



Spotlight on Local and Refugee-Led Efforts to Address Key Protection Needs

Lessons Learned in Three Key Regions

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About IRAP

IRAP is a global legal aid and advocacy organization working to create a world where refugees and all people seeking safety are empowered to claim their right to freedom of movement and a path to lasting refuge.

In 2022, IRAP undertook a geographic rapid assessment¹ project to understand the legal frameworks, regional migratory trends, landscape of protection needs, and associated gaps in a subset of countries in three regions of the world: Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South and Southeast Asia. IRAP selected these three regions in an effort to study places with large and concentrated populations of displaced people, where access to refugee resettlement and complementary pathways is limited, and where strong networks of refugee-led and local organizations exist.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

In 2022, the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) undertook a geographic rapid assessment project to better understand the unmet needs and protection gaps of displaced people in three key regions: Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South and Southeast Asia.² Globally, local organizations receive less than two percent of international humanitarian funds annually.³ The equivalent percentage for refugee-led groups is unknown, but likely much lower. For this reason, IRAP's assessment had a particular interest in spotlighting refugee-led and other local initiatives working to protect the rights of displaced people.

This report synthesizes insights and recommendations from over 100 interviews and highlights key opportunities for philanthropic engagement and international cooperation.⁴ The exclusion of local organizations and refugee-led initiatives (RLIs) from policy-making spaces and funding sources is a missed opportunity given the powerful and innovative work of these groups. Many refugees form organizations in order to help other refugees take control of their own destinies after disruptive experiences of forced displacement.⁵ As key connectors with displaced communities, local organizations and RLIs are often best positioned to understand the protection needs and barriers faced by displaced communities, to develop the most innovative solutions, and to provide the most linguistically and culturally accessible services.

We hope this report is a welcome contribution to recent global efforts calling for increased financial support for RLIs and local organizations



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and for the redistribution of power in strategy and decision-making spaces.

Key Trends

While IRAP's interviews revealed significant distinctions, nuances, and complexities within and across regions, a number of cross-cutting trends emerged. Each regional section offers greater detail regarding major protection gaps and their specific context within the national and regional framework of laws, policies, and systems.

National governments in all three regions often deny displaced populations crucial rights and services, which constrain displaced people's ability to live with dignity, to regularize their status, and to access pathways to safety. Inadequate access to temporary and permanent lawful status, personal documentation, lawful employment, education, and medical care results in indefinite and prolonged legal limbo and pervasive discrimination, exploitation, and other grievous, systemic harms. In host and transit countries, national policies and practices of

encampment and detention of displaced people constitute and contribute to further severe rights violations. Finally, the regulatory environment in some host countries greatly impinges on RLI's ability to establish formal organizations.

While traditional refugee resettlement through United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referrals is a critical pathway for displaced populations worldwide, in all three regions, the annual number of available resettlement slots is far too small to meet the need; at the same time, a significant proportion of these slots go unused each year.⁶ Furthermore, in South and Southeast Asia, UNHCR refugee processing categorically excludes certain populations for political reasons, in contravention of human rights norms. Complementary pathways, which partially mitigate the shortcomings of UNHCR-referred refugee resettlement, suffer from parallel gaps in scale, accessibility, and equity.

Finally, across all regions, the populations exposed to systemic rights violations in countries of origin, transit, and destination warrant particular attention given the disproportionate and distinct harms that they suffer. The regional sections provide further details of the barriers faced by specific groups of displaced people.

Key Recommendations

In response to pervasive and profound protection gaps in all three regions, RLIs and local organizations design and carry out crucial, creative programming alongside, and often in collaboration with, larger or more established institutions. They are providing essential legal information and other services

to displaced populations navigating complex and opaque bureaucratic processes. RLIs and local organizations are advancing community empowerment models and advocating for systemic change informed by the views and needs of displaced people themselves. They are identifying, triaging, and mitigating some of the most profound, compounded, and hidden rights violations, often with minimal financial support or international recognition.

Based on IRAP's research, our key recommendations are:

1 Invest in RLIs and other local efforts to address displacement gaps.

RLIs and other local organizations are poised to meet informational, accessibility, legal representation, referral, and policy advocacy needs – at scale and on behalf of the most marginalized populations. These groups often face significant hurdles to accessing international funding opportunities. A closer look at the barriers they face and greater investment in their efforts would strengthen crucial advocacy efforts and services for displaced populations.

2 Engage RLIs in cooperative partnership models.

In the context of partnerships with more established organizations, RLIs report limited opportunity to participate in program design and development, as opposed to contracts to implement someone else's idea. Given the fact that most RLIs are part of displaced communities and often use participatory engagement models to discuss priorities with the populations they serve, they often best understand the needs and potential solutions for displaced populations.

Greater autonomy in program design would result in more effective programming as well as more dignified partnership structures. Greater inclusion of RLIs in UNHCR-referred resettlement and complementary pathway networks would have an enormous impact on the breadth and depth of outreach and referrals, especially with the most isolated populations. Donors should incentivize and reward meaningful partnerships between RLIs and organizations with more significant, traditional funding streams.

3 Support RLIs through direct and flexible funding structures.

RLIs report that often they are denied direct funding opportunities and limited to subgranting structures, which limits their ability to engage on equal footing with the grantee organization. Flexible and equitable funding structures would improve the ability of RLIs to respond to emergent community needs, to develop long-term strategies, and to build sustainable institutions. Project-based funding and small subgrants often do not meet critical needs to increase organizational autonomy and sustainability and do not support key needs such as hiring staff, infrastructure support, and fundraising capacity. Relaxing certain bureaucratic requirements common to many international funding streams would open up funding opportunities to RLIs embedded within displaced communities.

4 Support initiatives that disrupt traditional funding flows by sharing and pooling funding with refugee-led initiatives.

Some compelling models of this already exist. The [Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative](#)

(RRLI) is a coalition of six refugee-led initiatives ([Basmeah & Zeitooneh](#), [Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Centre](#), [Refugiados Unidos](#), [St. Andrew's Refugee Services](#), [Young African Refugees for Integral Development](#) and [Asylum Access](#)) that came together in 2020 to instigate a systemic transfer of power and resources to refugee leaders and RLIs within the current international humanitarian and development system. RRLI focuses on four strategies: directly resourcing RLIs through the RLI-to-RLI Fund, helping RLIs to address context-specific barriers through its peer-to-peer Strengthening Program, generating evidence to deepen understanding of the role that RLIs play in their communities, and advocating for influential institutions to directly fund RLIs and enable meaningful participation of people of forced displacement. At the time of publication, RRLI had distributed \$3.6 million USD to 17 RLIs. [We Are Cohere](#), in Kenya and Uganda, advocates for increased RLI funding and channels funds directly to refugee-led groups.

5 Support meaningful refugee participation and leadership in global, regional, and national decision-making spaces.

International institutions that have not already done so can join the emerging movement for meaningful refugee participation in public policy spheres, as well as in their own governance and decision-making structures. One leading, refugee-led effort to amplify refugee leadership at the global level is [Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table](#) (R-SEAT), which focuses on country-level advocacy strategies for refugee inclusion in decision-making. Donors should support efforts like this one, as well as other related needs such as training, capacity

strengthening, and travel grants for RLIs. International institutions should prioritize RLIs' participation in decision-making fora, such as the **2023 Global Refugee Forum**, and commit to such support through the **Refugee Participation Pledge**.

6 Support systematic mapping and sharing of RLI networks to enhance opportunities for global support and collaboration.

Some examples of this cooperation already exist on a regional or more local level such as We Are Cohere's **Reframe** database in Kenya and Uganda, the **Working Group on Migratory Policy's** Regional Mapping of Actors on Human Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean, and **Equilibrium - Center for Economic Development's** mapping Venezuelan RLIs. Many resources exist but are not accessible to the public or to RLI networks. Publication of existing resources as well as new mapping efforts would reposition local organizations and RLIs to receive support, coordinate with one another, and connect to larger institutional frameworks.

"We hope international funders and donors will understand the unique existence of refugee-led groups. We might not be at the same level as other bigger organizations, but it is possible that if trusted, guided, and given proper capacity-strengthening and training, we can deliver even better results. We know the issues of refugees best because we experience them ourselves first hand."

— Youth Voices Community, Nairobi, Kenya

With systemic inclusion, adequate financing, and a redistribution of power in the prioritization, design, and implementation of efforts to protect the rights of forcibly displaced people, the potential of local organizations and RLIs to transform the refugee rights protection landscape is monumental.



Photo Credit UN Women/Ryan Brown

Preface: Centering Refugee Perspectives in Decision-Making Opportunities

By **Najeeba Wazefadost**, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) and Co-Founder of the Global Refugee-led Network (GRN)

Since the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) was conceived in 2016 as the principal, multilateral platform to shape global refugee policy, refugee leaders have advocated for their interests in related global policy discussions and events. Our motto, borrowed from the disability rights movement, is “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

One of IRAP’s priorities in this report is to elevate the important work being done on the local level by smaller grassroots and refugee- and diaspora-led initiatives given the historic exclusion of such voices from most international spaces, in particular international policy-making spaces and funding circles. This exclusion leads to policies that further marginalize refugees and contributes to the stigmatization of refugees. The exclusion of refugees from policy-making results in an information gap between the policies designed to serve the refugee communities, and the beneficiaries of those policies – refugees themselves.

People often asked me, “So what? Why is refugee participation important? Can you prove that involving refugees really makes policies better?” To that I say, “Imagine if policies were determined that impacted where you live, where you go to school, where you work, all without consulting you. You can imagine that such a situation would lead to solutions that did not fit your needs.”



The number of people forcibly displaced worldwide continues to grow. Responses and solutions to forced displacement remain grossly inadequate. The capacity of the humanitarian system is severely constrained. Despite these challenges, refugees are not passive recipients of humanitarian assistance, but are willing and active agents of change. Wherever there are refugees, there are people within refugee communities with knowledge, motivation, and capacities to find solutions to the diverse challenges they face. RLIs are often the most connected to displaced people. They are the first and last responders to any crisis and hold the most trust of the people with whom they work. This report highlights some of the many examples of RLIs that are effective, innovative,

and impactful because the needs and solutions are identified from within communities. We know best what will work. We are committed and accountable to our own communities.

Although there has been recognition of the need for refugee participation for some time, the movement to include refugees in decision-making processes or as providers of protection has only recently gained momentum. Many RLIs share their perspective that they are rarely consulted or invited into policy-making spaces. When we are, we are rarely treated as equal

actors or co-developers of solutions. Instead, it can feel tokenistic when we are treated as “victims of war” or “storytellers,” with a lack of recognition regarding our skill sets and expertise.

We still speak of *participation* whereas the conversation should really be about *transformative leadership* for refugees. Without long-term engagement, a system of inequity is perpetuated that keeps refugees dependent, adding to the burden of the hosting population, and resulting in growing, protracted refugee situations.



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Introduction

This report highlights key opportunities for the philanthropic community and other stakeholders to directly support RLIs and local organizations with critical financial resources. IRAP is by no means the first organization to support the growing movement of RLIs across the globe advocating for a power shift toward more inclusive and equitable partnerships and engagement.

Yet despite the important efforts of many supportive allies of this movement, many RLIs continue to experience marginalization and exclusion from important opportunities. Therefore, IRAP intends for this report to serve as a spotlight to elevate RLIs' critical work across the globe.

The goals of this rapid assessment were:

- 1 To identify potential partners** with whom IRAP can expand its legal programming and advocacy to address unmet needs for displaced people;
- 2 To understand the regional context and the organizations** addressing the needs of displaced people; and
- 3 To elicit the perspectives of local organizations and RLIs** who are most connected with displaced communities but often excluded from funding and decision-making spaces.

Within each of the selected geographic regions, IRAP focused on a smaller subset of transit and host countries. IRAP considered the following criteria to identify countries in focus:

- 1 Scale and sustained nature** of displaced populations;
- 2 Extent of gaps in legal protection** for populations exposed to systemic rights violations;
- 3 Security situation and operational risks** related to NGO involvement since IRAP was investigating potential future partnerships;
- 4 Landscape of other organizations** serving displaced communities; and
- 5 Availability of and access to lawful pathways** to safety.



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Methodology

IRAP's geographic rapid assessment project employed qualitative research methodologies. Consultants with regional expertise led the work in each region. For the 22 countries in focus, we conducted an initial desk review of publicly available, secondary sources such as academic articles, reports, and statistical data. The consultant teams also conducted a "regional mapping process" that considered displacement trends across each region, selecting countries of focus, researching the regional and national policy frameworks, and identifying key populations with heightened protection needs and pathways to protection. Through this process, they also identified key regional, national, and local actors and compiled a list of organizations to interview from each region.

Using standard interview protocols, IRAP interviewed 107 organizations about the relevant country conditions and regional context for displaced people and about the organizations' work and views on unmet legal and protection needs in the region. Interviewees included large and transnational agencies as well as grassroots, local, and refugee-led organizations. IRAP analyzed the interview results using the same qualitative content analysis methods across the three regions, using a deductive coding approach to identify themes and patterns.

Framing and Limitations

There was a voluntary selection bias in how the team chose interviewees. IRAP did not intend to speak with a *randomly* selected group of organizations; we focused on a subset of

potential partner organizations aligned with our stated values, as well as regional and international entities that shared important regional context. This led to a bias toward grassroots, local, and refugee-led organizations in some regions and a focus on those engaged in work that overlaps with IRAP's programmatic priority areas. IRAP identified interviewees through its own and consultants' networks. For purposes of background research, IRAP primarily reviewed English language secondary sources and publications by large national NGOs and international development, humanitarian aid, and UN agencies.

Comprehensiveness

IRAP's research was not meant to be exhaustive. Instead, IRAP sought to develop a detailed, nuanced, and accurate, if incomplete, picture through 30-to-60-minute, remote interviews with selected interviewees. As a result, this report reflects only a selection of the interviewees' initial perspectives. In no way does this report purport to be a representative sample of all entities engaged in refugee advocacy.

Informed Consent

IRAP obtained informed consent from all interviewees, who received information on the scope and purpose of this research. Interviewees provided additional consent to be listed and quoted in this report. Some information in this report has been anonymized to protect confidentiality.

Refugee-Led Responses to the Growing Trend of Climate Displacement

In the future, climate change will be a primary driver of displacement across the world – even as contemporary humanitarian and political crises persist and new ones emerge.⁷ Climate-induced displacement transcends the three regions and portends a central framework and analysis for future displacement globally.

Climate-related disasters like drought, wildfires, and hurricanes are increasingly driving people to flee home, often compounding other structural causes of marginalization and inequality. Climate-related and other environmental disasters triggered three times more internal displacements than conflict in 2020.⁸ Since 2008, climate and other environmental disasters have forcibly displaced more people within their own countries than conflict.⁹ For climate-displaced people seeking shelter across borders, international, regional, and domestic laws all fail to offer robust protection. No multilateral treaties and few domestic laws specifically protect climate-displaced people. However, many institutions are engaged in advocacy to expand legal protections for climate-displaced people, and local and refugee-led organizations are engaged in a range of innovative projects to support climate-displaced people.

In Africa, [We Are Cohere](#) and [HIAS Chad](#) work on varied food production programs. A number of groups focus on pre-migration support for people impacted by climate, while others provide direct assistance for those already displaced. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the [Working Group on Migratory Policy](#) (GTPM) advocates for legislative reforms in Mexico related to

asylum access for people displaced by climate. Even organizations with other rights protection causes as their focus, such as the [Association Communicating and Training Trans Women in El Salvador](#) (COMCAVIS TRANS) in El Salvador, have incorporated climate-related work given the transcending urgency of the issue. They assist populations highly exposed to environmental disasters and climate change, such as rural workers whose livelihoods revolve around agriculture and livestock activity. The [Dignified Life Collective](#) in Guatemala addresses the needs of Indigenous communities facing displacement broadly, including people impacted by climate change, with a goal of avoiding displacement; and the [Center for Investigation and Promotion of Human Rights](#) (CIPRODEH) in Honduras is hoping to expand support for communities who are fleeing famine and environmental disasters, like floods. In South and Southeast Asia, displaced populations like Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh face grave climate-related dangers. Refugee camps are often located in areas exposed to sea-level rise, salinization, cyclones, and floods. Often, organizations advocating on behalf of these populations are confronting severe climate impacts as well.



