



asylumaccess

ANNUAL REPORT
2022



About Asylum Access

We are human rights advocates who support 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.

Our mission is to make human rights a reality for refugees.

What Makes Us Unique in Refugee Response

Our Global Approach: Asylum Access is the only global organization dedicated specifically to advancing refugees' human rights.

Our Leadership: We are a family of national organizations in Mexico, Thailand and Malaysia. Our local organizations are led and staffed by nationals and refugees in these countries. There is a strong mutual trust and respect between us and our clients.

Our Focus: On the international stage, we work with established institutions to shift the global system to better uphold and promote refugees' human rights. We can help catalyze and lead systemic transformation because, uniquely among NGOs in the refugee response sector, we focus exclusively on rights and governance.

Our Experience: Our field experience using legal empowerment and policy change to turn rights into reality provides us with the credibility and expertise to offer pragmatic, effective solutions.

What We Do

Through our legal empowerment, policy change and global systems change programs, we advocate for a world where refugees everywhere can live safely, move freely, work, feed their families, send children to school and contribute to their communities.

The Asylum Access family of organizations includes Asylum Access Malaysia, Asylum Access Mexico and Asylum Access Thailand.

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This annual report concerns our programs and activities across Asylum Access between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.

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“

I feel good because I don't feel that fear and insecurity any more, I feel protected and safer. I feel if I say something I am heard, and that pleases me because I feel like I am important.

”

Marlen, refugee client from Honduras





LEADERSHIP

Our board and team feature sector experts in refugee law, human rights, business administration, and nonprofit success

Executive Team



Emily Arnold-Fernández
President and CEO



Diana Essex-Lettieri
Vice President and COO

National Directors

Our National Organizations in Malaysia, Mexico, and Thailand are directed by local leaders who are experts in asylum law, community outreach, and nonprofit administration.

Alejandra Macías
Executive Director,
Asylum Access Mexico

Daniel Berlin
Deputy Director,
Asylum Access Mexico

Hui Ying Tham
Executive Director,
Asylum Access Malaysia

Vaishna Santhar
Deputy Director,
Asylum Access Malaysia

Naiyana Thanawattho
Executive Director,
Asylum Access Thailand

Paniti Tiengtrong
Deputy Director,
Asylum Access Thailand

Global Directors

Our Global Headquarters comprises team members working on global human resources, operations, finance, development, communications, global policy, monitoring and evaluation, and the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI).

Bahati Kanyamanza
Associate Director of
Institutional Engagement

Elizabeth Otto-Wallace
Operations Director

Lisa D'Annunzio
Development and
Communications Director

Luisa Sotelo
Global Finance Director

Sana Ali Mustafa
Associate Director of
Partnerships and Engagement



Board Officers

The Board of Directors is Asylum Access's primary oversight committee. All members are experts in their respective fields and fully independent from Asylum Access. The Board meets quarterly, with sub-committees meeting monthly or as appropriate.



Susan Simone
Chair
HR Consultant
Independent



Amir Ghowsi
Vice-Chair
Operations & Strategy
LinkedIn



Michael Diedring
Secretary
Human Rights Lawyer
Independent



Steven Solinsky
Treasurer
NGO Administration Expert
Independent (Retired)

Board Members

Camila Andrea Mena
Communications Director
SF Black Wallstreet

Hany Aziz
Financial Controller
Teach for All

Joyce Song
Managing Director
Office of Laura
Arrillaga-Andreessen

Leah Zamore
Associate Director
NYU CIC

Lindsay Toczylowski
Executive Director
Immigrant Defenders Law
Center

Mary Gardiner Huang
Strategic Transformation
LinkedIn

Michael Teshima
Principal
Oliver Wyman

Mohammed Badran
Founder
Syrian Volunteers in the
Netherlands

Rachel Gordon
Special Deputy to ED
Movement Voter Project

Shalini Nataraj
VP of Programs
Ing Foundation

Susan Lieu
Playwright and Storyteller
Independent

OVERVIEW

Amid a challenging global context, we have supported more refugee clients than ever and pushed ourselves to go further

This fiscal year, major causes of forced displacement worldwide included conflicts such as the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which forced many to flee their homes. Ethnic and political persecution in Myanmar and Ethiopia, along with natural disasters contributed significantly. Economic crises, notably in Venezuela, pandemic-related impacts, and repressive government actions, particularly in China, further increased forced displacement.

