



**asylumaccess**

ANNUAL REPORT  
2023



## *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, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

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*At least with a residence permit, I can build up to being able to bring my mom. Even if she only visits for a month or a few days, I can still give myself the pleasure of seeing her again.*

”

Daisy, refugee client from Honduras





# LEADERSHIP

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

## Executive Team



**Sana Ali Mustafa**  
Chief Executive Officer

## 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

**Naiyana Thanawattho**  
Executive Director,  
Asylum Access Thailand

**Hui Ying Tham**  
Executive Director,  
Asylum Access Malaysia

**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  
Partnerships

**Daniela Reinoso**  
Associate Director of  
Human Resources

**Deepa Nambiar**  
Director of Partnerships

**Lisa D'Annunzio**  
Chief Development Officer

**Elizabeth Otto-Wallace**  
Chief Operating Officer

**Luisa Sotelo**  
Global Finance Director

**Rouba Anka**  
Chief Financial Officer



## 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.



**Mohammed Badran**  
Co-Chair  
Founding Member  
Global Refugee-led Network



**Michael Diedring**  
Co-Chair  
Human Rights Lawyer  
Independent

**Leah Zamore**  
Vice-Chair  
Director  
NYU CIC

**Hany Aziz**  
Treasurer  
Financial Controller  
Teach for All

**Shalini Nataraj**  
Co-Secretary  
VP of Programs  
Ing Foundation

**Michael Teshima**  
Co-Secretary  
Principal  
Oliver Wyman

## Board Members

**Carolina Jiménez Sandoval**  
President  
WOLA

**Joyce Song**  
Managing Director  
Office of Laura  
Arrillaga-Andreessen

**Lindsay Toczylowski**  
Executive Director  
Immigrant Defenders Law  
Center

**Mary Gardiner Huang**  
Strategic Transformation  
LinkedIn

**Rachel Gordon**  
Special Deputy to ED  
Movement Voter Project

**Susan Lieu**  
Playwright and Storyteller  
Independent

# OVERVIEW

*We have continued to champion a refugee response system that centers refugees and the communities that welcome them*

Last year, the number of forcibly displaced individuals worldwide reached an unprecedented 110 million, driven by a combination of conflict, climate change, and systemic human rights violations. The Russian invasion of Ukraine resulted in over 11 million displaced Ukrainians. The eruption of conflict in Sudan and violence in regions like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar exacerbated the displacement crisis. Economic instability and political turmoil in countries such as Afghanistan and Venezuela continued to force many to seek safety abroad.

**We witnessed how European countries that showed an open-door policy with Ukrainians, closed their doors to other refugees.** Therefore, we continued to make an intentional effort to extend the same human rights to all refugees. We provided critical support services to forcibly displaced communities in Mexico, Malaysia, and Thailand, despite increasingly challenging environments.

**Across our national organizations,** we provided legal services to over 12,000 refugees, our legal empowerment services reached 34,000 forcibly displaced people, and our community legal empowerment efforts reached over 22,000 individuals.

**At the global level, we continued to build the movement for refugee rights** by helping local civil society organizations to create or enhance legal empowerment and/or policy change programming. We continued influencing institutions of power, such as the World Bank and UNHCR, to prioritize interventions that pave the way for refugees to participate fully and equitably in their host countries.

**Internally, last July we welcomed Sana Ali Mustafa as our new CEO.** She is a feminist human rights defender and movement leader in the forced displacement sector who has been challenging and dismantling systems of oppression for over a decade. We also continued our DEI journey over the past year, including welcoming forcibly displaced staff to leadership and other positions.

**In 2022-23, RRLI allocated \$2.99 million to 17 refugee-led organizations** in five countries through the RLO-to-RLO Fund. This funding enabled comprehensive support for approximately 633,123 community members and their families.





## DIRECT SUPPORT

*We have advanced the human rights of refugees through strategic litigation and advocacy led by regional coalitions*

### Malaysia

Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no legal or administrative framework for the recognition of refugees within its borders. Without such a framework, refugees are denied legal protection, putting them at constant risk of detention and deportation. They are also banned from working and unable to access fundamental human rights.

This fiscal year we supported a client from Yemen as he filed a complaint with the Industrial Court of Malaysia asking for unpaid wages from an unlawful employment dismissal. Our client won his case, getting his unpaid wages in full, and setting a precedent for refugees' right to work.

Through our policy advocacy work, we engage different stakeholders, including members of Parliament, the UNHCR, local civil society organizations, international NGOs, and networks to mobilize positive momentum for policy change in refugee protection.