Photo Credit Mustharshid

Regional Sections

AFRICA

Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, and Uganda



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Regional Context

Legal and Policy Framework

The African countries in focus are part of two regions: the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes (EHAGL) region and the West and Central Africa (WCA) region. All countries in both of these regions are parties to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol except Eritrea.¹⁰ All countries except Eritrea are parties to the 1969 Organisation of African Unity

Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.¹¹

Most countries in the region are signatories to the UNHCR Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and have pledged to address refugees and displacement in their territories.¹² Some countries in focus have adopted and implemented the UNHCR Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF),¹³ which has contributed to national legal and policy reforms, such as new refugee laws in Ethiopia¹⁴



Photo Credit EU/ECHO/ Bjørn Heidenstrøm

and Kenya.¹⁵ Uganda is the only country in the world to have integrated four comprehensive refugee response plans as laid out in the Compact Framework, including health sector, education, water and sanitation, and a jobs and livelihoods plan.¹⁶ While such policy frameworks are a positive development, implementation often falls short of the commitments.

At the regional level, the most notable legal framework is the African Union (AU) Revised Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018 – 2030),¹⁷ which calls on resettling states to be receptive to referred cases requiring protection unavailable within the region. The Framework promotes regular migration for refugees through resettlement and complementary pathways such as family reunification and humanitarian visas.

At the sub-regional level, the EHAGL region established the 2012 Regional Migration Policy Framework (RMPF) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), as well as a protocol on the free movement of persons supported by the EU.¹⁸ The objective of the RMPF is to realize the well-being and protection of refugees in all the IGAD member states.¹⁹

IGAD's work on migration focuses on three broad thematic areas: migration governance, policy framework around regular migration, and durable solutions for refugees. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Common Approach on Migration of 2008 is an overarching inter-regional framework on migration in the West and Central Africa subregion.²⁰ It broadly encompasses major aspects of migration, management of regular migration, and prevention of irregular migration.

These frameworks promote the rights of refugees to reside freely in any of the member states and to access employment opportunities. The frameworks also urge member states to facilitate identity and travel document procurement to enable refugees in practice to work and to move freely within the regions.

For both frameworks, emphasis is on local integration and eventual return of refugees to countries of origin. Generally, this is the trend in many other regional and subregional frameworks. Very few make explicit mention of resettlement out of the region – a key legal and protection gap identified through this assessment. At the intra-agency and inter-governmental level, the 2017 AU-EU-UN Tripartite Taskforce on the Situation of Stranded Migrants and Refugees in Libya²¹ is a notable framework designed to protect migrants along migratory routes and in particular inside Libya. It led to the launch of the Emergency Transit Mechanisms (ETMs) in Niger in December 2017²² and in Rwanda in September 2019.²³ The ETM is positioned as a humanitarian response to evacuate displaced people and children trapped in detention centers in and around Libya.²⁴ As the security situation in Libya remains a concern,

Niger extended its ETM agreement in 2020 for two more years.²⁵ UNHCR presents that it is upholding the ETM’s strategic objective to create intra-African solidarity for the refugee situation in

Libya, as well as building on the burden-sharing principle to improve migration governance capacities.²⁶

Snapshot of refugee and asylum populations in focus countries ²⁷							
	Uganda	Sudan	Ethiopia	Rwanda	Chad	Cameroon	Niger
Total refugees	1.53M	1.14M	870,507	127,340	584,828	493,998	293,256
Top countries of origin	South Sudan 920,768 DRC 446,044 Somalia 60,394 Burundi 41,851	South Sudan 814,127 Eritrea 132,588 Syrian Arab Rep 93,480 Ethiopia 73,880	South Sudan 403,802 Somalia 249,573 Eritrea 161,640 Sudan 47,826	DRC 76,530 Burundi 50,133 Eritrea 287 Others 244	Sudan 391,601 Central African Republic 124,488 Cameroon 42,543 Nigeria 20,103	Central African Republic 347,575 Nigeria 135,243 Chad 1,472 DRC 454	Nigeria 203,565 Mali 63,155 Others 26,536
Total	4.95M in East, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region				1.6M in West & Central Africa region		

Regional Migration Trends Emerging from IRAP’s Focus Areas

Projected resettlement needs out of Africa for the year 2023 is approximately 662,012 persons: an increase of 68,414 persons as compared to 2022.²⁸ According to UNHCR, the needs cover 30 different countries of asylum, representing 33 percent of the total global need.

East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region (EHAGL)

By the end of 2020, the EHAGL region was home to 3.6 million displaced people. Less than two years later, as of May 2022, this number had increased 36 percent to 4.9 million. Displaced people in the region originate primarily from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, and

Eritrea.²⁹ A combination of factors has led to many groups' protracted and repeated displacement as well.³⁰

Conflict is a primary cause of growing displacement, mainly due to communal and regional violence, exacerbated by the region's heightened socio-economic fragility and political volatility.³¹ Many protracted and new displacement situations – including as a result of conflict in the Northern Tigray region in Ethiopia, instability in Sudan and South Sudan, and human rights violations in Ituri and Kivu provinces in the DRC – have no expected imminent resolution.³²

Increasingly, climate change is causing displacement in the region as well. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that over 1.2 million new, disaster-related displacements were recorded in the East and Horn of Africa region in the first six months of 2020, resulting from flooding, landslides and drought, more than twice as many new conflict-related displacements in the same region.³³ Severe flooding remained a significant driver of displacement in South Sudan, resulting in a total of 1.6 million displaced persons across the country at the end of 2020.³⁴ Research indicates that the South Sudanese refugee situation remains the largest in Africa requiring greater responsibility-sharing in a spirit of solidarity in line with the GCR.³⁵

West and Central Africa (WCA)

By the end of 2020, the WCA region was home to some 1.39 million displaced persons. Less than two years later, this number had increased 15 percent to 1.6 million displaced people. A majority of this population originates from Sudan, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon, and Chad.³⁶



Photo Credit EU/Bertha Wangari

The WCA region is one of the most unstable and risk-prone regions in the world. It continues to experience recurrent insecurity, terrorism, and violence as persistent key drivers of forced displacement, as well as adverse effects of climate change. Complex mixed migration flows throughout the region persist, despite the immense dangers displaced people routinely experience.³⁷ Interviewees from West Africa noted that there are new displacements as a result of escalating violence in the central Sahel region, in Lake Chad Basin from activities of non-state armed groups, from the conflict in northeast Nigeria, and from the ongoing unrest in Central Africa. Intercommunal clashes and secessionist conflict in the south and northwest regions of Cameroon have pushed millions to flee their homes and hampers humanitarian access.³⁸

Regional Responses to Humanitarian Crises and Forced Displacement

In EHAGL in 2019, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda developed and implemented a Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP)³⁹ in line with the GCR to contribute to an integrated protection and solutions strategy as a response to the South Sudan displacement crisis. Under the RRRP, South Sudanese refugees are given



Photo Credit EU/Dominique Catton

recognition on a *prima facie* basis⁴⁰ in those five countries, and states are meant to support resettlement and complementary pathways.⁴¹ In Uganda, *prima facie* refugee status is also granted to new arrivals from the DRC.⁴²

In the WCA region, the same factors that cause mass displacement make protection of displaced populations risky and challenging.⁴³ Through interagency response plans and strategies, some governments in the region have responded by keeping their borders open and granting individuals *prima facie* refugee status.

For example, Cameroon and Chad recognize Central African Republic (CAR) displaced populations as refugees on a *prima facie* basis. With UNHCR support, Cameroon, CAR, DRC, Republic of Congo, Chad, Sudan, and South Sudan adopted the Yaoundé Declaration in April 2022 to establish regional coordination for the more than 700,000 CAR refugees and 600,000 internally displaced persons, one of Africa's largest displacement crises.⁴⁴ The solutions in the Declaration mostly promote socio-economic inclusion, resilience, and empowerment of Central African refugees and the eventual return of displaced persons to their country of origin.

Gaps in Legal and Protection Needs Identified by IRAP's Assessment

Challenges Related to Refugee Status Determination

All countries in focus have national refugee status determination (RSD) systems run by the state, as opposed to UNHCR. Arriving refugees in the region may be granted *prima facie* refugee status when individual RSD is deemed impossible.⁴⁵ For most displaced people in urban areas, and others where *prima facie* recognition is not granted, individual RSD procedures exist.

Addressing gaps in RSD is vital to ensuring long-term protection since RSD is a prerequisite to most pathways to protection. Interviewees reported gaps in RSD processes such as lack of meaningful access for certain populations, such as LGBTQIA+ people, inefficient RSD decision-making processes, insufficient knowledge and training among decision-makers, insufficient information provided related to rejected claims, and appeal processes that fail to conform to international standards.

Inadequate Pathways to Permanency in Host Countries

For many who cannot return home, accessing citizenship in a host country, and accessing the associated rights and benefits, is a high priority. Without permanent status or citizenship, displaced populations are often stuck in



Photo Credit OCHA/Pierre Holtz

protracted refugee situations with no other option. Depending on national policies, refugees have limited access to basic rights and services, especially when coupled with encampment. Interviewees reported that in some countries where the law theoretically affords refugees access to citizenship or permanent residence, these rights often exist on paper but not in practice.

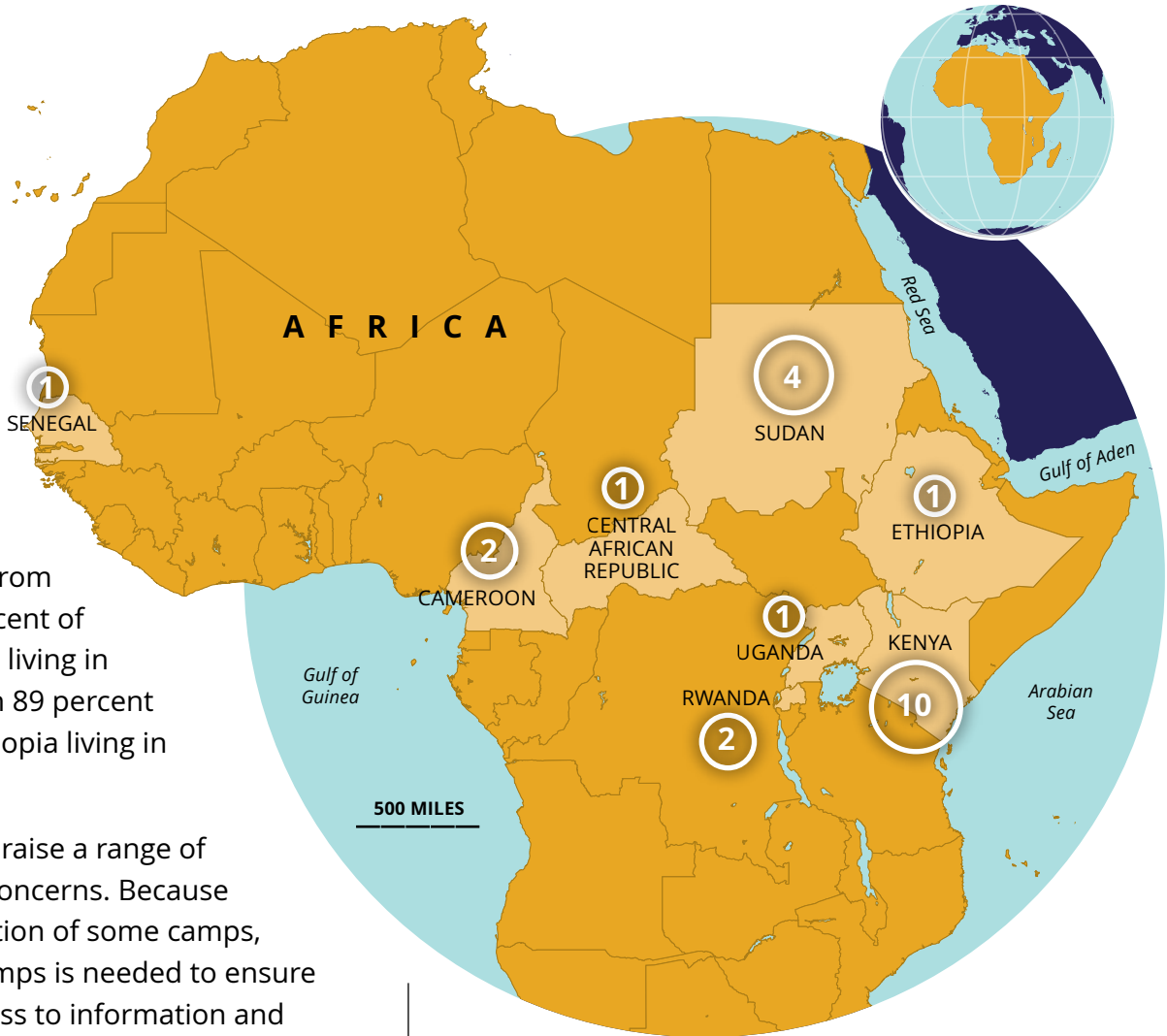
Some regional actors use strategic litigation to address gaps in the development and implementation of national legal frameworks on refugees.⁴⁶ The existence of strong regional refugee frameworks may be used to advocate with regional and national actors for better citizenship policies.

Challenges Related to Encampment Policies

All of the countries in focus in the region have hosted refugee camps. The extent of

AFRICA

Locations of organizations interviewed for IRAP's geographic rapid assessment project.



encampment varies, from approximately 38 percent of the refugees in Sudan living in camps⁴⁷ to more than 89 percent of the refugees in Ethiopia living in camps.⁴⁸

Encampment policies raise a range of legal and protection concerns. Because of the locational isolation of some camps, better outreach to camps is needed to ensure that people have access to information and services addressing their legal needs. In Chad, where more than 83 percent of the refugees live in camps,⁴⁹ some camps are unreachable for months at a time. In Ethiopia, displaced people in camps that are not easily accessible have limited access to legal aid.

Typically, encampment is also paired with restriction on freedom of movement and other rights deprivation. In Kenya, an interviewee reported that those who feel unsafe in camps sometimes decide to stay in urban areas and live without documents, facing other protection threats, including arrest and exploitation. The U.S. Department of State's 2021 Trafficking in

Persons Report for Sudan highlighted restrictive encampment policies as a protection threat resulting in some refugees utilizing migrant smugglers, which further increased their risk of exploitation.⁵⁰ Cameroon has an encampment policy for refugees of particular nationalities and locations, with refugees from CAR in camps in the East Region, where they are reportedly denied the right to work, and refugees from Nigeria in the Far North Region where many face a dire lack of humanitarian assistance.⁵¹ Mass forced returns and violence have taken place and continue to be a threat.⁵²

Access to pass permits allowing free movement without the risk of arrest would greatly improve conditions for refugees in camps. Interviewees identified such practices in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. In a number of these contexts, community paralegals are working to improve access to permits through legal counseling and representation. A number of interviewees praised Uganda's approach of using organized settlements rather than camps, allowing refugees freedom of movement to access services and market opportunities.⁵³

Initiatives That Respond to Protection Needs Arising from Encampment

- In Sudan, the **Sudan Organization for Development** provides locally led legal aid and other services, including programming led and implemented by refugees. Among their other efforts, the organization trains community paralegals to provide legal assistance in urban settings and camps. This model addresses locational isolation by using community paralegals and RLIs that have better access to specific communities.
- The **Refugee Law Project** in Uganda and **Kituo Cha Sheria** in Kenya are local legal aid organizations that have established legal aid clinics and outreach in camps to increase access to legal information and assistance.

Barriers to Accessing Critical Documentation

Interviewees across the region consistently raised access to documentation as a core issue of concern. Specifically, interviewees' priorities were: access to civil registration documents (such as births, deaths, marriages), access to UNHCR and government registration and status documents, and access to documents to facilitate onward movement through resettlement or complementary pathways.

Interviewees reported that documentation issues infringe on protection at every level, affecting access to services; increasing risks of exploitation, arrest, and detention; and creating significant challenges limiting local integration and resettlement in other locations. Without access to documentation, people are at risk of statelessness through an inability to prove their nationality.⁵⁴ As one interviewee stated, documentation is problematic for refugees in its "legitimacy, validity, significance, and access."

COVID-19 has worsened access to documentation for refugees. A refugee-led assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on urban refugees in Kenya and Uganda found that the biggest hurdle faced by refugees in those settings during the pandemic was access to documentation, with 37 percent of respondents experiencing challenges accessing essential services because of documentation issues.⁵⁵

Church World Service, which manages the Resettlement Support Center Africa, reported that access to documentation to facilitate resettlement can be challenging. These issues are more acute for certain marginalized groups

who are less likely to have certain documents, such as unaccompanied children and women and girls. Exit permits can also be difficult to access in certain countries such as Rwanda and Kenya. Interviewees reported the need to take cases to court in some instances to access necessary documents, a time-consuming and laborious process. Local expertise is critical to resolving these issues. Interviewees urged collaboration among UNHCR and IOM, local and national authorities, and other partners directly involved in these efforts.

The Yaoundé Declaration on Solutions in the Context of Forced Displacement Related to the Central African Republic Crisis (2022) is one regional example of state commitments to address gaps in access to documentation. Signatories, including Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, agreed to integrate refugees into national registration systems in order to “facilitate the issuance of civil documentation, as well as identity and travel documents by governments [sic] agencies.”⁵⁶ The impact of these commitments on access to documentation is yet to be determined.



