), offering scholarships for refugees and asylum seekers and specialised support and initiatives. However, support varies greatly across institutions as the specific needs of students and staff from forced displaced backgrounds are not readily understood, coupled with institutional barriers on budgets and agendas. In response, a recent report developed recommendations for universities to better facilitate integration so individuals can unlock their potential (Speed *et al.*, 2020). Considering the context of the sector, when supporting academics in exile, can alleviate some of the burdens individuals face. Below, we explore how Cara goes on to mitigate some of these challenges for academics in exile by leading cross sector partnerships and providing dedicated support to Fellows.

#### *Meso And Micro Level Factors: Organisational Responses to Individual Needs*

##### Cara: The Fellowship Programme and The Syrian Programme

Cara works with academics in exile as well as academics under immediate threat via two main programmes. The Fellowship Programme provides support to individuals to escape from immediate risk, with their families, to safety in a receiving country where they can continue their academic activities. The Syria Programme provides regionally based support, including networking and skill development to Syrian academics forcibly displaced to countries around Syria. Cara have also previously run dedicated regional programmes for exiled academics from Iraq and Zimbabwe. Latest figures show that by the end of 2019, the Fellowship Programme had engaged with 300 Fellows and the team were processing just under 100 additional enquiries. The Syria Programme database had

registered nearly 500 Syrian academics and had engaged directly with 140 in at least one of the programme strands (Cara, 2020b). Cara's approach echoes recent findings that posit that sector specific support is more effective in ensuring professional employment for refugees (Campion, 2018). Next, we discuss how Cara plays a role, like other newcomer support organisations (Nardon *et al.*, 2020), in empowering refugees in the receiving economy (Lacroix *et al.*, 2015).

#### Unpacking Standard Recruitment and Global Mobility Assumptions

Individuals contact a dedicated team at Cara, that understands the circumstances in which academics in exile find themselves. One Cara Fellow said: *'I got in touch with Cara in 2016, which was the only organisation that responded to my application. They were so sympathetic to my case'* (Cara, 2020b, p. 21). Cara steers away from standard recruitment models because engagement of refugees in such processes may not be possible given the severe changes to individual economic circumstances, and restrictions on technology, internet and electricity access. Individuals may not have the time to build an online profile and this in itself may cause risk to the individual in regimes that punish deserters. Therefore, Cara's recruitment model is based on finding academic positions in receiving countries if and when academics at risk make contact.

Cara's approach is centred around valuing previous experience and supporting individuals to reach their full potential. One Syrian Cara Fellow, unable to obtain academic work during the unrest, volunteered for a charity in Syria, and worked for an NGO after fleeing to a neighbouring country. In line with Parkinson *et al.* (2020), there are few or no opportunities to work within the same discipline, so individuals may work *'in areas peripheral to their expertise'* (Cara, 2020b, p. 190). Taking steps away from academia can be detrimental to successfully obtaining academic positions in the future as some employers fail to consider the context impacting individuals work history and overlook the valuable experience and transferable skills developed during displacement. A lack of understanding of international qualifications and experience could see organisations *'miss out'* on talent (Rodriguez and Scurry, 2014). However, Cara seems to take a more holistic view; despite some academic eligibility criteria required to study in UK institutions, Cara supports the individual to contact relevant universities to secure a postgraduate or post-doctoral fellowship.

This emphasises that individual agency and push and pull factors are heavily influenced for those fleeing war-torn countries (Hajro *et al.*, 2019) which shapes individual needs and expectations. Unlike expatriates and skilled migrants, pulled to relocate for professional reasons (Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss, 2018), refugees face immediate risk to life due to war and unrest which acts as a push factor as individuals seek safety elsewhere (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). Unlike these dominant assumptions around global mobility, Cara understands the complex nature of crossing borders for safety. Fellows spoke of the difficulties they had in leaving the country, but Cara reassured them stating the Fellowship would begin upon arrival. That same Fellow added: *'It took me six months to leave the Gaza Strip because of the continuous siege. Cara was in continuous contact with me, always assuring me that my Fellowship would start as soon as I was able to come to the UK'* (Cara, 2020b, p. 20). Furthermore, individuals can access dedicated travel assistant support; one Fellow highlights: *'Cara booked a flight ticket and hotels to facilitate my travel from Egypt to UK without delay'* (Cara, 2020b, p. 20). The flexible, human and tailored support goes a long way in reassuring individuals in desperate situations.