Amidst this global context, we continued working to improve legal frameworks and livelihood for refugees worldwide. Our team published the Refugee Work Rights Report, covering how 51 countries are protecting and promoting refugee work rights. It identified policy gaps and barriers to access work rights for refugees, and provided recommendations for institutions such as the World Bank, UNHCR and the US government. Advocacy efforts also included direct engagement with multilateral organizations and efforts to partner with Civil Society Organizations (CSO)/Refugee-Led Organizations (RLO) worldwide.

In 2021, we launched our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) journey to ensure that Asylum Access holds itself accountable first. Our efforts to encourage more representation and equitable partnerships within our sector started with ensuring that diversity and inclusion were

reflected in our own hiring process, communications, and relationships as a team and with our clients and partners.

During this fiscal year, our national organizations reached 26,500 clients in Malaysia, Mexico and Thailand. In Malaysia, after a surprise midnight raid in a condominium in Selangor, 49 people were detained by immigration authorities. Despite the late hours, our advocates were on the ground immediately to ensure families were released from detention. In Mexico, we increased our efforts to assist Haitian asylum seekers. In Tijuana, we are the only organization providing comprehensive legal services in Creole. In Thailand, where Myanmar refugees are considered illegal, we have been advocating with the Thai government to provide more protections to them.

We continued promoting refugee leadership and participation through the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI), a coalition of six RLOs in which Asylum Access acts as a convener and advocacy partner. In 2021, RRLI was selected as the recipient of the \$10 million Larsen Lam ICONIQ Impact Award, one of the largest-ever investments in the refugee leadership movement.





DIRECT SUPPORT

Our legal and integration teams around the world continued to provide vital support to forcibly displaced communities

Asylum Access provides direct legal representation and advice to help refugee families navigate complicated asylum application processes and other access to justice issues. Success rates vary across countries and are heavily influenced by local context.

Mexico

Over the past year, the Mexican Refugee Agency (COMAR) issued decisions in 286 of our clients' first instance asylum cases (cases in which this is the first time someone is applying for asylum, in contrast to appeals or other access to justice issues). Of those 286 decisions, 265 of our clients received asylum, indicating a 92.7% success rate.

Mexico received an unprecedented 130,744 asylum applications in 2021, a 220% increase from the approximately 41,000 received in

2020. For the first time, Haitians constituted the largest nationality seeking asylum there. Mexico also dramatically increased the detention of migrants in 2021. A historic 307,679 people were detained by the government, including 75,592 children.

Malaysia

Over the past year, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) issued asylum decisions in 32 of our client cases. Of those 32 cases, 30 were successful, indicating a 93.75% success rate.

Our unique employment disputes program continued to be a critical intervention. Prior to this program, refugees in Malaysia had no recourse when they were exploited at work. Violations include being underpaid, withholding earned wages, physical abuse, and the threat of immigration raids. Our employment

disputes program began with mediation between us and employers, but we later tested cases in the Labour Court and Industrial Court complaint processes, which are historically not open to refugee complainants. Not only did we convince the Courts to review cases involving refugees, but they started issuing decisions in our favor. Now, we train our refugee clients on how to facilitate mediation and/or bring their own complaints to court. Over the past year, we received outcomes in 51 of our employment cases. We achieved a 49% success rate, which is very high in the context of labor disputes in Malaysia.

Thailand

Over the past year, UNHCR issued asylum decisions in 61 of our client cases. Of those, 33 clients were recognized, showing a 54.1% success rate. Success rates tend to be lower in Thailand because it's a challenging context in general, and because we purposely prioritize cases where clients have vulnerabilities that make their case more difficult to navigate (e.g., if someone is illiterate or from a country of origin that UNHCR is more likely to reject for recognition). We know these cases will be more difficult to win, which is why we prioritize them. In contrast, if we think there is a high likelihood of UNHCR recognizing a client's case, we might just provide advice and not full representation. Also, UNHCR is not working at full capacity due to COVID-19, so many decisions are taking a long time in being issued, delaying the results for cases that have been submitted, and taking a long time in processing new cases. This reduced capacity has also affected how we can support certain full representation cases, as we have not been able to receive transcriptions and necessary documents to support clients' claims.