Photo Credit NICEF Ethiopia/Tadesse

Initiatives Responding to Documentation Challenges

- The Future with Wakimbizi⁵⁴ – a joint project of **Youth Voices Community**⁵⁵ and **Youth African Refugees for Integral Development** (YARID)⁵⁶ to assess the impact of COVID-19 on urban refugees in Kenya and Uganda – identified access to documentation as a major hurdle. The project made recommendations for addressing documentation issues, including:
 - Collaboration between UNHCR and local organizations to fast-track access to identification and reduce backlogs;
 - Involving RLIs to identify and inform refugees of available documentation who may be otherwise unreachable; and
 - Removing the expiration of validity periods for refugee documents to reduce the need to interact with bureaucratic systems and increase access to services.
- **iPeace** in Rwanda⁵⁷ has implemented projects helping children born to refugees obtain their birth certificates among other rights protection programs, such as facilitating access to justice for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Barriers to Accessing Legal Information

Across the region, interviewees reported that access to accurate legal information and resources is an enormous unmet need, including

resources reflective of varying literacy levels and language, especially given the multitude of languages and dialects spoken in the region. Lack of legal information is a barrier to accessing documentation, legal status, and available state and UNHCR services.

Interviewees warned against state and international actors' over-reliance on disseminating information online. In certain locations and among particular groups, computer literacy and access to technology is so limited as to make online-only information inaccessible. With increasing use of digital technology in state bureaucratic systems, some legal information and access to services is only available online, which can serve some populations while limiting its utility to others, especially people in camps.

Interviewees reported that online information can be helpful, but in-person information campaigns are also needed. Interviewees suggested information sharing through social media and other phone-based applications as effective ways to disseminate information.



Photo Credit UNICEF Ethiopia/Mulugeta Ayene

Initiatives Responding to Gaps in Access to Legal Information and Resources

- **Refugee-Led Organization Network of Kenya** (RELON Kenya) works through refugee-led legal centers to provide legal information and resources to refugee communities.
- **iPeace** in Rwanda used WhatsApp and YouTube to conduct information and advocacy campaigns in 2019, reaching approximately 3 million people.
- **Refugee Welfare Association Cameroon** (REWAC) in Cameroon conducts campaigns and outreach activities to promote the rights of displaced people, especially women, children, and people with disabilities.
- **Sudanese Defenders Center for Legal Aid**⁵⁸ provides in-person workshops for refugees, training in legal awareness, human rights, and their implications for the daily lives of refugees.
- **Bahir Dar University Legal Aid Clinic** conducts in-person workshops with community leaders and uses local media such as radio and TV to raise awareness on legal issues.

Unmet Needs Related to UNHCR Processes

A fundamental issue with UNHCR-referred resettlement is that many available and needed resettlement slots remain unused each year.

In the EHAGL region, significant resettlement slots are allocated, but not always filled. In 2021, UNHCR received around 17,000 individual submissions for approximately 23,000 resettlement slots, only 73 percent of those available. The WCA region receives a much smaller allocation, despite significant protection threats, particularly by sexual violence survivors.⁶⁰



Photo Credit EU/Evan Schenider

Accessing legal assistance can be difficult for those based in camps; innovative approaches should be recognized to expand successful models. Remote legal clinics and community paralegal models working on wider access to justice issues – such as through the work of Kituo Cha Sheria, RELON Kenya, and Sudan Organization for Development – could be replicated. If locational isolation and its impact on resettlement opportunities is to be addressed, working with community-based organizations or projects is essential.

A second major issue with UNHCR resettlement processes pertains to the scope of UNHCR

partnerships for their referrals. Some INGOs operating in EHAGL deploy staff to UNHCR for resettlement and complementary pathways work to increase UNHCR’s ability to process cases. However, deployments are sometimes restricted by funding, which can create gaps in service. In EHAGL, INGOs also stressed the lack of capacity within their own organizations to identify cases that could be referred to UNHCR, expressing an interest in expanding partnerships.

In WCA, we did not identify any partners doing this type of work. In the words of one interviewee, “It is a very shrunken space. It is very secluded with very restricted information.” Despite their extensive work on refugee legal matters, no local legal aid organization interviewed reported that they refer cases to UNHCR for resettlement. RLIs reported being held at arm’s length when it comes to resettlement, including with established INGOs who manage resettlement cases. Given the connections RLIs have in their communities, this is a missed opportunity.

Thirdly, interviewees highlighted concerns regarding a lack of information about UNHCR resettlement and a lack of information regarding case updates. Many processes take years, harming refugees’ well-being as they wait without receiving updated information. Interviewees also reported a lack of information related to cases that are rejected for security reasons. This lack of information prevents refugees from making independent and informed decisions about their future. Furthermore, it results in an inability to challenge discretionary denials.

Unmet Needs Related to Complementary Pathways

Given the barriers to accessing UNHCR resettlement, access to complementary pathways is critical in the region. Family reunification is a particularly important option for long-term protection, but family reunification procedures are complex. Interviewees reported a desire for more information about these procedures and more coordination to enable them to make referrals.

Despite the number of international actors with family reunification expertise in the region, expertise is not shared with local and refugee-led organizations. Local legal assistance, building on context-specific knowledge of national systems, may also play an important role in facilitating access to the documentation required for family reunification procedures.

The Emergency Transit Mechanisms (ETM) in Niger and Rwanda⁶¹ created limited humanitarian pathways for a small number of displaced people.⁶² However, reports indicate that the Mechanism is deeply flawed, and RLIs also report a lack of information about these programs. More cooperation could contribute to monitoring, research, and advocacy to improve these pathways.

Some INGOs reported working on educational pathways and expressed an interest in increasing this work as well as on labor mobility pathways. Interviewees in EHAGL pointed to the work of the World University Service Canada (WUSC) and the Windle Trust. Talent Beyond Boundaries is also exploring options for working in the region. UNHCR has identified countries

with a potential to facilitate these pathways along with strategies for doing so.⁶³

Yet the number of displaced people in the region relocating to safety through these pathways is small.⁶⁴ These pathways are often unattainable because of their extensive requirements. One RLI suggested that protection considerations should be borne in mind when prioritizing people for such opportunities and when setting thresholds for educational achievements and qualifications. In their words, “refugees shouldn’t have to be exceptional to access pathways.”

Another interviewee highlighted the gap in available educational opportunities and the need to invest in them, particularly for people in camps. Education and training certification programs are needed, or support for projects to make referrals into certified opportunities, as a step towards increasing access to education and labor complementary pathways from the region.

Initiatives to Increase Access to Complementary Pathways

- **RELON Kenya** would like to develop a train-the-trainers model among community paralegals, to provide legal information and case referrals on complementary pathways.
- The **Refugee Law Project** in Uganda identifies cases for family reunification, conducts best interest assessments, and makes referrals to UNHCR.

Critical Gaps in Refugee Law Training

While the region has some excellent initiatives that address certain gaps in the implementation of refugee law, critical gaps remain. Regional

initiatives that train judges and decision-makers in refugee law to improve their adjudication of refugee claims would benefit from more funding to expand to other countries.

To improve legal representation for RSD, we identified local legal aid organizations that provide training for lawyers at the national level, but interviewees identified a lack of refugee law training at universities in the region. We highlight legal aid clinics offering training and practice opportunities, as well as affordable and accessible remote refugee law courses offered through international universities below.

Interviewees raised a number of ideas that could strengthen training and knowledge in refugee law. The publication of national and regional jurisprudence, as well as amplifying efforts to share regional jurisprudence, such as at the African Law Collection of the Africa Chapter of the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges (IARMJ).⁶⁵ The Africa Refugee-Led Network has done an assessment of regional refugee laws and policies, which could be used to develop refugee law programming with RLIs.⁶⁶

Initiatives Responding to Unmet Legal Assistance Needs

RLIs in the region provide excellent models of refugee involvement in legal aid and advocacy work with displaced populations, notably using community paralegal models. Often working in collaboration with local legal aid organizations, these models help address notable gaps by engaging displaced people with legal backgrounds or RLIs with interest and experience in direct legal aid programming. For those with an interest in refugee protection programming, engaging with regional and local initiatives presents an opportunity to learn from the expertise and innovation of these initiatives.

- University law clinics are offering training, practice, and research opportunities for law students in refugee law such as the [Refugee Law Project](#) affiliated to Makerere University in Uganda and [Bahir Dar University Legal Aid Clinic](#) in Ethiopia.⁶⁹

- [The International Association of Refugee and Migrant Judges](#) (IARMJ) Africa Chapter, in conjunction with the Judicial Institute for Africa (JIFA) and UNHCR, have a training initiative (and

corresponding pledge in the Global Compact for Refugees) conducting training in refugee law for judges, decision-makers, and lawyers to improve capacity in refugee protection and decision-making across the continent.⁷⁰

- [REWAC](#), a small, Indigenous NGO in Cameroon, has coordinated training in refugee law for lawyers to encourage pro bono representation.⁷¹
- The [Refugee Law Project](#) in Uganda runs workshops on refugee law and refugee protection for communities, targeting knowledge and language needed to manage refugee status determination and other processes. They also provide training for duty-bearers among national authorities, including immigration officers, police, and the judiciary, to improve knowledge and understanding on refugee protection.⁷²
- Community paralegal models enhance legal awareness, assistance, mediation, and accompaniment, such as those implemented by [RELON](#) Kenya⁷³ with support from [Kituo Cha Sheria](#).⁷⁴

Specific Populations with Heightened Protection Needs

The Importance of Refugee-Led Organizations in Identifying and Supporting Populations with Heightened Protection Needs

RLI programming is essential to adequately cater to specific needs of refugee populations facing access barriers. **Youth Voices Community** (YVC) works with refugees who have a range of disabilities. In 2020, YVC partnered with UNHCR Kenya to produce resources for refugees with visual and hearing impairments.

During the course of the project, YVC learned that most resources printed in Braille were inaccessible for the target populations with visual impairments because they had not learned to read Braille. Through this project, YVC was able to identify the broader needs in the community, which extended beyond access to resources and included training and education programs on Braille and Sign Language, employment training programs, access to wheelchairs, and other core support.

Women and Girls at Risk

Women and girls in the region have distinct legal and protection needs related to high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, the frequency and legal consequences of childbirth without access



Photo Credit Propects ILO

to documentation, and gendered barriers to economic empowerment and financial stability.

An interviewee in Cameroon described high incidences of rape and pregnancy among teenage girls in urban and camp settings. Access to prenatal care and psychosocial support are often unavailable, particularly in remote camp settings.

An interviewee in Kenya noted the need for more counseling and support services for women and girls as well as basic supplies like menstrual pads. The interviewee raised concerns that policies of “voluntary return” for those in camps in the east of the country may place women and girls at further risk of violence.

In its 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview of Cameroon, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs noted a “pervasive belief that GBV is inevitable.”⁷⁵ Interviewees in Kenya also reported GBV against children. In Chad, an interviewee described the risk of GBV connected to climate change, which results in women and girls in camps having to travel to collect survival resources. An interviewee in Rwanda noted insufficient support systems for GBV survivors.

Interviewees reported that single mothers face particular barriers when accessing documentation needed to address their legal and protection needs. Birth certificates typically require a named father, and legal support may be needed to access documentation when children are born outside of traditional family units. Children born to single mothers in camps in Kenya are sometimes rendered effectively stateless.

LGBTQIA+ Populations

Interviewees across the countries in focus consistently underscored the systemic oppression and protection barriers specific to the LGBTQIA+ community. This population routinely fears reprisals from homophobic and transphobic government actors, since RSD processes are implemented by state authorities that also persecute people for their sexual orientation or gender identity. Interviewees raised the fear that an asylum claim based on sexual orientation or gender identity would amount to self-reporting to repressive state authorities.

Legal representatives working with LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers with rejected claims expressed concerns that discrimination among decision-makers contributed to rejections. Refugee leaders spoke of the difficulty LGBTQIA+ individuals face accessing healthcare, education, and free legal aid. One interviewee spoke of the reluctance among legal providers to challenge discrimination by authorities.

Many LGBTQIA+ individuals' ostracism from their families and communities reduces the potential for access to alternative pathways that rely on

these connections, such as family reunification and community sponsorship.

In the face of increasingly repressive environments for LGBTQIA+ communities in the region,⁷⁶ there is a widespread need for advocacy and assistance for LGBTQIA+ populations, including for those who may not have been granted refugee status.

Unaccompanied Children

Unaccompanied children face significant protection barriers, often connected to the very legal procedures established for their support. These barriers arise most frequently in the countries on migration routes through which unaccompanied children often travel. Among countries in focus, these countries include: Ethiopia, which hosts large numbers of unaccompanied children from Eritrea and South Sudan; Sudan, which sees a significant number of unaccompanied children from Eritrea, Ethiopia,



Photo Credit Annelekie van de Wiel



Photo Credit UNICEF Ethiopia/Mulugeta Ayene

and South Sudan; and Rwanda and Niger, whose Emergency Transit Mechanisms have hosted unaccompanied children evacuated from Libya.⁷⁷

Interviewees reported that documentation and administrative requirements cause significant barriers and delays to the resettlement processes.

In Ethiopia, an interviewee reported that administrative and legal barriers to the timely identification of caregivers besets the guardianship process for unaccompanied children, which is necessary both for family reunification procedures and children's ability to move outside of camp settings. Since the Ethiopian government ceased the *prima facie* recognition of Eritreans, displaced, unaccompanied, Eritrean children there without documents may lack access to services or pathways to protection.⁷⁸

People with Disabilities

Interviewees in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Chad highlighted significant, unmet legal and protection needs for people with disabilities, highlighting the limited capacity of state structures to provide the support required by those with disabilities.⁷⁹ Specifically, interviewees mentioned exclusion from social support programs, community structures, and education and employment opportunities; restricted access to legal pathways; and the omission of mental health considerations in the provision of services and protection.

Although medical needs are a priority category for resettlement, UNHCR reports it can be difficult to promote resettlement of persons with medical needs in some countries.⁸⁰ People with disabilities are often not prioritized for the available resettlement spaces because of misperceptions about their needs⁸¹ resulting in some resettlement countries limiting resettlement slots for medical needs cases.

Discrimination against people with disabilities in education and employment settings impacts access to complementary pathways as well, since discretionary eligibility criteria for these pathways often requires particular achievements or connections.

Mental health was starkly absent from discussions with organizations in the region. In the context of displacement, mental health needs are often significant and relate to challenges in accessing legal, protection, and resettlement services. It is essential to consider mental health matters in all policy interventions meant to serve populations beset by the aftermath of traumatic events.

Interventions by Local and Refugee-Led Organizations Working with Populations with Heightened Protection Needs

- **Youth Voices Community** provides workshops to raise awareness about GBV risks and consequences as well as information regarding reporting options for GBV survivors, business and entrepreneurship training programs for women, counseling and psychosocial support for youth coping with mental health challenges, and other programming.
- **Bahir Dar University Legal Aid Clinic** focuses on the provision of legal aid for particularly marginalized groups, including women and girls at risk, unaccompanied children, and people with disabilities.
- The **Legal Aid Forum** in Rwanda supports access to documentation for unaccompanied children through national systems as requested by resettling states or UNHCR.
- The **Refugee Law Project** in Uganda runs mental health and psychosocial services alongside its legal aid interventions. Legal representatives coordinate with mental health and psychosocial workers to ensure wrap-around support for displaced people going through legal processes, ensuring that mental health needs inform legal representation.