To this end, Asylum Access Malaysia, in partnership with women advocates of refugee communities in Malaysia, is preparing a submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2024. Malaysia is a signatory of CEDAW, and we believe we can use this international human rights accountability mechanism to help hold the government accountable for the protection of refugee women and girls.

### Mexico

In recent years, Mexico has registered an unprecedented number of asylum requests and faces humanitarian crises on its borders. Abuses, delays, and the underfunding of Mexico's asylum system mean that refugees seeking legal protection must wait months, if not years, for their cases to be adjudicated. Especially for those at the northern or southern borders, waiting for a response means living under inhumane conditions and in constant fear.

This fiscal year we advocated against the governmental decisions of sending children to Child Referral Offices (similar to immigration detention centers) or having them deported without first undergoing a multidisciplinary and exhaustive study to determine their best interests. We also trained authorities in different states to promote best practices to eliminate child detention.

We are part of the Migration Policy Working Group, where we focus on harmonizing the General Law on Children and Adolescents (which contains strong child protections) with the Refugee Law and the Migration Law (where protections remain weak). Additionally, in a resolution to a strategic litigation case we filed in 2022, the Court held that bus companies could not screen the immigration status of passengers, leading to increased freedom of movement.

## Thailand

Since the February 2021 Myanmar military coup, thousands of refugees have crossed the border into Thailand to seek safety. However, like Malaysia, Thailand is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Refugees face government-sanctioned systems of detention and deportation, live off of unreliable humanitarian aid, and work within exploitative environments.

Legal services are crucial for refugees in Thailand in general, and particularly for Myanmar refugees. It is becoming increasingly important to ensure that all refugees are treated equally and are entitled to the same rights and protections that Thailand has to offer regardless of politics.

Through our bail fund and legal assistance program, we prevented the deportation of Myanmar refugees. Some cases became strategic cases, as Myanmar refugees had not received bail before due to their lack of refugee status with UNHCR. Nevertheless, we successfully assisted clients with bail. We receive an average of 20 calls from new clients each week, 85% of whom are from Myanmar.

## Impact Snapshot

# 25,390

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

### BREAKDOWN

## 19,029

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

## 2,775

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

## 3,586

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

## 12,079

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

## 22,284

Individuals and their family members supported through community legal empowerment

### DIRECT IMPACT TO DATE

# 133,980

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 pushed key actors in global refugee response toward more meaningful inclusion of forcibly displaced communities*

**This reporting period brought major achievements in the promotion of effective and inclusive advocacy** that centers refugee-led and host community organizations and advances foundational rights for refugees globally. Our Global System Change team's work led to sustainable improvements in the practices of institutions of power and in the power and resourcing of refugee-led organizations.

**We prioritized equity in our learning and external engagements**, promoted effective and inclusive advocacy with key institutions, and focused on refugee inclusion, leadership, and resourcing to enhance accountability and transparency within refugee response.

**We also developed monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) tools that will enable us to guide the refugee response sector** to build more equitable partnerships that shift power

to local partners, we have influenced important World Bank processes and pioneered inclusive approaches between the World Bank and CSOs in Uganda, shifted UNHCR's perspective on refugee-led organizations (RLOs), and opened doors to improve their partnership practices to be more trauma-informed, and engaged with influential donor governments, especially the US Government on refugee leadership, resourcing, and equitable partnerships.

**Asylum Access has also made significant progress in supporting, strengthening, and resourcing host community-led and refugee-led civil society** through our partnerships in East Africa, Colombia, the Middle East, Bangladesh, and Southeast Asia, including expanding the impact of the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI)—the first-of-its-kind multimillion-dollar fund for refugee-led organizations.

We are also increasingly positioning ourselves to guide the sector, in very practical ways, through difficult but important shifts in power through equitable partnerships with local organizations—in line with their stated commitments towards localization and refugee leadership.

This fiscal year, Asylum Access reached a milestone in our commitment to equitable partnerships. In January 2023, we commissioned an independent review of our partnerships with local civil society organizations (CSOs), including refugee-led organizations (RLOs), over the last four years. The 7-month review process allowed us to identify our strengths and areas of improvement in partnership practices and helped us develop partnership assessment tools. This newfound knowledge and tools will inform our new position paper on Equitable Partnerships, which we will launch in 2024.

### Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI)

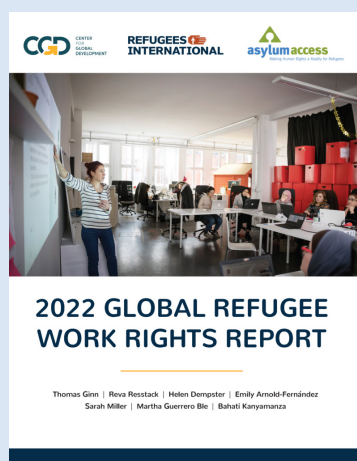
This fiscal year, RRLI disbursed \$2.99 million to 17 RLOs in Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Uganda through the RLO-to-RLO Fund. The impact of this funding on community-based, refugee-led organizations has been transformative. Our RLO partners supported approximately

633,123 community members in total (including dependents and household members) through holistic and comprehensive support for entire families.

**RRLI also launched the Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program**, a program designed to enable grantee sustainability, influence, and efficacy through regular, grantee-driven, localized support from one of our in-country Coalition Members and the RRLI implementation team.

**RRLI engaged with 46 key stakeholders to broadly advocate for resourcing RLOs and enabling refugee leadership.** As a result, RRLI unlocked \$3.4 million for 80 RLOs outside the RLO-to-RLO Fund (including through UNHCR and UN Women), provided technical support for 96 RLOs outside our current cohort of RLO grantees, and facilitated 71 connections between RLOs and governments, foundations, INGOs, UN agencies, and academic institutions. RRLI also successfully advocated for UNHCR to institutionalize a more inclusive definition of an RLO and influenced a donor government to prioritize refugee leadership in a call for proposals.

## Our Publications



### 2022 Global Refugee Work Rights Report

Joint report by Asylum Access, Center for Global Development, and Refugees International

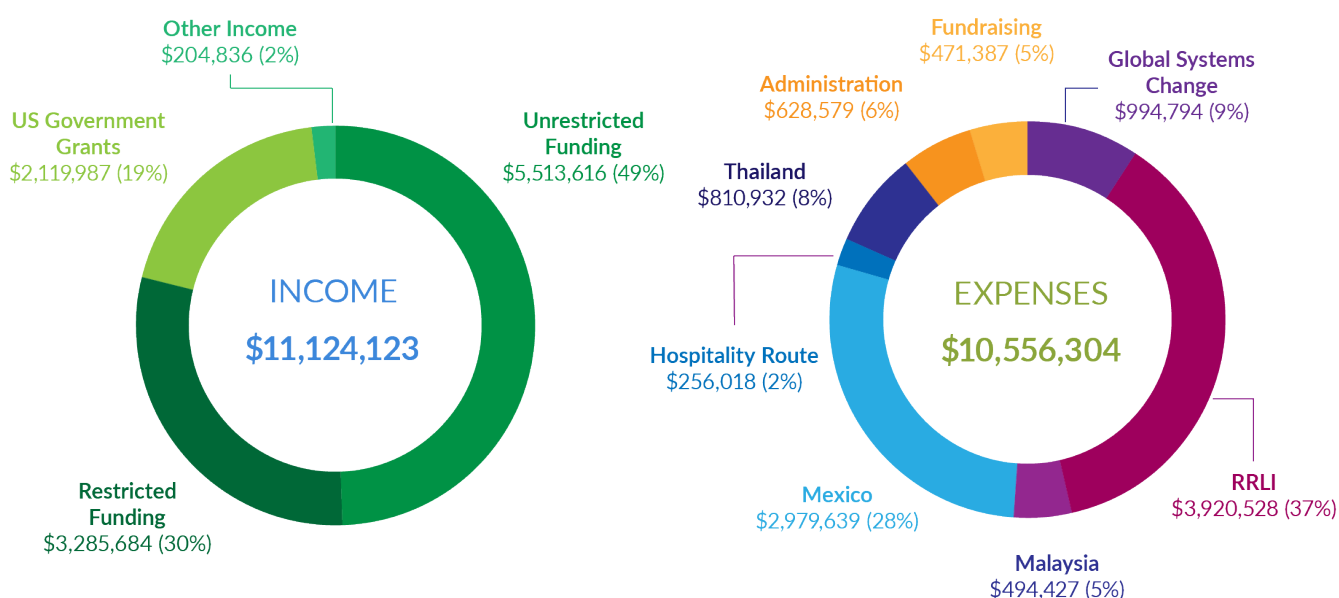
December 2022

This report examines the different dimensions of work rights both in law (*de jure*) and in practice (*de facto*) across 51 countries that were collectively hosting 87 percent of the world's refugee population at the end of 2021. Combining legal documents, country-level reports, news articles, and input from more than 200 practitioners with knowledge of refugees' livelihoods and use of services, we evaluated the *de jure* and *de facto* situation within a standardized framework. We believe that the findings and accompanying dataset will be critical tools for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers on refugees' work rights.



# 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.





[www.asylumaccess.org](http://www.asylumaccess.org)

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