#### Developing the Refugee Talent Pool

The impact of war on HE has been significant, resulting in a *'lack of access to resources, administrative support, professional or disciplinary bodies, and research facilities'* during unrest and displacement (Parkinson *et al.*, 2020, p. 191). It is difficult staying up to date with research due to the devastating effects of war (ibid, 2020). This has substantial implications for the employment and professional development of academics at risk. For individuals considering attending conferences and training as a way of getting back into academia; immigration status can be a barrier to travel,

and personal circumstances remain precarious and unstable (ibid., 2020). Cara's regional work, via the Syrian Programme, addresses some of these issues by supporting the development of academics in exile as a pool of talent (for detail see, Parkinson *et al.*, 2018). It has three strands aimed at capacity building and the professional development of academics in exile. Following consultations with Syrian academics, they include; English for Academic Purposes, Research Incubation and Academic Skills Development (Parkinson *et al.*, 2020). Scholars demonstrate the importance of (re)training due to refugees' absence from the labour market and lack of specific knowledge regarding the new workplace (Bloch, 2008). Unlike the Fellowship Programme, the Syrian Programme has a broader remit encouraging all Syrian academics in neighbouring countries to join the network and development activities. The localised nature of Cara's programme considers these challenges to overcome issues of deskilling, unemployment, networking and travel restrictions.

Different working cultures and practices also play a role in how individuals can adapt when taking up employment in another country. With greater emphasis on teaching in certain institutions, some individuals were not required to remain research active. Individuals feel that this leads to deskilling (Parkinson *et al.*, 2020). To address these issues, Cara works closely with key stakeholders across the sector, including over 260 university and academic experts from over 80 universities who provide voluntary support for the Syria Programme (Cara, 2020a). Furthermore, refugees may have experienced traumatic events which have long lasting implications on physical and mental health including malnutrition and trauma due to exposure to violence (Kone *et al.*, 2019). One Syrian Programme Cara participant said: *'My self-efficacy as an academic diminished, and, like the majority of exiled Syrian academics, I experienced psychological trauma after all the dangers I went through'* (Cara, 2020b, p. 14). Individuals need support to recover from the trauma of displacement, build trust diminished through regimes and interrogations, and improve wellbeing. Failure to provide integration support triggers negative outcomes at individual and organisational levels.

Despite challenges, and with the support of Cara and sector stakeholders, Cara reports the successes and career achievements of its Fellows demonstrating that a supportive environment can help individuals reach their full potential and unlock talent. Some academics supported by Cara found employment, gained fellowships, participated in international activities, for example with the UN. Another Fellow reported securing very competitive British Academy funding. This highlights the success and ambition of academics in exile. Many Fellows report participating in multiple activities; it seems that individuals go above and beyond. This may be linked to high levels of motivation, feelings of gratitude, or wanting to give back, but also the result of a competitive sector that requires unrealistic participation levels in order to secure employment post fellowships. The impact of Cara's work demonstrates that tailored support can unlock potential and facilitate talent development. Cara values the experience and potential of academics in exile, and in partnership with sector stakeholders, fosters a more conducive social environment, where individual talent can flourish (Simonton, 1999).

#### Developing and Integrating the Refugee workforce

Cara Fellows in the UK report the vast range of activities they had been involved in during their Cara Fellowship that helped develop their academic profile and career prospects, including writing papers, attending training and development workshops, collaborations, expanding networks, presenting at conferences, teaching and supervising students. One Fellow highlights, *'Cara continues to provide me with support to progress my career, including workshops to help Fellows to strengthen their skills and be more familiar with the British system'* (Cara, 2020b, p. 21). One Fellow volunteered her time by supporting another Cara Fellow via Cara's English support programme. This demonstrates Cara's ability to foster networks and promote self-reliance amongst Fellows. Furthermore, one Cara Fellow said: *'Cara continuously reviews its Fellows' progress and solves any obstacles we face as international academic visitors'* (Cara, 2020b, p. 20). Cara (2020b, p. 4)

highlights future organisational plans to pilot a Mentoring Scheme to provide additional support for their Fellows. Our analysis of Cara Fellow accounts suggests that this holistic support encourages the development and integration of refugees into the workforce, demonstrated by Fellows going on to secure employment, research funding and large-scale impact and recognition.

#### Acknowledging Multiple Marginalisations

Cara acknowledges the disproportionate effect on women academics in exile. Cara's Deputy Director states: '*Cara continues to promote the cause of female academics, who share the risks that their male colleagues do but also often face additional discrimination in their predominantly patriarchal societies*' (Cara, 2020b, p. 4). Cara highlights the importance of supporting women academics and report that around a third of their Fellows are women. Cara also reports that the enquiries being processed were from 20 different countries highlighting the breadth of global talent but equally the widespread global unrest impacting several nationals. Support for Fellows' immediate family forms part of Cara's work with reports of around 400 dependents supported to date. Family can provide a significant support mechanism particularly relevant when individuals may have experienced separation and loss during displacement.