Photo Credit UNICEF/Raphael Pouget

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama



Photo Credit EU/S. Billy

Regional Context

Legal and Policy Framework

All Latin American and Caribbean countries except for Cuba and British Guyana are party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and/or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.⁸²

In response to the civil wars and systemic human rights violations causing massive displacement

in Central America in the 1980s, the region's governments adopted additional commitments to refugee protection beyond those established by the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.⁸³ For example, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration⁸⁴ recommended an expanded definition of refugee to include people fleeing "generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order."⁸⁵

In 1996, a number of countries in North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean formed the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) or Puebla Process, a “consultative process” to create a space for improved coordination and transparency on migration governance, integration of migrants, and protection of particular populations.⁸⁶ More recently, the 2014 Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action and the 2016 San Jose Action Statement further enhance regional governments’ commitment to addressing root causes of forced displacement and collaboration to protect those displaced.⁸⁷

Despite these aspirations, many host and destination countries have not made significant progress in fulfilling their commitments to expand or create new resettlement schemes. Most countries’ legal and policy frameworks allow asylum seekers to apply for other forms of legal protection and alternative pathways, such as labor visas, if national authorities reject their asylum applications. But many governments’ subpar implementation of regularization programs, the high costs of benefitting from other legal pathways, and poor access to dignified, lawful work obstruct the legal and socioeconomic integration of displaced people⁸⁸ and expose them to discrimination, exploitation, and other human rights violations.⁸⁹

Nonetheless, some countries have taken meaningful steps toward creative legal protections for displaced persons. For example, Argentina created a humanitarian visa program for displaced Syrians and Palestinians, the Special Program of Humanitarian Visas for Foreigners Affected by the Conflict in the Arab Republic of Syria.⁹⁰ In May 2022, Argentina also announced its intention to offer visas to people from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean



Photo Credit Daniel Arauz

who are displaced by “socio-natural” disasters. The Argentine government considers this visa program to be at the “vanguard” of future, global, climate displacement responses.⁹¹

Most recently, in June 2022, 20 countries endorsed the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, committing to build national and regional programming for “safe, orderly, humane, and regular migration.”⁹² The Declaration focuses on addressing root causes leading people to leave their countries of origin, the expansion of lawful pathways, cooperation efforts to combat smuggling and trafficking, and an “early warning” system for mass displacement and migration. Notably, the Declaration reflects that, due to recent displacement and migration patterns, most countries in Latin America are host countries, not just countries of origin for people migrating elsewhere.⁹⁴

Region-Specific U.S. Resettlement Pathways

Since fiscal year 2017, more refugees to the United States have come from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras than from other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, in

large part due to in-country refugee processing through the Central American Minors (CAM) Refugee and Parole Program.⁹⁵

The CAM Program was established in 2014 in response to the significant rise in U.S. border apprehensions of unaccompanied Central American children fleeing violence.⁹⁶ The Program allows certain parents in the United States to apply for their unmarried children in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to come to the United States as refugees or, if found ineligible for that status, through parole.⁹⁷ Nearly 5,000 Central Americans have come to the United States through the CAM Program either as refugees or parolees since its inception.⁹⁸

The Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA) is a protection strategy coordinated by UNHCR, Costa Rica, and IOM. It was created in 2016 to offer protection to a small number of refugees from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador by facilitating resettlement referrals for people at heightened risk in their countries of origin.⁹⁹ Between its establishment in 2016 and 2021, the PTA has identified approximately 2,000 people and facilitated the resettlement of approximately 1,000.¹⁰⁰

In fiscal year 2022, the United States received the first UNHCR referrals for resettlement of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica and of Venezuelans in several South American and Caribbean countries.¹⁰¹ Historically, UNHCR has identified refugee cases among displaced Colombians in Ecuador for resettlement to the United States, resulting in around 1,600 arrivals since 2009.¹⁰²

Coordinated Responses to Humanitarian Crises and and Forced Displacement

In line with the region's long-established tradition of regional cooperation, many regional actors, including governments, UN agencies, and international and national organizations, collaborate on regional responses. Two significant recent examples relate to migration flows from Venezuela and Central America.

The Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V)¹⁰³ is comprised of approximately 200 organizations, including 23 diaspora-led organizations. This Platform's regional response to displaced Venezuelans, the largest, internationally displaced population in the region and the second largest in the world,¹⁰⁴ includes country-level and sub-regional humanitarian, protection, and integration efforts across 17 countries.¹⁰⁵ R4V's Inter-Agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM) in Colombia addresses the needs of Venezuelan migrants, refugees, returned people, and host communities at the national and local level.¹⁰⁶ As part of its R4V commitments, Brazil's Operation Welcome offered basic social services assistance, including cash transfers to displaced Venezuelans irrespective of legal status; lifted restrictions on the admission of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in 2021; and facilitated internal relocation, humanitarian support, and other integration efforts.¹⁰⁷ In the past decade, many governments in the region have implemented temporary legal entry and stay arrangements and temporary regularization programs for Venezuelan nationals.¹⁰⁸

Examples of U.S.-Influenced Border Policies in Mexico and Panama

The United States is the predominant regional actor in the deterrence of migration to its borders, often in stark violation of human rights and international law. This section focuses on some aspects of these deterrence policies in Mexico and Panama.

Mexico has been described as a “vertical border” between Central America and the United States because, since the 1990s, it has institutionalized a security-based approach to migration, encouraged by the U.S. government.¹⁰⁹ Immigration enforcement, the militarization of migration controls, and border securitization have led to serious human rights abuses, extortion, kidnappings, and killings by criminal groups, immigration officials, or the Mexican security forces.¹¹⁰

There are two main humanitarian hotspots in Mexico: Tapachula on the Mexico-Guatemala border and various points along the Mexico-U.S. border.¹¹¹ The deterrence policies of the United States¹¹² have pushed migrants of all nationalities back into Mexican border cities, resulting in a humanitarian crisis.¹¹³ Asylum seekers waiting in Mexico have been at significant risk of extortion, kidnapping, sexual violence,¹¹⁴ and death.¹¹⁵ IOM registered 1,728 migrant deaths between 2019 and 2022,¹¹⁶ making the Mexico-U.S. border the most deadly land crossing worldwide.¹¹⁷

Similarly, the Darien Gap, a roadless, rainforest region between Colombia and Panama, poses rampant dangers to people crossing from South America into Central America, involving 93 miles of jungle and high risks of injury and

violent crime.¹¹⁸ More than 134,000 people crossed through this harrowing region in 2021.¹¹⁹ Haitians, Venezuelans, and Cubans¹²⁰ account for the most significant numbers of people crossing the Darien Gap, as well as Africans and South Asians who entered the continent through Brazil, which does not require visas for foreigners from other continents.¹²¹



Photo Credit Jennifer Babaie

Most of the people passing through the Darien Gap are headed toward the United States.¹²² Following a spike in crossings in 2014, Panama instituted a “controlled flow” system with U.S. funding and training to prevent and control migration.¹²³ This system serves as an “early warning” for the United States of the movement of people toward its borders. The lengthy “controlled flow” process results in migrants waiting weeks or months in dire living conditions before proceeding on their journey.¹²⁴

In exchange for funding, equipment, and training from U.S. law enforcement and the U.S. military, Panama shares biometric and biographic data with the United States through a system

called BITMAP, also used by 14 other countries including Mexico.¹²⁵ For those passing through the Darien Gap region, there is little access to information about protection and other legal options in Panama or Costa Rica.¹²⁶

Regional Migration Trends Emerging from IRAP's Focus Areas

In 2021, the most common countries of origin of internationally displaced people in the region were: Venezuela (4,605,634), Colombia (115,792), Guatemala (26,927), Haiti (29,454), Honduras (51,687), El Salvador (52,041), Mexico (16,403), and Cuba (11,534).¹²⁷

Beyond patterns of displacement and migration from within the region, a notable migration trend from outside the region is of African migrants, mostly seeking refuge in the United States who enter Latin America either through Brazil or Ecuador.¹²⁸ While the numbers of African migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean remain a fraction of those in Europe, their numbers in the region have increased significantly in the last decade.¹²⁹

All countries in focus have complex mixed movements and, in some instances, are simultaneously countries of origin, transit, destination, and return. A snapshot of displacement follows.

Principal Countries of Origin among Countries in Focus

Venezuela: Although Venezuela was once a destination country for displaced people seeking refuge, for nearly a decade, Venezuela has produced a massive migration out of the

country, especially since 2016.¹³⁰ As of late 2021, 86 percent of the 5.1 million displaced people in the Americas were Venezuelans who fled the ever-worsening political, socio-economic, and humanitarian crisis in the country.¹³¹ In 2021, more than 1.8 million Venezuelans lived in Colombia, while Peru hosted 797,300 and Ecuador 560,500.¹³² Globally, only Syrians outnumber Venezuelans in terms of international displacement.¹³³ Venezuelans, like Haitians, are sometimes displaced multiple times, moving from South America toward the United States after experiencing discrimination, exploitation, and other rights violations.¹³⁴

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

[Northern Triangle]: Almost 600,000 Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans have fled their countries of origin as refugees or asylum seekers, with an additional 318,000 or more people internally displaced.¹³⁵ A combination of factors drives displacement from this subregion, including governments' inability to protect their citizens from criminal violence and transnational crime,¹³⁶ corruption and impunity, gender-based violence,¹³⁷ violence toward LGBTQIA+ populations,¹³⁸ forced recruitment of children and youth by gangs,¹³⁹ climate-induced displacement,¹⁴⁰ security forces' violence,¹⁴¹ and socio-economic inequality.¹⁴²

Nicaragua: Nearly 200,000 Nicaraguans have sought international protection since 2018.¹⁴³ Most Nicaraguans have sought asylum in Costa Rica, where they represent eight percent of the country's total population,¹⁴⁴ and in Panama.¹⁴⁵ The rise in authoritarianism, mass political persecution, including the crackdown on government opposition, and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are the current drivers of displacement.¹⁴⁶



Photo Credit Peg Hunter

Colombia: Colombia has faced one of the world’s most acute and prolonged internal displacement situations with more than eight million IDPs¹⁴⁷ and 111,600 internationally displaced Colombians, mainly in Ecuador, Venezuela, Chile, Costa Rica, and Panama.¹⁴⁸ The main drivers of forced displacement from Colombia include armed conflict, lack of governmental protection especially in rural and border areas, and natural disasters.¹⁴⁹

Haiti: Almost two million Haitians reside outside of Haiti in the United States, Dominican Republic, and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with significant numbers having been displaced after the 2010 earthquake.¹⁵⁰ Almost 30,000 Haitians were displaced in 2021.¹⁵¹ The deterioration of living conditions in some countries where Haitians initially sought refuge, along with growing anti-Black and anti-immigrant discrimination, have led displaced Haitians to move again toward Mexico and the United States.¹⁵²

In the past decade, forced displacement drivers have included political instability including

the 2021 assassination of the prime minister, pervasive violence,¹⁵³ and natural disasters including the devastating 2021 earthquake.¹⁵⁴ Some countries, like Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, have created temporary legal pathways for Haitian nationals in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake¹⁵⁵ and in 2021.¹⁵⁶

Principal Host Countries in Focus

Colombia: In 2021, Colombia hosted more than 1.8 million displaced people,¹⁵⁷ almost all of whom are Venezuelan, the second highest number of displaced people that any country in the world hosts, following Turkey.¹⁵⁸ In recent years, Colombia’s geographic location as the only land gateway between Central and South America has made it a critical transit point for those moving north by land.¹⁵⁹

Costa Rica: Costa Rica has hosted Nicaraguans in various cycles over more than a century,¹⁶⁰ with the latest cycle commencing around 2018.¹⁶¹ Although Costa Rica’s asylum system has greater capacity than neighboring countries’ systems,¹⁶² it has substantial backlogs and wrestles with increasingly high volumes of asylum filings.¹⁶³ Besides 141,301 displaced Nicaraguans, Costa Rica hosts displaced people from Venezuela (30,546), Colombia (3,852), El Salvador (1,582), Honduras (1,173), Haiti (922), and Guatemala (133).¹⁶⁴

Panama: The largest displaced populations in Panama are from Venezuela (30,546), Nicaragua (5,409), Colombia (3,852), Cuba (1,674), and El Salvador (1,315).¹⁶⁵ The country’s asylum system is very underdeveloped, with more than 15,000 cases pending and a tiny fraction of cases approved.¹⁶⁶

Mexico: Mexico is host to many diverse migrant populations, including from Honduras (105,903), Venezuela (88,976), Haiti (69,877), Guatemala (57,417), El Salvador (57,209), Nicaragua (28,006), Cuba (27,047), and Colombia (6,633),¹⁶⁷ among hundreds of thousands of people from other parts of the world.¹⁶⁸ While significant, in a country of approximately 130 million people, these numbers constitute a very small percentage of the total population.¹⁶⁹

Mexico has a generous international protection system,¹⁷⁰ and it has received significant financial and technical support from UNHCR and the U.S. government in recent years.¹⁷¹ However, public funding and human resources allocated to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) continues to be woefully small¹⁷² considering Mexico's place as the 15th largest economy in the world.¹⁷³

In 2021, for the first time ever, Mexico surpassed 100,000 asylum claims in one year, which represents an increase of 86.8 percent compared to 2019.¹⁷⁴ Its asylum system remains overwhelmed, understaffed, and underfunded, which poses many challenges to processing the increasing volume of asylum claims.¹⁷⁵

Mexican law requires asylum seekers to remain in the state where they requested protection while their claims are processed, with wait times of many months and without due process standards.¹⁷⁶ In Tapachula, Chiapas, on the border with Guatemala, interviewees reported such long wait times in precarious living situations¹⁷⁷ that many asylum seekers choose to continue migrating north instead of waiting.¹⁷⁸

Gaps in Legal and Protection Needs Identified by IRAP's Assessment

Barriers to Accessing Legal Information

Lack of access to legal information, especially multilingual resources and materials in plain language, is a significant legal and protection gap across the region. Virtually all interviewees identified access to accurate and accessible resources for migrants as a high priority. An Ecuadorian NGO lamented that “it’s hard for migrants who are not being served directly by organizations to access information.” In the Darien Gap and surrounding region, legal information is only available upon request, so many people in transit do not receive information regarding the asylum process.

Official legal information is also commonly available only in Spanish or English. Linguistic and cultural minorities, including Indigenous people who have historically relied on teaching and learning through means other than written



Photo Credit MedGlobal Org

texts,¹⁷⁹ face particularly acute barriers to legal information.¹⁸⁰ Despite regional consortiums' and large humanitarian organizations' efforts to develop user-friendly legal information tools including through cell phone application and websites, many barriers remain for people with disabilities, older people, and speakers of languages other than Spanish.

Organizations Providing Legal Information

All grassroots, national NGOs, diaspora-led, and international organizations interviewed provide legal information to displaced people individually, in know-your-rights workshops, or through information campaigns. Grassroots, national NGOs, and international humanitarian organizations are the primary actors fighting misinformation on legal procedures. As one interviewee said, "there's much gossip on migration procedures," and misinformation is common. These organizations have taken the lead on providing updated, actionable information on asylum processes, how to report GBV cases and human rights violations, and access to services as well.

- The [Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights](#) (CMDPDH) provides legal information in know-your-rights workshops and individually in migrant detention centers. In these, CMDPDH



Photo Credit EU/C.Palma

identifies asylum seekers who have been victims of human rights violations and are in need of legal representation.

- The [National Forum for Migration in Honduras](#) (FONAMIH) provides information about human rights processes to returned migrants who were victims of human rights violations.
- Betzabeth Jaramillo from the Venezuelan diaspora-led NGO [Making Friends Foundation](#) (Ibarra) in Ecuador uses Instagram to provide updated information on asylum and legal aid. She created it because "there have been several communication campaigns by international agencies, but there is not enough coordination and integration between them so they do not reach the persons in need of legal assistance."

Barriers to Accessing Legal Representation and Service

Across the region, access to legal with some of the groups with the greatest need for legal representation having the least access to it. Legal

representation is both far more consequential and far less available than legal advice, as the range of legal services available to displaced Venezuelans makes clear.¹⁸¹

NGOs and university-based law clinics provide some legal representation to displaced people



Photo Credit Maren Barbee

in the region, but critical needs remain unmet. Most NGOs interviewed are underfunded and understaffed, which makes providing information in humanitarian hotspots and to hard-to-reach populations, including detained individuals, extremely challenging. The Center for Popular Legal Assistance (CEALP), one of the most well-known NGOs in Panama that provides legal representation to asylum seekers, has only two employees.

Local and Diaspora-Led Responses to Legal Services Needs in the Region

- In Panama, the **Foundation Latin American House** (CASALAT) has provided more than 100,000 consultations to people seeking legal assistance with their immigration status. Most of CASALAT's clients lack the income and knowledge to resolve their migration, labor, and family legal matters without CASALAT's services.
- In Honduras, the women-led pro bono group **The Lawyers Bar** provides free legal representation for migrants in RSD procedures, and those seeking international protection in cases of human rights abuses and human trafficking.

Local and Diaspora-Led Organizations Defending Human Rights of Displaced People

Many interviewees highlighted the need for state actors responsible for migration policy and practices to incorporate a human rights-based approach.¹⁸² To fill this gap, many local NGOs provide anti-discrimination, cultural awareness, and anti-racism training for public migration officials. Numerous organizations interviewed defend human rights and protect the rights of displaced people and those at risk of displacement through various, complementary efforts.

- The [Center for Integration for Migrants and Working Persons](#) (CIMITRA) empowers returned Salvadorans and others living and working in El Salvador with legal tools and knowledge regarding labor rights; provides seed capital to set up home-based businesses; and other projects to support the rights and opportunities of migrants and workers.
- The [Association Communicating and Training Trans Women in El Salvador](#) (COMCAVIS TRANS) was established to protect the human rights and interests of trans women and has expanded to advance the rights of LGBTQIA+ populations as well as populations affected by HIV, among other

groups, with particular attention to people who are displaced or otherwise affected by migration.

