

# The Only Real Protection for Refugees Is Local



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## The Problem

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) define refugee protection efforts as “all activities, aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual.” Although many would agree that access to human rights should be the primary focus of the forced displacement sector, current “protection” efforts are failing refugees. The dominant modes of protection intervention do little to address the systemic lack of protection in the domestic national landscapes in which refugees live.

As a result, they have almost no impact on the central problem facing refugees today: **A local environment that leaves refugees unprotected:** The reality is that forcibly displaced people in many countries cannot walk down the street without fear of arrest. They often cannot work legally, which means they accept work in exploitative situations that drive down wages and working conditions for everyone. They cannot access police protection from assault or theft, or secure police response when they are attacked or robbed. They have no recourse when front-line authorities extort them, when landlords evict them, when employers steal their wages or worse, when schools bully or neglect them. They often cannot hold authorities or private actors accountable through courts and legal systems.

## The Solution: Enabling Localized Protection

Localized Protection acknowledges that for protection to be real it must be embedded in domestic frameworks and is typically enabled by local actors, especially by refugee communities and their organizations, who can deploy comprehensive strategies for systemic change.

*The experience of enjoying rights in practice throughout all aspects of daily life.*

# Elements of Localized Protection

Localized protection can only be experienced fully when the following are present:



Domestic laws that fully protect refugees' rights in all interactions — at work, at school, at home, in transit, and in public and private spaces.



Enforcement and accountability mechanisms that put those laws into practice, ensure their implementation by host community actors (both public and private), mobilize state resources to enforce those laws, and empower refugees to use them.



Resourced and protected refugee communities, including refugee-led organizations, who have the power, positioning, and safety to participate equitably in shaping domestic laws and accountability mechanisms.

## Our Calls to Action

To achieve localized protection, donors should deliberately and proactively deepen their investments in local advocates engaged in strategic, long-term efforts to enact systemic change. Specifically, donors should invest in **efforts that embody both of the following components:**

- 1** **Local actors, especially refugee communities and RLOs**, who are positioned and equipped to be effective advocates for systemic change within their national environments;
- 2** **Coherent, sustained, locally-devised strategies** rooted in a credible theory about how these strategies can meaningfully contribute to systemic reforms.



**Read the Full Report:**



## About Asylum Access

We are a human rights advocacy organization that partners with forcibly displaced individuals and communities as they reclaim their rights, agency and power. We aim to create a world where refugees everywhere can live safely, move freely, work, attend school and rebuild their lives. We advocate for a response to forced displacement that honors refugees' freedom, dignity and autonomy, while also strengthening the communities that welcome them.

Learn more about Asylum Access in <https://asylumaccess.org/> and contact us via [info@asylumaccess.org](mailto:info@asylumaccess.org). For more information about this position paper, contact our Partnerships team: [deepa.nambiar@asylumaccess.org](mailto:deepa.nambiar@asylumaccess.org) and [salwa.mukoda@asylumaccess.org](mailto:salwa.mukoda@asylumaccess.org).