Impact Snapshot

26,500

Refugee clients and dependents supported globally by Asylum Access this year*

BREAKDOWN

20,949

Individuals and their family members supported by **Asylum Access Mexico**

2,865

Individuals and their family members supported by **Asylum Access Malaysia**

2,686

Individuals and their family members supported by **Asylum Access Thailand**

12,816

Individuals and their family members supported through our free legal aid clinics

13,928

Individuals and their family members supported through community legal empowerment

DIRECT IMPACT TO DATE

117,870

Forcibly displaced people supported through all Asylum Access programs since 2011*

*Total figures are cleared for both clients that access multiple programs and clients that access our services over multiple years



CHANGING SYSTEMS

We strengthened refugee-led civil society through our partnerships and the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative

Building connections with institutions of power can significantly improve refugee frameworks and livelihoods. By partnering with local civil society organizations (CSOs)/ refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and preparing them to provide feedback, we can inform institutions' engagement with host countries. This approach ensures that policies are grounded in the community's reality, rather than solely relying on multilateral organizations' data.

This fiscal year, we convened Ugandan CSOs/ RLOs to provide feedback on the World Bank Uganda Refugee Policy Review (RPR) report. We learned that the RPR Uganda report had policy gaps which were shared with the Bank. For example, while seeking professional jobs, refugees in Uganda are required to have work permits which cost between \$1000-2000. This is in addition to having valid refugee IDs issued by the government. Recommendations were

made on how the Bank could engage the Ugandan government to address these gaps.

Through our CSO partnerships, we successfully introduced Colombian RLO Refugiados Unidos to Hilton Foundation, which is funding an 18-month project to expand rights for Venezuelan refugees. We are also offering consulting services to strengthen their capacity. In Southeast Asia, we facilitated a successful award of a \$500,000+ grant by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) to AAM, AAT, and RAIC Indonesia for a research project aimed at developing evidence on the impact of refugee-led legal empowerment towards greater refugee protection and accountability.

The Refugee Work Rights 2022 Report, covering 51 countries, was published to assess how they respect, protect and promote refugee work rights. The report identified policy

gaps and barriers to access work rights for refugees and provided specific recommendations for institutions such as the World Bank, UNHCR and the US government. Since its launch, several newspapers, including *Politico*, mentioned the report, a valuable resource for policymakers and advocates interested in advancing refugee work rights in the researched countries.

In December 2021, we launched our position paper on Equitable Partnerships. We developed a 1-year strategy to engage UNHCR, INGOs, and the donor community in learning, internal change, and changing external partnership practices with local CSOs and RLOs. We advocated with UNHCR in Geneva during the 2022 Annual Consultations on the key principles in the paper.

Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI)

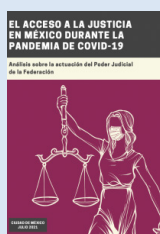
Over the past year, RRLI has distributed \$3.5 million to 17 RLOs across 5 countries. These grants are significantly uplifting the work of impactful RLOs: for 30% of grantees, this is their first grant ever, and for 70% of grantees, it is their largest grant. The five coalition RLOs reached approximately 189,486 people with comprehensive support in their first year as RRLI grantees. RRLI made 80 new connections between RLOs and

donors, unlocking an additional \$1.7 million in funding.

RRLI also contributed to major mindset changes through advocacy work. RRLI influenced Porticus and Luminate foundations to prioritize lived experience and refugee leadership in their grant-making and programming. RRLI also contributed to UNHCR increasing grant sizes for RLOs from a maximum of \$15k to \$50k and easing bureaucratic requirements that hinder accessibility. RRLI representatives are directly influencing funding flows through membership in a donor collective for the Middle East and serving on an advisory board for an EU grant facility and the German government's Action Network on Forced Displacement.