- The Indigenous-led [Dignified Life Collective](#) (Colectivo Vida Digna) in Guatemala defends the rights of Mayan Indigenous communities, including returned migrants and people who may be forced to migrate in the future.
- The [Center for Research and Promotion of Human Rights](#) (CIPRODEH) advocates to protect the rule of law, justice, and human rights in Honduras generally and conducts research and advocacy defending the rights of displaced people and migrants, among other topics.
- The [Association of Venezuelans in Guatemala](#) (ASOVEGUA), [ACTIVADOS Panama](#), the Foundation Making Friends Ecuador, the [Association of Venezuelans in El Salvador](#) (ASOVENSAL), and the [Global Venezuela Association in Brazil](#) assist unemployed Venezuelans and those with limited access to dignified employment or livelihoods with emergency cash and longer-term supports.

Inadequate Access to UNHCR-Referred Resettlement

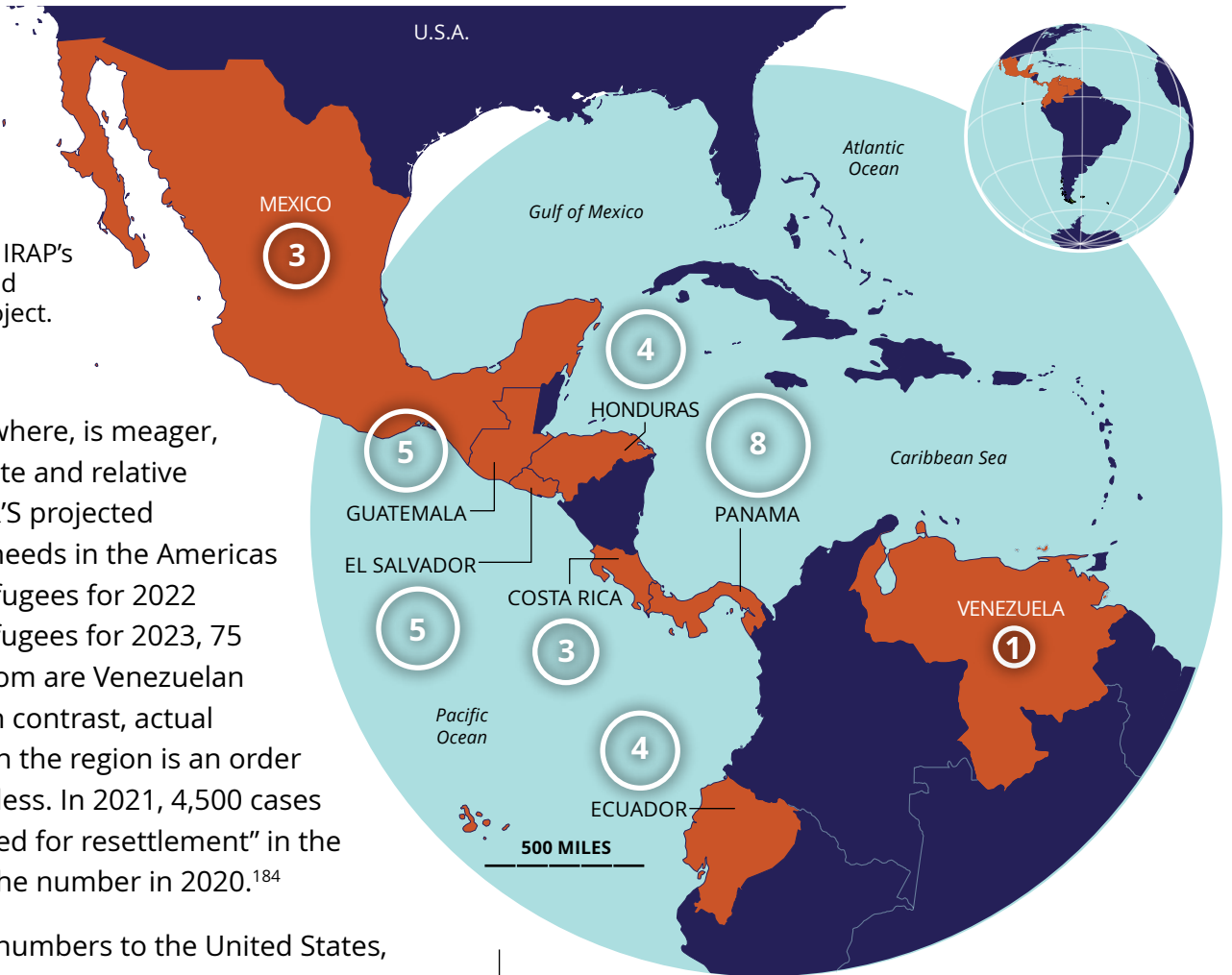
UNHCR resettlement remains an unrealistic pathway for the vast majority of migrants from this region, even those with the most pressing protection needs. The total number of available UNHCR-referred resettlement slots is far below

the actual and projected resettlement needs for the region. The UNHCR-referred resettlement process inadequately protects equitable access to resettlement: those with the greatest protection needs often face the biggest obstacles to accessing the referral system.

The number of people in Latin America and the Caribbean who are resettled, to the United

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Locations of organizations interviewed for IRAP's geographic rapid assessment project.



States or elsewhere, is meager, both in absolute and relative terms. UNHCR'S projected resettlement needs in the Americas was 55,640 refugees for 2022 and 77,000 refugees for 2023, 75 percent of whom are Venezuelan nationals.¹⁸³ In contrast, actual resettlement in the region is an order of magnitude less. In 2021, 4,500 cases “were submitted for resettlement” in the region, twice the number in 2020.¹⁸⁴

Resettlement numbers to the United States, the primary destination for refugees from the region, are also low. For the U.S. fiscal year 2022, the global refugee ceiling for Latin America and the Caribbean was 15,000, only 2,000 of whom were projected to arrive.¹⁸⁵ While the U.S. government has provided financial support for UNHCR staffing to increase certain referrals, including of Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, and Haitians,¹⁸⁶ the results of any investment remain to be seen.

Besides woefully inadequate resettlement slots for the region, the primary challenges with the UNHCR-referred resettlement processes in the region include: lack of access to information and legal services, available but unused slots, discriminatory processes, and lack of sufficient

expedited processing measures for people in need of emergency protection. Expedited RSD procedures are critically needed for children, pregnant people, older people, and people with disabilities. Adequate and dignified reception conditions are lacking for unaccompanied and separated children, women, and LGBTQIA+ people in transit.

Unmet Needs Related to Complementary Pathways

Given the limited track record of traditional refugee resettlement from Latin America and the Caribbean, alternative opportunities for

safe relocation are even more critical. Due to the proximity to the United States, the lack of other such options for displaced people has contributed to the high volume of people who make the dangerous journey north to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Alternative pathways that provide limited relief for some migrants in the region include labor-based pathways,¹⁸⁷ such as Canada's Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot and employment-based pathways in South America, family reunification routes to both the United States and Canada,¹⁸⁸ and various education pathways to other areas in the region, Canada, and the United States.¹⁸⁹

Private sponsorship programs are an important pathway to safety from the region. Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program has resulted in the admission of more than 300,000 refugees in the last 40 years.¹⁹⁰ The United States has vastly expanded private sponsorship recently, mainly with respect to the urgent need for resettlement of Afghans and Ukrainians; building off of those programs, the U.S. Department of State is launching a "private sponsorship pilot program" that will be open to refugees from all countries.¹⁹¹

Complementary pathways from Latin America and Caribbean are severely underutilized and under-resourced with no complementary pathway operating at the scale needed to address displacement in the region. Many private and state actors lack awareness of complementary pathways.¹⁹² Given the significant need and potential for complementary pathways from the region, organizations need access to accurate legal information and capacity-strengthening support to empower displaced people to access the potential of these programs.

Specific Populations with Heightened Protection Needs

Women and Girls at Risk

Despite the existence across the region of rights-protecting national legal frameworks,¹⁹³ gender-based violence, including against the trans community, continues to proliferate.¹⁹⁴ In Mexico, women and girls on the move are particularly at risk of sexual violence, abuse, kidnapping, and trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes.¹⁹⁵ A 2020 Doctors Without Borders (MSF) report found that almost half of women they assisted in Mexico had been abused during their transit.¹⁹⁶ In the Darien Gap, MSF reported treating 396 women for sexual violence between April 2021 to March 2022,¹⁹⁷ and 89 people between January and the first week of May 2022.¹⁹⁸ According to official figures, GBV against displaced Venezuelan women in Colombia increased by 71 percent between 2018 and 2021,¹⁹⁹ and in Peru by 31 percent between 2019 and 2021.²⁰⁰

LGBTQIA+ Populations

Beyond gender-based violence affecting women, girls, and many members of the LGBTQIA+ community, additional legal and protection gaps concern this latter population. Private and state-sanctioned discrimination, exclusion, and persecution are rampant across the region: they are both a driver of displacement and a common form of harm against migrants in transit.²⁰¹

In some locations, such as in large Mexican cities, legal protections based on gender identity

and sexual orientation exist,²⁰² but the level of available services and legal protection varies by state.²⁰³ Likewise, in Costa Rica and Panama, interviewees reported discrimination against trans women in RSD procedures. Ecuador also has promising legal protections, yet in

practice, regularization schemes are very poorly implemented, according to interviewees. As a result, many Venezuelan and Colombian LGBTQIA+ people don't have legal migration status and remain in a situation of heightened social and economic vulnerability.

Local and Diaspora-Led Responses to Address GBV and Serve the LGBTQIA+ Community

Due to the magnitude of GBV and human trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes in all countries in focus, virtually all organizations interviewed serve GBV survivors.

- In Ecuador, the **Ecuadorian Equity Foundation**, defends the human rights of the LGBTQIA+ community through direct social services for survivors of GBV, referrals to legal assistance, and policy advocacy.
- The women-led **Lunita Lunera Foundation** assists GBV and trafficking survivors in the main provinces of transit in Ecuador with a community-based, human rights, feminist, and anti-discrimination approach.
- In El Salvador, **COMCAVIS TRANS** is committed to universal access to HIV prevention and care through communication and training, policy advocacy, and the defense of the human rights of LGBTQIA+ persons.
- The **Institute for Women's Studies** (CEMUJER), a feminist human rights NGO advocating for the rights of women, children, and LGBTQIA+ persons, provides holistic services and legal assistance for GBV survivors who have sought international protection in El Salvador, and Salvadoran women who have fled to other countries.

- **Youth Action Honduras** is a feminist, women-led, LGBTQIA+-led NGO engaged in advocacy and providing psychological and social support, sexual, and reproductive health services as well as referrals to legal services for GBV survivors.
- The **Center for Labor Rights Without Borders of Costa Rica** represents LGBTQIA+ people, especially trans people, in asylum cases.
- **S.O.S. Victims of Colombian Armed Conflict in Panama** (SOVIC) runs a "Collective of Women," a support group for Colombian women, including trans women, who are survivors of GBV. The **International Coalition of Women and Families** (CIMUF), a lesbian feminist NGO, serves the LGBTQIA+ community, their families, and women. Many of their constituents are displaced internationally. CIMUF carries out communication campaigns and workshops to foster a more inclusive Panamanian society.
- The **Regional Safe Spaces Network**, established under UNHCR auspices in 2017, focuses on improving access to services for survivors of SGBV, victims of trafficking, children at risk, and LGBTQIA+ persons.

Anti-Black Racism and Violence Against Haitians

Anti-Black racism, colorism, and other forms of racial discrimination transcend national and migration-specific policies and practices across Latin America and the Caribbean, where almost one in three people are African descendants and where displaced people from approximately 35 African countries²⁰⁵ pass through in transit.²⁰⁶ Afrodescendants experience disproportionate rights violations compared to other populations, excluding Indigenous populations, contributing to their displacement and lack of options for many Black migrants.²⁰⁷

Haitians face particular risks and mistreatment in the region. For example, in Mexico law enforcement and migration authorities have subjected Haitians to racist human rights violations in Tapachula,²⁰⁸ including push-backs into Guatemala.²⁰⁹ Asylum officials and service providers²¹⁰ alike overlook Haitians as potential recipients of international protection.²¹¹ In the United States, from October 2020 through August 2021, U.S. Border Patrol made more than 30,000 apprehensions of Haitians, which marked the most Haitians ever apprehended at the U.S. land border.²¹²

Invisibilization of Indigenous Communities

Between 41 and 53 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean are Indigenous, accounting for eight to 10 percent of the total population, depending on the data source.²¹³ Between 550 and 900 Indigenous languages are spoken in the region, with at least half of those

languages considered endangered in many countries in the region.²¹⁴ The greatest numbers of Indigenous people in the region live in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia.²¹⁵

Because of their historical and ongoing exclusion, Indigenous communities are exposed to some of the most egregious rights violations, possess the least autonomy and authority to protect their rights, and experience compounded forms of violence in their displacement.²¹⁶ Moreover, Indigenous populations are often invisibilized, exacerbating the harms they experience through the lack of attention to them and the fundamental lack of recognition for them as Indigenous people.²¹⁷

It is in this context that displaced Indigenous people experience a severe lack of access to information – at all and in languages that they speak – as well as a lack of access to other services and to formal protection systems.²¹⁸



Photo Credit Cindy Catoni

South and Southeast Asia

Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Thailand



Photo Credit ILO

Regional Context

Legal and Policy Framework

Despite covering a large and varied geography and containing three of the top ten refugee-hosting countries globally (Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran), Asia has the fewest number of signatories to the 1951

Convention and its 1967 Protocol in the world and remains underrepresented in international discussions of refugee responses. None of the six Asian countries in focus is a signatory to these foundational instruments.

In the absence of the adoption of the refugee convention, some advocates have tried to rely on the 1984 Convention against Torture and



Photo Credit EU/ECHO/Mathias Eick

Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment²¹⁹ as a legal foundation for the principle of *non-refoulement*.²²⁰ However, even this fundamental principle is not consistently respected in the region, and there have been numerous recent reports of refugees being forcibly returned to harm in their countries of origin.²²¹

Each of the six countries examined are host to significant numbers of displaced people who are often in precarious situations while they await a longer-term solution to their displacement. Each country falls under the purview of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (UNHCR RBAP), and each has a Country Office (UNHCR CO) mandated to facilitate protection and pursue "durable solutions" for refugees: local integration, voluntary repatriation to country of origin, and resettlement to a third country.²²²

In practice, UNHCR's ability to provide protection varies across country contexts, depending on the political will of the host country. For example, UNHCR is barred in some countries from registering and assisting certain, politically sensitive groups. Access to any of the three

recognized durable solutions is extremely limited in the region.

Historically, Asia has seen large resettlement programs end in success, including the resettlement of over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees from camps in Nepal²²³ and significant resettlement programs after the Vietnam war.²²⁴ In recent years, however, resettlement numbers from the region have been negligible.²²⁵ Today resettlement out of the region is not attainable for the vast majority of refugees due to the limited number of resettlement slots available globally, host country policies barring UNHCR from conducting resettlement processing, resettlement country policy restricting certain groups, and travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Critically, the history of international resettlement from the region has informed national approaches that view refugees as a temporary phenomenon with third country solutions, resulting in a lack of investment in and access to local livelihoods, education, health, and legal protection.²²⁶

At the regional level, no legal or policy frameworks exist for refugee protection in South and Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the most viable avenue for pursuing a regional refugee response framework.²²⁷ However, as an economic union lacking a protection mandate and operating on consensus, progress is slow.

Furthermore, ASEAN is guided by the principle of non-interference, and ASEAN-level responses to date have prioritized security over refugee protection. Yet ASEAN has demonstrated some positive action towards displaced populations

in the past, most notably in response to the devastating 2004 tsunami,²²⁸ and more recently through facilitating an investigation into the viability of return for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.²²⁹ The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is another potential avenue for regional cooperation on refugee issues.²³⁰

Since 2002, the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process) has provided a forum for policy dialogue and practical cooperation relating to migration in the Asia-Pacific region. Jointly chaired by Australia and Indonesia, and counting among its members UNHCR, IOM, and all six countries in focus, the Bali Process has a strong focus on border security, anti-trafficking, and anti-smuggling. It has no protection mandate for refugees, but has incorporated protection principles into its approach periodically, referring to the importance of “protection-sensitive strategies” in managing irregular migration and recognizing that “the principle of non-refoulement should be strictly respected” in a 2016 declaration.²³¹

Geopolitical dynamics have a significant influence on refugee protection in the region. States often prioritize their relationship with neighboring governments over respect for refugee rights.