Considering the disproportionate effects on displaced and marginalised communities within academia is required so individuals can unlock their potential. This necessitates intermediaries and cross-sector stakeholders to understand and commit to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) support for students and staff so that the categories of sanctuary student, refugee or international Fellow, do not homogenise the diverse experiences. Cara's recognition of some of these issues along with EDI work taking place within universities goes some way to addressing these issues (Speed *et al.*, 2020; Unangst and Crea, 2020).

#### Cross Sector Partnerships

Cara collaborates with key sector stakeholders such as the British Academy, the Royal Society and the British Council to host development and networking events as well as ensuring in-kind support or fee-waivers for their Fellows. Organisations that support refugees, like Cara, are able to facilitate support provision by leveraging social actors and resource (Nardon *et al.*, 2020). Cara has also created a network of UK Universities and recently reported there were 121 members. By working with key stakeholders, Cara facilitates academic freedom for their Fellows and obtains vital practical and financial support; many members from the University Network also offer Cara Fellowships. Other stakeholders, such as university career advisors, also provide more localised support within respective institutions. Furthermore, Fellows report that supervisors played a vital role in accessing networks, jobs, and collaborations. Fellows' accounts (Cara, 2020b) demonstrated the important role of networking for career development but also as a means of building collegial rapport, collaborations and advancing understanding and knowledge. Universities and other sector stakeholders play a key role in ameliorating individuals integration process. One academic highlighted that the university provided one Fellow '*with office space and accommodation on its Canterbury campus for two months*' (Cara, 2020b, p. 15). Fellows spoke about the pedagogical and pastoral support from university colleagues and supervisors that helped career development and in some cases wellbeing. Another Cara Fellow said: '*The cooperation of my colleagues here at Newcastle, and the support I received from them, has had a very positive impact in overcoming the very negative psychological effects of the years of war that I lived through in my country*' (Cara, 2020b, p. 11). The support of local volunteers is also highlighted by Cara, including host families providing accommodation and social support. Studies shine light on the benefits of cross-sector partnerships and industry collaborations, boosting the capability of refugee support organisations to act as an intermediary between refugees and employers (Hunter and Mileski, 2013). In this case, Cara galvanises support and resources from across the sector, and beyond, to secure their work as a charitable organisation and their related programmes which are essential in addressing the needs of academics in exile.

## 5. Practical and Theoretical Implications

This paper explores the role of intermediary organisations in supporting access to and the development of the refugee talent pool. We examine migration literature on Refugee Support Organisations (also referred to as Newcomer Support Organisations) and HRM literature regarding the role of intermediaries. We argue the case for specialised intermediaries, that work across a sector to galvanise assistance and resource to support the development and integration of the refugee talent pool and confront the challenges of the canvas ceiling. We term such organisations 'Refugee Talent Intermediaries.' Cara's model ensures no talent goes to waste, facilitates the global advancement of knowledge and innovation and the inclusion of diverse perspectives. By considering the case of refugees, we demonstrate the ethical and business case for GTM. Below, we expand on our research contributions and practical recommendations.

We contribute to debates within IB and HRM literature regarding the nature of global mobility for refugee talent pools and make the case for a relational framework. Engagement with political and economic analysis shines light on the reasons for, and reality of forced displacement for academics. We unpack dominant assumptions around the nature of global mobility for academics in exile by shining light on the factors that push individuals to cross borders. We highlight that supporting global talent in exile helps individuals to build on their knowledge and expertise, contribute to host countries, and also serves as a way of protecting both the individual and values at the heart of professions subject to persecution. In the case of academics, such persecution challenges the rights to freedom of speech and the ethic of academic freedom. GT managers can also play an instrumental humanitarian role for professionals at risk in need of safety, which can facilitate, in the long-term, ways forward for nationals and nations to rebuild and innovate post-conflict.

Exploration of the sector context demonstrates the challenges of academia and the disproportionate effects this has on refugees. Institutional EDI initiatives, along with the University of Sanctuary network, go some way to address these challenges. We emphasise the importance of acknowledging the various experiences of marginalisation and how they intersect with migrant worker subjectivities (Tapia and Alberti, 2019). We demonstrate how Cara's organisational response, in facilitating network events, workshops and the roll out of a Mentorship programme, along with engagement in cross-sector partnerships, alleviates some of the burdens of the sector on academics in exile. We encourage the development of refugee support organisations and intermediaries to target support and specialism to specific professions and sectors.