Ahead of the UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations in Geneva in June 2022, RRLI, supported by Asylum Access, sent an "open letter" on "Five Ways to Foster Greater Refugee Leadership and Localization" to the High Commissioner. We advocated for UNHCR to prioritize refugee rights, improve partnership practices with local CSOs based on the Equitable Partnerships Position Paper, and encouraged greater refugee leadership and trauma-informed training for UNHCR staff in access to justice programming.

Our Publications



Access to Justice in Mexico during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Joint report by Asylum Access Mexico and civil society partners

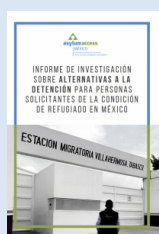
July 2021



Advancing Refugee Rights in Non-Signatory States

Article in Issue 67 of Forced Migration Review

July 2021



Investigative Report on Alternatives to Detention for Refugees in Mexico

Report by Asylum Access Mexico

September 2021



Building Equitable Partnerships

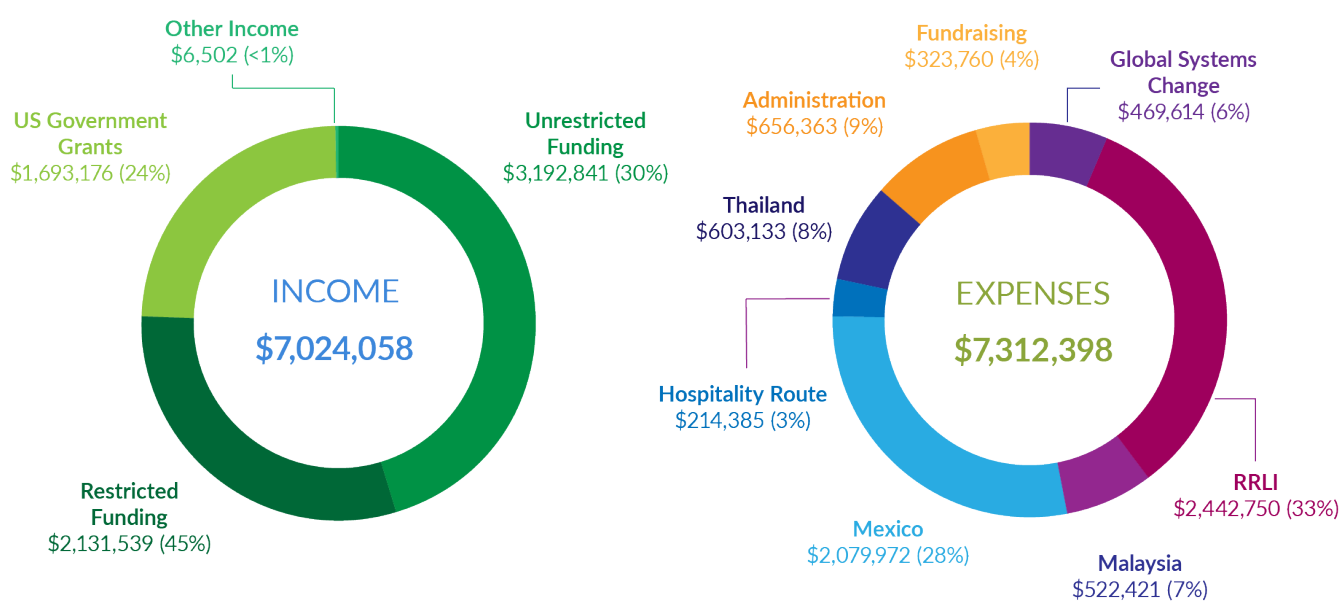
Our position paper on shifting power in forced displacement

December 2021



FINANCES

We have maintained the highest standard of efficient use of funding. Our activities passed all independent audits



Restricted funding: Includes foundation, individual, multilateral and government funding that is restricted in time, region or purpose.

Unrestricted funding: Includes foundations and individual funding that is not restricted in time, region or purpose. It is usually for general operating support of the organization.



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