In contravention of the principle of *non-refoulement*, China exerts heavy pressure on its regional neighbors to return exiled Uyghurs who seek international protection. Regional governments do not even report basic information on displaced Uyghurs, nor do UNHCR COs publicly acknowledge their presence. Consequently, Uyghurs face some of the most acute protection risks in the region,



Photo Credit IHH Humanitarian Relief Fund

and face significant barriers to accessing international protection.

Similar politics shape refugee protection of displaced Rohingya people. The Thai government forcibly returns refugees crossing the Thailand-Myanmar border. Rohingya people, among other groups, cannot register with UNHCR.

The absence of comprehensive regional and national frameworks has led to state-level responses that are *ad hoc* and reactive, resulting in uneven protection and increased risks for refugees across the region. In many instances, untenable local conditions such as Cox’s Bazar camps in Bangladesh motivate dangerous onward journeys via land and sea.²³² National solutions remain focused on third country resettlement or voluntary return, which are often non-viable options.

The legal and policy context for each country is briefly summarized on the next page.

At the national level, none of the six Asian countries in focus maintains a comprehensive legislative framework relating to refugees.

Bangladesh: Pathways for Rohingya out of Bangladesh are extremely limited. The Bangladeshi government ended its UNHCR-facilitated third country resettlement program in 2010²³³ “out of fear [the country] would become a hub for refugees seeking to move to the West.”²³⁴ Currently, the government’s official position is only to support voluntary repatriation. Despite several failed attempts at repatriation between 2018 and 2021, the 2022 Joint Response Plan (JRP), a Bangladeshi government-led framework for humanitarian response, focuses on repatriation to Myanmar and does not refer to resettlement at all.²³⁵ Reportedly, the United Kingdom has been asked to resettle 100,000 refugees from Bangladesh, indicating that Bangladesh’s position may be shifting.²³⁶

India: Under the Modi government the protection space for refugees as well as freedom of civil society have seriously deteriorated.²³⁷ There is a general hostility toward INGOs and what is construed as “foreign interference.” Refugees are not recognized and “do not exist” under Indian law. Directing resources towards them is frowned upon and perceived as diverting funds away from local needs.

In 2019, the Indian government passed the discriminatory Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), which, for the first time in India, makes religion a basis for citizenship. The law specifically fast-tracks asylum claims of non-Muslim irregular immigrants from neighboring Muslim-majority countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.²³⁸ This

law disenfranchises the Rohingya population from protection and fuels hostility from the local population towards Muslim refugees.

Indonesia: Although Indonesia’s Constitution guarantees “the right to obtain political asylum from another country,” this provision has not translated to a comprehensive legal framework for refugee protection.²³⁹ The 2016 Presidential Decree Concerning the Handling of Foreign Refugees in Indonesia, passed in the wake of the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis, sets out processes for refugee reception, shelter, and safeguarding.²⁴⁰ However, the Decree only addresses emergency maritime situations and is mainly symbolic with limited implementation.²⁴¹

While previously identified as a key transit country, advocates in the region have pushed back against this narrative because the Indonesian government uses it to justify a lack of investment in local support and solutions. In reality, displaced people remain in Indonesia for prolonged periods, in situations of “indefinite transit.”²⁴²

Australia’s policy since 2013 under Operation Sovereign Borders is largely responsible for this situation. The policy entails push-backs of boats and denial of any permanent protection in Australia for those arriving by boat, with many being sent to offshore regional processing centers in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Australia also effectively bars people who arrive by boat from bringing family to join them under family reunification pathways.²⁴³ Further, Australia announced in 2014 that any person who has registered their status as a refugee in Indonesia will never be allowed to resettle into Australia, despite strong community and family links among Hazara refugees in Indonesia



Photo Credit EU/Peter Biro

and Australia.²⁴⁴ In recent years, onward travel from Indonesia primarily consists of Rohingya attempting to travel to Malaysia by boat.²⁴⁵

Malaysia: In 2018 the government committed to signing the 1951 Convention,²⁴⁶ though it has not yet occurred. The country maintains large numbers of refugees without the threat of mass expulsion. In 2019, the Malaysian government reportedly negotiated with UNHCR regarding RSD processes. The Home Minister stated that the National Security Council was working on a comprehensive framework for asylum seekers and people with UNHCR cards.²⁴⁷

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a public backlash against refugees and a vocal opposition to progressive policy.²⁴⁸ There has been an increase in detention and *refoulement*.

Refugees have no formal right to work and limited access to healthcare and education. The environment for refugee-serving organizations is reportedly growing more hostile. UNHCR no longer has access to detention centers, where large numbers of Rohingya refugees are detained.

Pakistan: In mid-2022, the Pakistani government reportedly ordered UNHCR to temporarily stop conducting both RSD and resettlement processing. NGOs have reported pressure from the government to scale down, with some being forced to close. In recent years, very few people have been resettled from Pakistan. During 2021 and 2022, only 19 departures were recorded, to destination countries of the United States, Australia, Finland, and Canada.

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), a 2012 regional framework drafted by Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, with UNHCR's support, is built on three pillars: voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan, and continued aid to host communities. It does not have a focus on third country resettlement as a solution.²⁴⁹

Thailand: Responding to a pledge made at the 2016 Leaders Summit on Refugees in New York, Thailand has committed to screen migrants for protection concerns.²⁵⁰ UNHCR is currently responsible for refugee status determination in Thailand, however, this role will likely transfer to the Thai government under the proposed national screening mechanism (NSM) for identifying and protecting noncitizens who may face persecution if returned. Advocates have raised concerns about the NSM's compliance with international law.²⁵¹

Durable solutions for both camp and urban refugees are limited. Thailand does not support local integration. The government has supported voluntary repatriation of refugees from Myanmar in recent years, although such repatriation after the 2021 coup is not realistic. Third country resettlement remains the only possible solution for most of Thailand's refugees, although resettlement submissions account for less than one percent of the refugee population in the country.²⁵²

Regional Migration Trends Emerging from IRAP's Focus Areas

In 2021, there were approximately 4.4 million refugees and asylum-seekers in the Asia Pacific region.²⁵³ In contrast, there were only 4,855

resettlement submissions and 2,419 resettlement departures from host countries in 2021, while 978 additional people departed with UNHCR assistance to third countries via complementary pathways. Projected resettlement needs for the Asia Pacific region for 2023 are 115,133 cases (or 383,010 individuals).²⁵⁴

Actual numbers of refugees in the region are significantly higher than reported because of the failure to register or count entire populations. For example, in Thailand, UNHCR does not register Rohingyas, Uyghurs, North Koreans, or ethnic minorities and political dissidents from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. In India, UNHCR does not have access to significant numbers of ethnic Chin refugees who have crossed the border from Myanmar.

Migration Trends by Country of Origin

The major refugee movements in South and Southeast Asia are primarily driven by complex crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar. China is also a significant source country, however data on the profiles and locations of those fleeing China, including Uyghurs and political dissidents, is difficult to confirm.

Urban centers in the three Southeast Asian focus countries are characterized by diverse populations of urban refugees.

- **Indonesia** hosts around 13,000 refugees, more than half of whom are Afghan, primarily Hazara (7,251), as well as people from Somalia, Myanmar, Iraq, Sudan, and elsewhere.²⁵⁵
- **Malaysia** hosts around 186,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, approximately 85 percent of whom are from Myanmar, including around

105,000 Rohingya. The remaining refugees in Malaysia are from 50 other countries, including Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, and Somalia.²⁵⁶

- **Thailand** hosts over 90,000 refugees from Myanmar and around 5,000 urban refugees primarily in and around Bangkok from over 51 countries.²⁵⁷

Refugees Fleeing Afghanistan: Decades of conflict have produced several waves of displacement from Afghanistan, most recently after the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2021. Pakistan is the largest country of asylum for Afghans, hosting 1.5 million Afghans.²⁵⁸ Between January 2021 and June 2022, more than 178,240 Afghans fled into Pakistan.²⁵⁹

Refugees in Pakistan are subject to a complex system of documentation. Around 1.4 million Afghans are registered with UNHCR and hold Proof of Registration cards. The Pakistani government has issued Afghan Citizen Cards to around 800,000 Afghans who fall within the exclusive mandate of the Pakistani government, as opposed to IOM or UNHCR. An additional 500,000 to 800,000 undocumented Afghans reside under IOM’s mandate, including many “new arrivals,” including Hazara and other ethnic minorities, professionals, and former government officials.

Anyone without a Proof of Registration or Afghan Citizen Card is considered “undocumented” and is subject to detention and deportation under the Foreigners Act of 1946.²⁶⁰ It is unclear how Pakistan will treat “new arrivals” going forward, specifically whether it will issue documentation or afford legal status for these refugees to remain in Pakistan.

The Afghanistan situation presents a unique dynamic of two-way migration of a single population, as large numbers of displaced Afghans are now returning to Afghanistan while others continue to flee the country to Pakistan and other bordering countries. The Commissioner for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province described this dynamic as follows: “Long-term residents of the camps in Pakistan are mostly sympathizers of the new Taliban regime. A refugee leader who was in Pakistan for 42 years is now the new Minister for Refugees in Afghanistan. The former Minister for Refugees in Afghanistan is now a refugee. Those who were in power are now taking refuge, and those who were refugees are now back in Afghanistan in government.”



Photo Credit UN/Kibae Park

Within the Asia Pacific region, Iran, India, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia also host significant numbers of Afghan refugees. UNHCR is charged with managing this population in all neighboring countries where they lack legal protections.

Refugees Fleeing Myanmar: UNHCR estimates that there are 2.4 million “persons of concern” from Myanmar, including internally displaced people and those who have crossed international borders to seek asylum. Approximately two-thirds of this population of concern are stateless Rohingya.²⁶¹

The drivers of displacement in Myanmar are complex and the result of decades of internal armed conflict between the country’s many ethnic minority groups fighting for self-determination and the government’s Tatmadaw armed forces. Most recently, mass protests and a civil disobedience movement followed the military coup d’état overthrowing Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy civilian government on February 1, 2021.²⁶² The military junta then commenced a violent crackdown²⁶³ and there has been an escalation in armed conflict across the country since then, displacing tens of thousands of people.²⁶⁴ Cumulatively, 30,700 people from Myanmar fled to neighboring Thailand and India in 2021.²⁶⁵

Along the **Thai/Myanmar border**, Thailand has hosted nearly 100,000 Karen, Karenni, and other Myanmar ethnic minority populations in nine, “temporary” camps along its northwest border for more than 35 years.²⁶⁶ Thailand does not permit these populations to access national services, such as education and healthcare, and does not authorize their free movement.

Few options exist for durable solutions. Since the 2021 coup d’état, the Thai government reportedly has blocked access for new refugees and pushed people back to Myanmar territory.²⁶⁷ Some refugees have managed to cross the border into Thailand and are in hiding, facing serious protection risks including *refoulement*.

Thailand has not permitted UNHCR access to newly arrived refugees.

An emerging displacement situation is developing in India’s Northeastern states of Mizoram and Manipur, on the **India/Myanmar border**, as well as Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Since the coup in Myanmar, more than 22,000 refugees have crossed the border from Myanmar into India.²⁶⁸ Most are Chin, a minority ethnic group that shares cultural links with the Mizos of Mizoram and previously displaced Chin refugee populations in India.²⁶⁹

Chin people have historically faced persecution in Myanmar due to minority religious status and have sought protection across South and Southeast Asia. While UNHCR has previously pressed to implement cessation of refugee status for this population, those efforts were met with great outcry, particularly regarding the lack of “fundamental and enduring changes” required in Myanmar to enable safe return.²⁷⁰ The Chin Refugee Committee in Delhi noted that “it is a very difficult time” for Chin refugees in India, the majority of whom hold temporary “under consideration certificates,” which do not allow access to basic rights or livelihood. UNHCR registers only those refugees who make it to Delhi and has no access to the Northeast.

The Rohingya people are a Muslim ethnic minority in Myanmar primarily from Rakhine State, bordering Bangladesh, who have faced decades of repression, violence, and persecution, including being effectively stripped of citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law. In 2013, anti-Muslim riots and calls for the expulsion of all Muslims from Myanmar led to escalating violence against Rohingya.



Photo Credit ILO/Mongkon Duangkiew

Violence against Rohingya escalated in 2017, following attacks on Burmese border authorities by Rohingya armed groups. The brutal and disproportionate response of the Tatmadaw, involving indiscriminate killing and the razing of villages to the ground, was “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing,” according to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.²⁷¹ Over 700,000 Rohingya people fled across the border into Bangladesh in 2017, joining hundreds of thousands who had already sought refuge in previous years. Since the 2021 coup, conditions in Rakhine State have continued to deteriorate under military rule.²⁷²

The Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh is the largest stateless population in the world, inhabiting the largest refugee camp in the world, Kutupalong, in Cox’s Bazar.²⁷³ Close to a million refugees, nearly half of whom are children, inhabit more than 30 overcrowded camps in

eastern Bangladesh. They are fenced in behind barbed wire, subjected to recurring devastating fires, generalized crime, and a significant lack of livelihood, education, and medical support.²⁷⁴

Bangladesh has responded to increasing numbers of Rohingya refugees through controversial warehousing plans, including the relocation of Rohingya to a remote, cyclone-prone island in the bay of Bengal, Bhasan Char, thereby cutting off freedom of movement, family reunification, and NGO access.²⁷⁵

Bangladesh ranks near the top of the list of countries most at risk of climate devastation, as its low-lying delta geography makes it highly vulnerable to sea-level rise, salinization, cyclones, and floods. Climate change is already impacting displaced Rohingya in Cox’s Bazar, making a precarious situation even more difficult and unsafe.²⁷⁶

Given the conditions in Bangladesh, many Rohingya have moved on to Malaysia, Thailand, India, Indonesia, and Nepal.²⁷⁷ Refugees are using overland routes increasingly, although some are still attempting perilous journeys via sea to other countries in the region.²⁷⁸ While neighboring states have shown very limited commitment to protection of refugees at sea, civil society and local communities have often stepped in, engaging in rescue, and providing support. This has been most notable in Aceh, where traditional law and local custom require fishermen to rescue those who are in distress at sea.²⁷⁹ Following the deaths of 17 Rohingya off the Myanmar coast in May 2022, UNHCR has warned that a failure to act to address root causes of these journeys, and a lack of

regional cooperation to ensure safety of those at sea, “will continue to lead to tragic and fatal consequences.”²⁸⁰

Maritime movement of refugees in the **Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea, and Indian Ocean** is common. In 2015, around 8,000 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants were stranded in the Andaman Sea Crisis after smugglers abandoned them. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand responded with a dangerous stand-off, refusing access to their territories. Thousands attempted perilous boat journeys at the hands of smugglers, despite a devastating fatality rate far higher than that of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea.²⁸¹



Photo Credit ILO/Pichit Phromkade

Gaps in Legal and Protection Needs Identified by IRAP's Assessment

Regional Advocacy and Cooperation - Refugee-Led Initiatives and Civil Society

Effective regional civil society cooperation has emerged as well as strong refugee-led advocacy movements. RLIs are driving localized, innovative, and ground-up responses, despite limited support from national and international actors.

The Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) (a network of RLIs) and the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) (a network of civil society actors) are key actors that have provided platforms for joint regional and international advocacy. RLIs and civil society are pushing this work forward in the context of xenophobic nationalist rhetoric, host community apathy, and shrinking civil society spaces across the region.

- APNOR has established the [Refugee Leadership Alliance](#), a groundbreaking initiative that seeks to “transform the aid sector” by facilitating RLO-to-RLO funding and providing capacity strengthening support for refugee leaders, with a focus on women’s leadership.
- At the civil society level, consortia of NGOs, individuals, and others have collaborated through [APRRN working groups](#) on refugee leadership and participation and

on regional protection matters to devise and actualize regional and international protection strategies through fora such as the Global Compact on Refugees’ 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

Lack of Access to Basic Rights in Host Countries

A key issue for displaced populations is a lack of legal status and resulting limited access to fundamental rights, including the right to work, education, and medical care. Refugees have no legal right to work in Indonesia, Malaysia, or Thailand, resulting in economic insecurity that is compounded by xenophobia and exploitation.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, access to education is limited. Despite an “education for all” policy in Thailand, refugees face challenges accessing education without language skills or risk-free mobility. Refugees in Bangkok often do not have enough money to pay for housing or healthcare and are not entitled to subsidized public healthcare.

Lack of documentation and legal status lead to exploitation in the informal labor market. In Bangladesh and Thailand, camp refugees face prolonged encampment and restrictions on movement. In Pakistan, the Society for Human Rights and Prisoners’ Aid (SHARP) stated that, “new arrivals [from Afghanistan] have been denied health services and housing due to lack of documentation.” In India, lack of documentation and legal status also impedes access to basic needs, including even telephone SIM cards.

