

Mentoring new voices in forced migration publishing

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Feedback from authors who participated in a new mentorship scheme offers useful insights into how to increase the inclusion of under-represented perspectives in forced migration publishing.

Publication, particularly in peer-reviewed journals, remains one of the most tangible ways to share knowledge on forced displacement, to advance scholarship and individual career goals, and to inform policy debates. A 2020 study of the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, arguably one of the most influential journals in the field, found that scholars based in the Global North authored 90% of articles.¹ During the same period, 85% of the world's forced migrants were to be found in the Global South.² This power imbalance biases scholarship in favour of forced migration issues in the Global North and raises fundamental questions about the distribution of power within the field of forced migration itself. There is a growing recognition that the status quo must change, both to promote the inclusion of Global South scholars for its own sake, but also to ensure that research reflects the knowledge and insights of those researchers closest to the phenomenon of forced migration, many of whom have invaluable lived experience. But how to turn that recognition into real change?

Gaining insights, seeking solutions

To explore how to improve access and representation, the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (LERRN) partnered with the editorial team at *Forced Migration Review* to support a new mentorship scheme aimed at increasing the inclusion of previously underrepresented perspectives. This initiative built on the promising results of other initiatives, especially the Displaced Scholars Peer Mentoring Program hosted by the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at the University of New South Wales and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute at Lund University. These initiatives provided peer mentoring and other support for early career scholars who have experienced forced displacement.³

To design the process, FMR and LERRN convened an advisory group composed of partners based in significant refugee-hosting regions of the Global South and people with lived experience of displacement. The group helped to shape the call for articles for this issue of FMR on 'Knowledge, voice and power' and also gave insights on how barriers to inclusion might be overcome. Following these discussions, FMR and LERRN conducted a survey of participants in an information session on 'Writing for FMR'⁴ to gather information about barriers to publication. Survey respondents were mostly employed in academia, NGOs or UN agencies in the Global South. One third were individuals with lived experience of displacement, more than half were born in the Global South and one third were women. Insights gained from this survey included:

Language remains an important barrier to being published in FMR, particularly for refugees and others who have experienced displacement. Even though FMR both receives articles and publishes them in English, Arabic, French and Spanish, refugees and others with personal experience of displacement cited as a significant barrier the dominance of English in the international sphere, both real and perceived, and the corresponding lack of opportunity to write in non-FMR languages. By contrast, authors who were not refugees and/or did not have personal experience with displacement, regardless of their relationship to the Global South, were much more likely to cite lack of time for writing as a barrier to publication, rather than language.

Lack of knowledge about the publishing process and/or a lack of confidence in their ideas or in their writing abilities.

Most survey respondents stated that they

faced some barriers to publication, perhaps because they had self-selected to attend a workshop on how to write for FMR. When asked what might break down these barriers, all respondents cited mentorship as among the most likely interventions to increase their participation. Specific themes which should be covered by mentors included informing scholars about the publishing process, building confidence in the author's ideas and helping them structure an article for publication.

Mentoring new authors

In response to the urgent and identified need for mentorship in forced migration publishing, FMR and LERRN launched a pilot mentorship programme in December 2021, designed to promote the inclusion of authors with forced migration backgrounds and/or from the Global South in the magazine. Nine authors were selected on the strength of their article proposal and a short personal statement. Authors then benefitted from an hour of one-to-one online mentoring and subsequent written input on their draft article. While participation in the programme did not guarantee publication, it provided authors with tailored advice on how to make their submissions more competitive.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with all mentees saying the programme helped them overcome the barriers they faced to publication and that they would recommend it to others. The majority felt they had improved their ability to write a strong article, which was the top reason most mentees joined the programme. Several mentees stated that mentoring had helped them refine their article topic, helping them to tailor it to the specific requirements of FMR. One participant also noted that they had been able to get targeted advice on writing about forced migration, something which was not available at their own institution.

Mentors also provided positive feedback, noting that they had learned from the interaction with their mentees, particularly about the various subjects covered in the draft articles. Several mentors went beyond the initial time commitment, sustaining an

in-depth, ongoing conversation with their mentees. Some mentors, however, said they felt unable to offer advice on some of the particular challenges faced by scholars in the Global South, such as the possible negative consequences of publication on politically-sensitive topics. Including more mentors with experience of these issues and in providing advice for those unfamiliar with navigating specific political sensitivities would be important in any future programme. The extent to which future mentorship programmes can address the barrier of real and perceived English hegemony in forced migration publishing remains to be seen.

Future plans

The success of the pilot mentorship programme has encouraged LERRN and FMR to continue to invest in proactive steps to increase the diversity of authors published on their communications channels. FMR intends to establish a more permanent scheme for those authors with forced migration backgrounds and/or living in the Global South who would like to receive support in the development of articles for the magazine. Alongside this, they will hold regular webinars addressing questions about the publication process and the specific requirements of the magazine. The pilot mentorship programme and the survey have provided extremely valuable insights which will help FMR to shape initiatives aimed at addressing the current imbalance in authorship.

LERRN will continue to support localisation in academic research through its webinar series⁵ and other programming. In partnership with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), LERRN is launching a global network of Research Chairs on Forced Displacement⁶ which will incorporate the lessons learned from the mentorship programme, including peer learning and active promotion of linguistic diversity as part of an effort to shift power to Global South authors and academics.

The pilot mentorship programme highlighted the importance of meaningful

partnerships and peer learning among and between authors with extensive publication experiences and those with less experience, particularly from the Global South. It also highlighted the need for support to create an inclusive environment in publishing, particularly to overcome barriers such as language exclusion and to mitigate risks to safety faced by some authors in the Global South. Ultimately the goal of all these initiatives is to ensure that practice and policy are debated and shaped by those most closely affected by forced migration today. There is much yet to be done to achieve this goal, particularly to address English dominance in forced migration publishing, but we are committed to playing our part in contributing to this overdue and necessary change.

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1. Rachel McNally and Nadeea Rahim, "How global is the Journal of Refugee Studies?" (2020). bit.ly/global-jrs
2. Following the invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing displacement crisis these statistics have shifted, with the number of people displaced within Europe climbing significantly. However, the dominance of Western (and particularly Anglophone) authorship remains within publishing.
3. Kaldor Centre Displaced Scholars Peer Mentoring Program: bit.ly/kaldor-mentoring
4. To view the webinar, visit www.fmreview.org/writing-fmr
5. bit.ly/lerrn-webinar-series
6. bit.ly/idrc-research-chairs