Organisational analysis shows that, by focusing on academics, Cara is able to tailor support, build very context specific knowledge and partnerships and galvanise resources. Unlike the limitations presented in the migration literature regarding the lack of knowledge and tailored support in assisting refugee workforce integration, Cara's design demonstrates the benefits of profession and sector specific support. However, integration support must also consider the impact of psychological trauma and the physical implications of displacement by working with relevant stakeholders to ensure the individual needs are met. There is a need for awareness raising to inform and counter misinformed and harmful attitudes amongst colleagues and relevant stakeholders. This could be in the form of including forced migration specific points in existing EDI policy and training or supporting initiatives like Refugee Week. Certain sectors also have initiatives that could raise awareness and support integration. Within academia, universities can join Cara's University Network and engage in the University of Sanctuary network.

Cara's regional programme galvanised support in the sector to offer network opportunities and professional development training to those academics in exile, struggling to find employment or work commensurate with their experience and expertise (Junankar and Mahuteau, 2004). This

commitment to develop the refugee talent pool facilitates upskilling and career development which resulted in subsequent benefits such as individuals going on to secure a fellowship or employment. In line with Reade *et al.*'s (2019) strategic HRM perspective that calls on organisations to reduce push factors and promote peace, this localised approach to refugee professional development builds capacity and develops talent, which can better equip individuals to rebuild HE sectors destroyed by war.

We contribute to debates on talent management and development by exploring refugee talent pools. We highlight a major shift in talent recruitment processes which are required in order for refugees to take up international work opportunities. Refugee Talent Intermediaries support the administrative and financial processes whilst working with sector stakeholders to ensure workforce integration. We unpack dominant assumptions that view talent as tangible, static and internal to the organisation, by demonstrating how Cara's flexible, human and tailored approach values the experience and potential of academics in exile. Cara's support, including stakeholder partnerships, enables the development and integration of refugee talent. We discuss how Cara Fellows develop the competencies and confidence which leads to professional and personal development. Cara Fellows report several successes and demonstrate the multidisciplinary talent that has national and international impact. We argue that this individual talent was unlocked by the supportive environment and opportunities created via a cross-sector partnerships, facilitated and led by Cara, a refugee talent intermediary. This demonstrates the importance of viewing individual potential, support and opportunities as a precursor for talent and impact.

By taking a multi-stakeholder response, GT managers can foster relations across the sector, build understanding as well as mobilise support (financial, in kind, practical etc.) and impact ensuring global talent from forcibly displaced backgrounds can find safety and excel in the new country. Identifying best practice like this is one of the key areas which GTM and HRM scholars can offer precious insight and valuable recommendations for policy makers and companies. Such action can both facilitate access to an untapped talent pool and support refugee integration (Szkudlarek *et al.*, 2019). In doing so, we contribute to conceptualisations of responsible and inclusive management practices (Swales *et al.*, 2014; Swales, 2020).

## 6. Limitations and Areas of Future Research

The paper's focus on secondary resources does not capture the in-depth experiences of individuals involved with Cara. Furthermore, by anchoring our case analysis on Cara's annual review, we acknowledge the potential skew in our findings. We propose further empirical research with key stakeholders to gain a better understanding of how Cara's work is experienced by the various individuals and organisations involved across the sector. Focusing on one case provides one angle and is limited in its ability to theorise. Future research could explore additional contexts and sectors, such as French-based organisation, *the Agency of Artists in Exile*, or Cara's US counterpart, *Scholars at Risk*. Understanding the differences in the lived experiences of refugees precisely due to profession and/or nature of talent is an interesting path for future research.

Given the organisational focus on success stories in Cara's reporting, our case analysis shows limited exploration of sector implications and the challenges faced by individuals during the Cara Fellowships. Further research would help shine light on these implications and could highlight which measures are effective in addressing them. We believe it is important to have support and contacts that are not directly linked to the Fellowship as Fellows may feel obliged to overlook their needs to 'fit in' with requirements from supervisors and Cara. The introduction of Cara's Mentoring Scheme may address these challenges. Future research focusing on the individual lived experience of Cara Fellows could highlight these potential organisational blind spots and shed light on the how the cross-sector partnerships are experienced by the Fellows.

GTM theorists and practitioners must consider the vast range of needs and experiences amongst refugees. Individuals may be internally displaced within their country of origin; they may be in camps or towns having managed to flee; some may be resettled in countries participating in various international resettlement schemes. Each scenario provides a vastly different context impacting individuals' working rights and experiences, level of safety and immigration status. Future research could explore the varying challenges and opportunities faced by individuals and refugee talent intermediaries.

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