Efforts of RLIs and Grassroots Organizations to Address Unmet Needs in Host Countries

A strong, grassroots, refugee-led movement has emerged across the region in recent years. In Indonesia alone, more than 11 RLIs have been established, including: six educational learning centers, a refugee information center, a community center, a karate club, a refugee network, and a women's support group. Many more examples are evident across the six focus countries in Asia.

- Responding to protection issues faced by stateless Rohingya without documentation, the [Rohingya Society in Malaysia](#) (RSM) provides membership cards to refugees to identify them as part of the Rohingya community and assist them in accessing services. RSM says the cards help clients who are illiterate and unable to explain themselves. Clients often use it at hospitals or other governmental institutions where they need to share their names and personal information without being able to write or read.
- [The Rohingya Project](#) is a grassroots organization developing a digital inclusion platform and exploring the use of blockchain technology to facilitate access to proof of identity, online health and education services, and financial inclusion for Rohingya communities.
- Responding to barriers to education, there have been numerous refugee-led schools and learning centers established across Southeast Asia, including [Cisarua Refugee](#)

[Learning Centre](#), [Roshan Learning Centre](#), and [Refugee Learning Centre](#) in Indonesia. These centers often become community hubs, providing spaces for connection and empowerment beyond their original educational focus.

- Responding to unmet medical needs and barriers to accessing physical and mental healthcare, [Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Centre](#) (RAIC) in Indonesia has established eye clinics, a dental care program, and a mental health program, "Cope," which provides self-guided, psychosocial support for the refugee community. RAIC also advocated strongly for access to COVID-19 vaccinations for the refugee community, who were reportedly the very last group in Indonesia to be vaccinated.
- RLIs reported challenges including a lack of funding and barriers to formal registration as organizations.²⁸² [The Sisterhood Community Center, Jakarta](#) works with around 400 refugee women in its community centers in Indonesia and reported that because they cannot register as a legal entity, they have trouble applying for grants and accessing funding. RAIC has managed to register as a foundation under Indonesian law. Despite formal registration, RAIC also reports challenges in accessing funding, due to the various complex requirements for the funding of NGOs in various donor countries including the United States and Australia.

"...Refugee-led organizations are the only hope for us."

— The Sisterhood Community Center, Jakarta, Indonesia

Arbitrary Detention and Detention Conditions

The risk of arbitrary detention in inhumane conditions is a major legal protection risk across the region. Access to detention centers became even more restrictive during the COVID-19 pandemic, impeding access to basic needs and contact with family. Rohingya, North Koreans, and Uyghurs face particular risk of prolonged and indefinite detention. Information about and access to these groups in custody is extremely limited.

In Pakistan, interviewees highlighted the detention of refugees as a major issue, especially for ethnic minority groups. In Malaysia, refugees face a constant threat of arrest and detention, even for those with UNHCR documentation.²⁸³ UNHCR previously had permission to enter immigration detention centers to screen for people with protection needs but has had no access since August 2019.²⁸⁴ The national human rights institution has documented conditions of detention that violate international minimum standards.

In Thailand, registered refugees are at risk of arbitrary detention in very poor conditions if they do not have a valid visa.²⁸⁵ Access for people in detention to legal assistance and other support is severely restricted and conditions are inhumane including overcrowded cells and insufficient food and healthcare.

Unmet Needs Related to UNHCR Processes

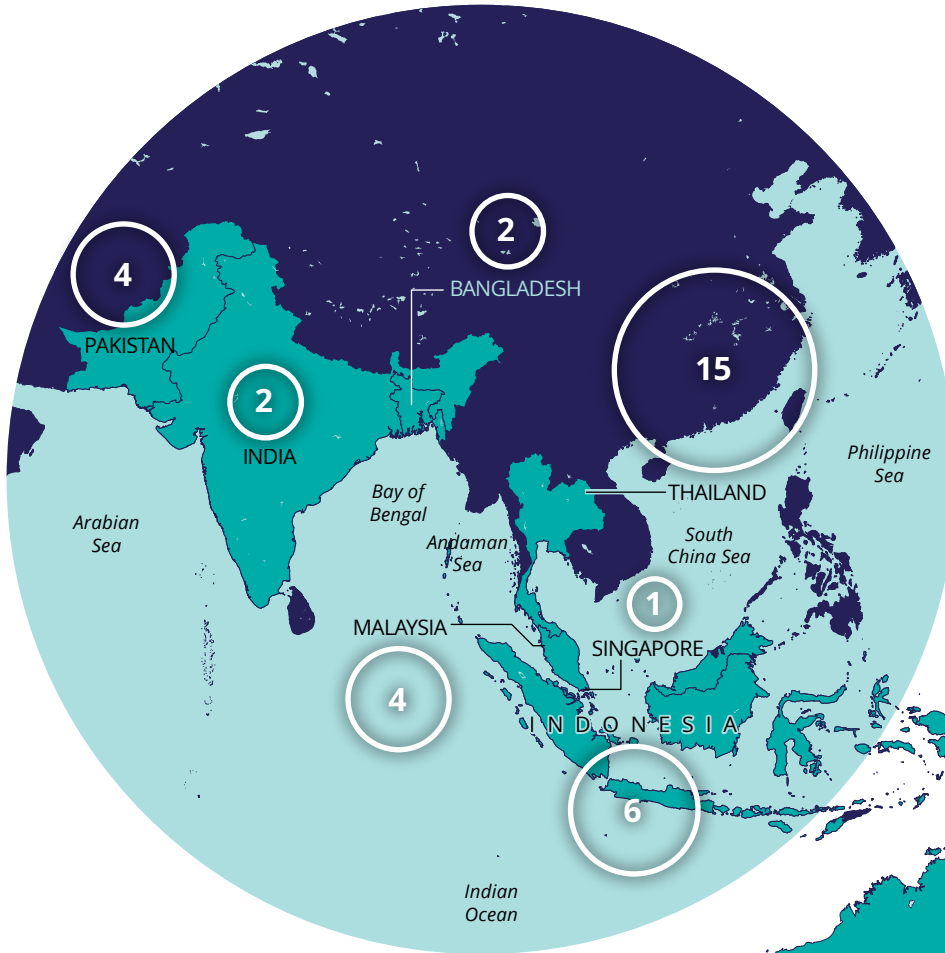
Interviewees reported numerous problems in relation to access to and information about

UNHCR processes. Interviewees also reported concerns about a lack of consultation and accountability in resettlement processes.

As noted, UNHCR is barred from even registering certain groups due to political sensitivities and host country relationships with refugee countries of origin.²⁸⁶ In Thailand, UNHCR data notably omit Rohingya and Uyghur populations because UNHCR does not have a mandate to process or recognize them. As a result, these groups have no access to UNHCR resettlement pathways. In India, UNHCR will not register refugees unless they travel to Delhi, and even there, processing delays have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a 65 percent drop in resettlement departures from India in 2021.²⁸⁷ UNHCR in India also does not have a mandate to conduct RSD for Rohingya, who instead must go through an enhanced registration process. As noted above, UNHCR does not currently have access to the new influx of Chin refugees arriving from Myanmar into India's northeastern states.

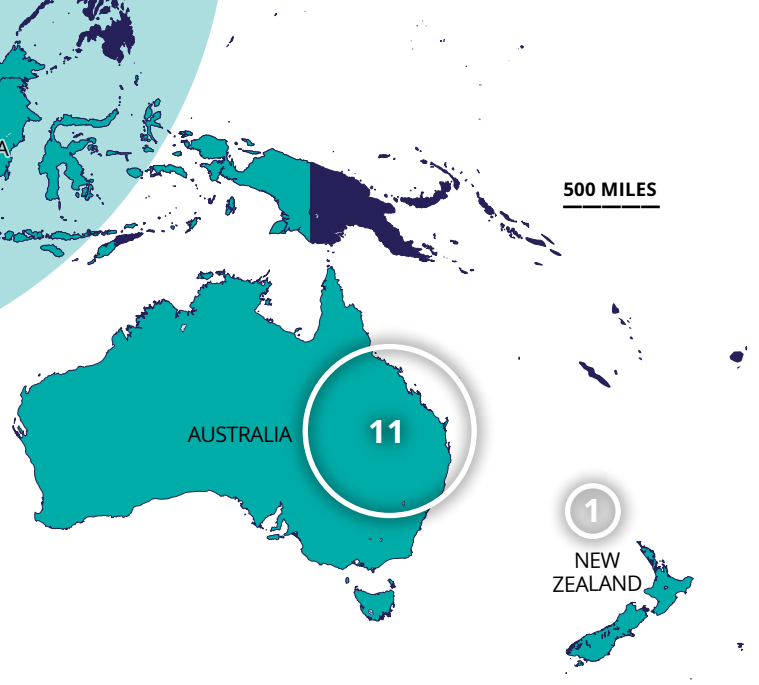
In Indonesia, mental health and suicide among refugees stuck in the country for prolonged periods without the right to work is of great concern to advocates. Australia's discriminatory resettlement policies, which closed off UNHCR resettlement pathways for many refugees there, has fueled this dire situation.

Interviewees in Malaysia viewed UNHCR resettlement processes as "opaque" with limited access. Analysis of resettlement data from 2018 to 2020 show there were on average 2,000 annual submissions for resettlement from Malaysia, which constituted roughly 25 percent of the actual need for resettlement.²⁸⁸ The Malaysia Hub at the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees in 2019 explained: "We wanted



SOUTH ASIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Locations of organizations interviewed for IRAP's geographic rapid assessment project.



to bring up the issue of having difficulty in communicating with UNHCR, where most of the refugee communities are feeling that we are not included in the decision-making process. We really would like to ask UNHCR to include community-based organizations and for community-based organizations to be a part of the decision-making process."²⁸⁹



Photo Credit ILO/Mongkon Duangkiew

Unmet Needs Related to Complementary Pathways

In Indonesia, lack of UNHCR resettlement pathways has left what one interviewee described as “a palpable sense of hopelessness.” Almost all interviewees in Southeast Asia identified a clear need for information and legal assistance about complementary pathways.

“If refugees have more information on resettlement options they can strategize their own efforts.”

— Suaka, Jakarta, Indonesia

The Rohingya Society in Malaysia confirmed that, “access to information is very much needed.” Interviewees in Thailand noted that some refugees were stuck in limbo for 10 years. Family reunification was mentioned as a “big gap” in terms of information and assistance. Center for Asylum Protection highlighted clients with family ties abroad but without access to information about these programs for which they might be eligible.

“There could be a pool of refugees here who may be able to leave the country through complementary pathways but don’t have the capacity or legal expertise to identify how to get a visa or other protection.”

— Center for Asylum Protection,
Bangkok, Thailand

In India, it was reported that the few refugees who are able to access complementary pathways face challenges obtaining exit permits, with reports of the Home Ministry inappropriately requiring refugees to approach their embassies for documentation before granting a permit. SHARP-Pakistan noted, “There is a need for the international community to bring flexibility to their visa regimes. There are students here who are capable and educated and want to go to study and work elsewhere. There is a need for flexibility in pathways to explore more opportunities based on the unique skills that refugees have.”

International and regional bodies also highlighted a need for access to information and legal

Efforts of RLIs to Address the Lack of Access to Complementary Pathways

Given the lack of other pathways, refugee communities in Indonesia are proactively coordinating their own strategies around complementary pathways where possible. [Cisarua Learning](#) reports that they have supported between 50 and 100 humanitarian visa applications to Australia, Canada, and the United States as well as facilitating Canadian sponsorship of over 100 individuals. Cisarua Learning and other RLIs are advocating for increased transparency of UNHCR processes and increased resettlement places from the Australian, U.S., New Zealand, and Canadian governments. Cisarua Learning is exploring how people from their community might be able to access labor mobility pathways as well.

[RAIC](#) provides legal assistance for complementary pathways and has supported 19 applications for Canadian private sponsorship. UNHCR Indonesia reported efforts with RLI [Roshan Learning Centre](#) to facilitate the departure of two Afghan refugees in 2021 on education pathways to Lithuania. RLIs in Indonesia have pursued education pathways through offering training for the General Education Diploma (GED) offered by the United States. The success of this initiative has led a consortium of national NGOs to formally propose that the Indonesian government undertake a broader refugee GED qualification initiative.

assistance about complementary pathways and the clear lack of legal assistance in this space.

Specific Populations with Heightened Protection Needs

Uyghurs

Uyghurs are a Turkic ethnic and religious minority from the Xinjiang region in Northwest China against whom the Chinese government is carrying out genocide.²⁹³ Chinese influence in the region constrains humanitarian and human rights actors from assisting the Uyghur population.²⁹⁴ There have been recent concerns about Beijing “stepping up its efforts to retrieve” Uyghurs who have fled, which would constitute refoulement if the host countries permit it.²⁹⁵ Physical and digital surveillance of organizations and individuals involved in protecting the rights of Uyghurs is a very real risk. As a result, the Uyghur population in exile is among the populations with the greatest needs and is among the most challenging to engage around protection issues.²⁹⁶

Rohingya

The Rohingya have faced decades of genocidal repression and denial of citizenship in Myanmar and are the largest stateless population in the world. All states hosting Rohingya refugees focus only on voluntary repatriation, despite deteriorating conditions in Myanmar today.

Access to resettlement and other complementary pathways is extremely limited for this population, both for political and path-dependent reasons. Historically low levels of resettlement in the Rohingya community

limits the number of family ties abroad making family reunification options uncommon. The widespread exclusion of Rohingya from formal education and skills training in Myanmar and Bangladesh effectively precludes their access to most labor and education complementary pathways.

In Bangladesh, encamped Rohingya do not have freedom of movement, the right to work or consistent access to primary education, resulting in a high likelihood of abuse including labor exploitation and trafficking.

In the face of onward movement of Rohingya from Bangladesh, regional states have responded with various restrictions, including blocking the disembarkation of Rohingya boats²⁹⁷ and the immediate detention of Rohingya arrivals.²⁹⁸ Malaysia has blocked access to Rohingya populations in detention, even for UNHCR.²⁹⁹ Thailand has denied hosting or recognizing any Rohingya people, preventing UNHCR from even registering them.³⁰⁰ Despite being one of the largest groups of displaced people in the region, the Rohingya are among those with the least options for movement to safety.

Human Rights Defenders and Political Dissidents Fleeing Myanmar

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, human rights defenders and political dissidents across the country were targeted in a brutal crackdown, forcing many to flee to neighboring countries.³⁰¹ By July 2021, approximately 16,000 people had crossed into India’s Northeast border states, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Access to resettlement or other pathways is difficult, given the political

sensitivities and the close relationships between refugee host nations and the neighboring Myanmar junta.

There are several refugee-led initiatives providing humanitarian assistance in the Northeast, including ethnic Karen groups and the Chin Human Rights Organization. In Thailand, it is estimated that this population may swell to 10,000 by the end of 2022. Many remain in hiding, and face heightened protection risks, including risk of *refoulement*.³⁰²

The situation is dire for those facing return to Myanmar. In July 2022, the military junta carried out the first death sentences in Myanmar in more than thirty years, executing four men, including an activist and an opposition law-maker, following politically motivated, unjust military trials that failed to meet basic international judicial standards.³⁰³

Illiterate and Minority Language Groups

Refugee populations in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand that do not read or write face additional challenges in accessing legal information, assistance, and other support services as well as challenges accessing and engaging in UNHCR processes. In Bangladesh, most Rohingya cannot read and write. Even for those with basic literacy levels, mobile phones are not allowed in the Cox's Bazar camps. Access to online information is difficult due to network connectivity issues.

In Indonesia, the Sisterhood Community Center, Jakarta estimates that 95 percent of around 2,000 refugee women in Jakarta are “illiterate, even in their own languages,” stating, “illiteracy is the biggest issue” in relation to

accessing information and services, pathways to protection, and being able to sustain themselves. In Thailand, interviewees identified low levels of education and illiteracy as the biggest issue for many ethnic minority refugees displaced from neighboring countries.

“Different groups of people have different levels of access. People who speak English have connections with other groups. Christians seem to have more support from people from church. People who don’t speak English or Thai can’t get as much support. Non-religious people don’t get as much support. Also, educational background could be a barrier. We see some people who don’t know what to do or how to talk to us.”

— Refugee Rights Litigation Project, Bangkok, Thailand

Minority language groups, in particular ethnic minority and hilltribe groups from Southeast Asia such as Hmong and Montagnard, also face particular challenges. In Thailand, it was reported that a group of around 200 hilltribe people from Vietnam were unable to access UN documentation for months due to a lack of interpretation, and as a result were also not able to access legal representation and healthcare.



Photo Credit ILO/Pichit Phromkade

Efforts of RLIs and Local Organizations to Support Populations in Need

In Indonesia, [The Sisterhood Community Center, Jakarta](#), provides education and livelihood skills for refugee women. They have established a community center to provide a safe space, where refugee children can play while refugee women study. Founder Nimo Adam Ahmed said, “There is a group of single mothers. They have three main problems: they are abused, they are illiterate, and they cannot support their children. They don’t know how to even access child-care. We try to give those women more support, because if you save that mother, you save her 5 kids as well.”

In Malaysia, [Tenaganita](#) noted the challenges faced in providing information to communities, saying, “we try to disperse more information, and Facebook has been a good platform. But even then, how do we reach out to those who are not tech savvy and are not being recognized by algorithms? How do we

get information into the hands of refugees who are not browsing online? How do we reach them?”

In Thailand, the [Refugee Rights Litigation Project](#) (RRLP) is working with illiterate ethnic minority groups from Vietnam and Cambodia. RRLP underscores that language ability affects access to services and highlighted digital literacy and access, stating, “some big families may have only one phone, and the father will work outside of Bangkok for weeks. No legal status means no work, means no money for good phone access. We are a legal aid organization and we try to get people to contact us for legal issues, but it doesn’t tend to work that way.... What works is going to the community with an interpreter and explaining in person. Online outreach may work in some communities but not in all.”

Women and Girls at Risk

Across the region, there is a lack of appropriate intervention and support services for women and girls who are at risk of or who have experienced GBV.

In Bangladesh, interviewees commented on the conservative nature of the Rohingya community. Interviewees explained that in Cox’s Bazar, women and girls are often “cut off from the outside world” with no access to services, information, or education. Without culturally

appropriate programming to reach these women and girls, they face heightened protection risks.

In Malaysia, Tenaganita reported, “for women and girls, sexual harassment and assault is common. Even when a woman says her husband beats her, it is hard to get access to justice....A lot of migrants and locals know this and prey on refugee girls for sexual crimes.” Tenaganita also referred to “shaming and cultural connotations” that inhibit women from speaking out and seeking support.

In Indonesia, Suaka has identified refugee

survivors of GBV as a particularly at-risk group, stating “they have limitations to move in Indonesia and cannot go to another country. For domestic violence cases, they do not have many options to move to a safe space.”

Efforts of RLIs to Support Women and Girls

In Indonesia, [The Sisterhood Community Center, Jakarta](#), aims to provide a safe space for refugee women. Yet the Center states, “Sisterhood isn’t a shelter. We can’t provide security when women speak out. So a lack of adequate services and attention is a big issue. UNHCR provides workshops and information, but does not provide adequate services... when women do step forward, there is no real support for them...”

They noted that in many instances, women are unable to access the courts, police, or lawyers. As a result, Sisterhood started providing “know your rights” training in 2021. They see the workshops as representing “the power of sisterhood,” while emphasizing the limitations: “Women need to know their rights, but there needs to be appropriate services to access too.”

LGBTQIA+ Populations

Interviewees reported identification of and access to services for LGBTQIA+ refugees as a “very big barrier,” especially in Muslim countries in the region (Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh). Many LGBTQIA+ people in these contexts do not openly identify that way and in

turn, that can make their refugee claims harder to win and make access to protection more challenging.

People with Disabilities

Displaced people with disabilities of all types, including many older people, face particular hurdles to rights protection. Interviewees reported that in Malaysia, “folks with disabilities are not in the conversation at all.” In Bangladesh, it was reported that people with disabilities in Cox’s Bazar are “definitely in need of heightened support.” Similarly, in Thailand, this group was reported to be “very underserved.”

A number of interviewees reported that due to the lack of status and access to basic rights, older people are often unable to access essential medical treatment. Similarly, older people in immigration detention face greater risk of illness and death.



Photo Credit The Spacemen

Conclusion

While the challenges of displaced populations living in all three regions in focus are complex and multi-layered, the resourceful and innovative models of refugee-led responses are a promising harbinger for the future. Often using limited resources, many of the organizations highlighted in this report have achieved great impact in

response to the protection needs faced by their own communities. If RLIs and local organizations are given increased access to global resources, if their ideas and solutions are centered in policy-making spaces, and if RLIs are welcomed into partnership structures with autonomy and meaningful inclusion, our ability to address some of the most pressing unmet needs facing displaced communities around the globe would be dramatically transformed.



Photo Credit Norwegian People's Aid/ Norsk Folkehjelp

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Glossary and Terminology

- **Complementary pathways:** Complementary pathways refer to legal pathways – such as humanitarian, labor, education, private sponsorship, or family reunification programs – that fall outside of traditional, UNHCR-referred resettlement and that do not count against state-set resettlement quotas.
- **Country of destination:** The country where displaced persons seek to relocate and receive international protection.
- **Country of origin:** A country of nationality or of former habitual residence of a person who has migrated abroad.
- **Country of transit:** The country through which a displaced person moves when traveling to a country of destination. Some refugees and migrants may remain in a country of transit for years before being able to proceed to a subsequent destination on their journey elsewhere.
- **Displaced person/people:** In this report we refer to displaced people as those who are forced to leave their home because of war, persecution, natural disaster, climate change, and other reasons.
- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** Any physical, sexual, or psychological act directed at an individual or a group of individuals intended to cause harm because of their actual or perceived gender. GBV is rooted in structural gender inequality, the abuse of power, and harmful norms.
- **Host country:** Also called “country of first asylum,” it refers to the country in which a displaced person resides, with or without authorization, often while pursuing more long-term protection elsewhere.
- **Internally Displaced Person:** Individuals who are forced to leave their homes but remain within their country of origin, unlike refugees who, by definition, must first cross an international border. Notably, the factors that drive internal displacement – persecution, armed conflict, widespread human rights violations, and environmental disasters, among others – are often the same factors that cause international displacement. As of December 2021, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated that there are 59 million IDPs globally.³⁰⁴ Because IRAP’s work focuses on helping forcibly displaced people enforce their legal rights – particularly in navigating pathways to permanent resettlement in third countries – this assessment and report is primarily focused on international displacement.
- **LGBTQIA+:** Abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and anyone else with a non-normative gender identity or sexual orientation.
- **Parole:** The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) permits the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to allow certain individuals to enter the U.S. and temporarily stay without an immigrant or non-immigrant visa as “parolees.” Parole is discretionary and granted on a case-by-case basis.
- **Refugee Status Determination (RSD):** Legal and administrative procedures undertaken by national governments and/or UNHCR to

determine whether an individual should be recognized as a refugee in accordance with national and international law.

- **Stateless Persons:** People whom no country's laws recognize as having citizenship or nationality.
- **Unaccompanied Children:** Children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for them.
- **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** The UN agency whose mandate is to process applications for refugee resettlement and to ensure that international protection is provided to refugees, forcibly displaced people, and stateless people.

Notes on Terminology

Through this assessment, we learned about the critical work of many grassroots, local, national, refugee-led, and diaspora-led organizations and initiatives. Depending on the context in which they are working, these organizations and groups use various terms to refer to themselves. The approach to terminology varies significantly by region, and we have done our best to use terminology that groups chose for themselves instead of placing them in overly broad, uniform, or inaccurate categories.

Refugee-Led Organization/Initiative (RLO/RLI): An organization, association, or other group, whether formal or informal, led by people with lived experience of displacement. Many groups identify with this terminology when not led by people with refugee status, which can be

extremely difficult to obtain. As many refugee leaders are living without legal status in host countries, they are often unable to formally register their organizations under local law. Some groups therefore prefer the term “refugee-led initiative” to reflect this reality.

Diaspora-led: This term was used primarily in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Many interviewees felt the term is more accurate since nationals of countries like Venezuela and Colombia face significant barriers to accessing refugee status.

Local, National, and Grassroots: Some organizations interviewed refer to themselves as local, national, or grassroots organizations because they are not refugee-led entities, but they are working directly with displaced populations in a local context. National organizations, staffed by nationals of the host country and generally registered as organizations under national or domestic law, are often considered local when their work is responsive to a local context or staffed by people with experience of displacement. We note that the relative power of the observer often determines which organizations are considered to be local.³⁰⁵ In the Asia context, we spoke with a number of international organizations that have local offices led by national staff. These entities are sometimes more similar to other national organizations in their staffing and work than they are similar to international organizations, but they may have easier access to international resources and advocacy platforms.

APPENDIX B

Additional References for International Legal Framework and UNHCR Refugee Processing

1951 Convention and Regional Treaties and Conventions

Rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (known colloquially as the “1951 Refugee Convention”) and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees³⁰⁶ are the main legal frameworks governing refugee protection and serve as the foundation for international human rights law and refugee protection. The Convention defines the term “refugee” and associated rights, most notably the principle of *non-refoulement*, which forbids the expulsion of refugees to a place where they may face serious threats to their life or freedom.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) serves as the administrator of the Convention and the 1967 Protocol. State signatories must commit to cooperating with UNHCR. No international agency has authority to enforce these rights or to punish violations of them, which are pervasive across the world.

Furthermore, beyond binding legal instruments, a number of global, UN-facilitated commitments to protect refugees frame national and regional policies and actions on refugees and displaced people. Most notably, the 2016 UNHCR New York

Declaration for Refugees and Migrants reaffirms national commitments to respect refugees’ and migrants’ human rights and established the aspirational Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which, in turn shaped the Global Refugee Compact, affirmed by all UN member states in 2018.

UNHCR-Referred Refugee Resettlement

UNHCR’s mandate is to facilitate three main “durable solutions” for refugees, one of which, refugee resettlement, is a focus of this report. UNHCR and national governments effectuate refugee resettlement together: either UNHCR or national governments determine who qualifies as a refugee, UNHCR handles much of the processing and receiving countries determine whom they will admit as a refugee.³⁰⁷



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APPENDIX C

List of Participating Interviewees by Region

AFRICA

Country	Organization Name	Organization Type
Niger	Advocates for Community Alternatives	Regional NGO
Regional	Africa Refugee-Led Network	Refugee-led network
Senegal	African Centre for the Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts (CAPREC)	Local NGO
Sudan	ALIGHT Sudan	INGO
Kenya	Ann Strandoo	Individual
Kenya	Bryan Otieno	Individual
Regional	Church World Service, Resettlement Support Center Africa	INGO
Sudan	Danish Refugee Council	INGO
Regional	Danish Refugee Council	IINGO
Chad	HIAS Chad	INGO
Kenya	HIAS Kenya	INGO
Rwanda	Initiatives for Peace & Human Rights (iPeace)	Local NGO
Regional	International Association of Refugee and Migrant Judges (IARMJ) Africa Chapter	INGO
Kenya	Kituo Cha Sheria	Local NGO
Rwanda	Legal Aid Forum (LAF)	National network
Ethiopia	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Ethiopia	INGO
Global	PILnet	INGO
Regional	U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) Regional Refugee Coordinator	Government
Uganda	Refugee Law Project, Makerere University	Local NGO, Academic
Kenya	Refugee-Led Organization Network (RELON)	RLI
Cameroon & Chad	Refugees International Cameroon & Chad	INGO
Kenya	Refugees International Kenya	INGO
Cameroon	Refugees Welfare Association Cameroon (REWAC)	Local NGO
Kenya	RefugePoint	INGO
Sudan	Sudan Organization for Development	Local NGO
Sudan	Sudanese Defenders Center for Legal Aid	Local NGO

AFRICA (Continued)

Country	Organization Name	Organization Type
Regional	Talent Beyond Boundaries, Africa	INGO
Regional	UNHCR Regional Bureau West & Central Africa	UN
Regional	UNHCR South Africa Multi Country Office	UN
Kenya, Uganda	We Are Cohere	Regional network of RLIs
Kenya	Youth Voices Community (YVC)	RLI

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Country	Organization Name	Organization Type
Honduras	Acción Joven	National NGO
Panama	Activados Panamá	Diaspora-led organization
Costa Rica	Asociación Centro de Derechos Laborales sin Fronteras	Grassroots NGO
El Salvador	Asociación de Venezolanos en El Salvador (ASOVENSAL)	Diaspora-led organization
Guatemala	Asociación de Venezolanos en Guatemala (ASOVEGUA)	Diaspora-led organization
Brazil	Associação Venezuela Global	Diaspora-led organization
Panama	El Centro de Asistencia Legal Popular (CEALP)	Grassroots NGO
Latin America	Center for Democracy in the Americas	INGO
Honduras	Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CIPRODEH)	NGO
Panama	Coalición Internacional de Mujeres y Familias (CIMUF)	National NGO
Guatemala	Colectivo Vida Digna	Indigenous-led organization
Mexico	Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos	National NGO
El Salvador	Comunicando y Capacitando a Mujeres Trans (COMCAVIS TRANS)	NGO
El Salvador	El Centro de Integración para Migrantes, Trabajadores y Trabajadoras (CIMITRA)	National NGO
Honduras	Foro Nacional para las Migraciones en Honduras (FONAMIH)	National network
El Salvador	Cristosal	NGO
Panama	Fundación Casa Latinoamericana (CASALAT)	Grassroots NGO
Ecuador	Fundación Ecuatoriana Equidad	National NGO
Ecuador	Fundación Lunita Lunera	National NGO
Mexico	Grupo de Trabajo sobre Política Migratoria	National NGO, subregional
Ecuador	Haciendo Panas (Ibarra)	Diaspora-led organization
Costa Rica	HIAS Costa Rica	INGO

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (Continued)

Country	Organization Name	Organization Type
Panama	HIAS Panama	INGO
El Salvador	Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer “Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera” (CEMUJER)	INGO
MERCOSUR countries	Instituto de Políticas Públicas en Derechos Humanos del Mercosur (IPPDDHH)	Multilateral agency
Mexico	Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración (IMUMI)	INGO
Honduras	La Barra de Abogadas	Pro Bono Organization
Ecuador, Colombia, Panama	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Ecuador, Colombia, Panama	INGO
Northern Triangle & Mexico	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Northern Triangle & Mexico	INGO
Panama	RET Internacional en Panamá	INGO
Panama	S.O.S. Victims of Colombian Armed Conflict in Panama (SOVIC)	Grassroots NGO
Regional (USA, The Dominican Republic, & Haiti)	UNHCR Multi-Country Office (based in Washington D.C.)	UN

SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Country	Organization Name	Organization Type
Regional	Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR)	RLI
Regional	Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)	INGO
Malaysia	Asylum Access Malaysia	INGO
Thailand	Asylum Access Thailand	INGO
Regional	BABSEACLE	Pro Bono Organization
Australia	Carina Ford Immigration Lawyers	Private Law Firm
Thailand	Center for Asylum Protection (CAP)	INGO
New Zealand	Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies	Academic
India	Chin Refugee Committee Delhi (CRC)	RLI
Indonesia	Cisarua Learning	RLI
Thailand	Coalition for the Rights of Refugees and Stateless Persons (CRSP)	INGO
Regional	Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (Bangladesh, India)	INGO
Regional	HOST International	INGO

SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA (Continued)

Country	Organization Name	Organization Type
Pakistan	Rana Refahi, Independent Consultant working on APRRN project	Individual
Pakistan	Muna Baig, Independent Consultant, Former Director of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan	Individual
Indonesia	Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation - Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (YLBHI)	NGO
Regional	International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	INGO
Regional	International Detention Coalition (IDC)	INGO
Thailand	International Rescue Committee (Thailand)	INGO
Regional	IOM Regional Office (Bangkok)	Multilateral agency
Indonesia	Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia	RLI
Thailand	Jesuit Refugee Service Thailand	NGO
India	Migration & Asylum Project (MAP)	NGO
Bangladesh	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Bangladesh	INGO
Regional	OHCHR Regional Office (Bangkok)	UN
Bangladesh	Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP)	NGO
Australia	Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness	Academic
Regional	PILnet	Pro Bono Organization
Australia	Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS)	NGO
Australia	Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS)	NGO
Australia	Refugee Council of Australia	NGO
Thailand	Refugee Rights Litigation Project	NGO
Indonesia	Refugees & Asylum Seekers Information Centre (RAIC)	RLI
Malaysia	Rohingya Project	Other
Malaysia	Rohingya Society in Malaysia	RLI
Pakistan	Society for Empowering Human Resource (SEHER)	NGO
Pakistan	Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid (SHARP)	NGO
Indonesia	Sisterhood Community Center, Jakarta	RLI
Indonesia	Suaka	NGO
Regional	Talent Beyond Boundaries, Asia	INGO
Malaysia	Tenaganita	NGO

SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA (Continued)

Country	Organization Name	Organization Type
Thailand	The Border Consortium	INGO
Regional	TrustLaw, Thomson Reuters Foundation	Pro Bono Organization
Regional	UN OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)	UN
Regional	UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP)	UN
Australia	Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, University of New South Wales	Academic



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Endnotes

1. Rapid assessment is defined as intensive, team-based qualitative inquiry using triangulation, iterative data analysis, and additional data collection to quickly develop a preliminary understanding of a situation from the insider's perspective. Encyclopedia of Social Measurement, 2005.
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