

ADVANCING REFUGEE PROTECTION AND PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA THROUGH LEGAL EMPOWERMENT AND REFUGEE LEADERSHIP (ARPR) PROJECT

PROJECT BRIEF

2023-2025

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This project brief was developed by the Refugee-Led Network in collaboration with Asylum Access Thailand (AAT) in February 2025



What does the ARPR Project stand for?

The Advancing Refugee Protection and Promoting Accountability in Southeast Asia through Legal Empowerment and Refugee Leadership (ARPR) Project is a Participatory Action Research (PAR) initiative dedicated to improving refugee protection and accountability through legal empowerment and leadership. Running from 2023 to 2025, the project operates in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia focusing on enhancing the ability of refugees to know, use, and shape laws and policies that impact their lives.

Legal empowerment tools: This aims to simplify the legal process and empower refugees with the legal knowledge needed to protect themselves and those around them from harm.

Know: It involves gaining knowledge about legal rights of the refugees and the justice system, allowing refugees to navigate legal processes with confidence.

Use: Legal empowerment enables refugees to access and utilize legal resources and services to protect their rights and interests.

Shape: Empowers individuals and refugee communities to influence laws and policies, advocating for changes that reflect their needs and values.



Empowering Justice: who is at the core of the ARPR Project in Thailand?

Refugee paralegals: Individuals trained to provide legal information and support within their communities, primarily through legal clinics.

A legal clinic is a community-based service where paralegals provide legal information about Thai laws and the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process. By offering guidance on various legal issues, legal clinics empower refugee communities to make informed decisions and advocate for themselves effectively.



Refugee-Led Network (RLN): The RLN is a new initiative, initiated as part of this project, where refugees lead advocacy and community empowerment efforts to address their challenges in Bangkok. RLN aims to ensure that forcibly displaced people are safe, can move freely, and access legal protection and essential services, fostering dignity and stability in their lives.

Who are the project partners involved in the ARPR Project?

The ARPR Project is a collaborative initiative involving several key partners: Asylum Access Thailand (AAT), the Nelson Mandela Center for Conflict Resolution, Atrocity Prevention, and Human Security at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Asylum Access Malaysia (AAM), and the Refugee & Asylum Seekers Information Centre (RAIC) in Indonesia. Together, these organizations work to advance research, legal empowerment, and advocacy efforts across Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

What are the aims of the ARPR Project?

Aim 1: Analyze existing legal frameworks and refugees' knowledge, usage and shaping of these laws to improve laws and policies and enhance legal empowerment programs.

Aim 2: Evaluate the effectiveness of current legal empowerment programs in supporting refugees, particularly marginalized groups, to know, use, and shape laws. Based on these findings, refine the programs to better serve refugees.

Aim 3: Conduct a comparative analysis of legal empowerment outcomes across Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia to provide recommendations for regional program enhancement.

Disclaimer: The following project information is specific for Thailand.

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METHODOLOGY



How is participatory action research used in the ARPR Project?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) involves program participants and community members as equal partners in the research process, empowering them by sharing control over the process. In the ARPR Project, PAR integrates paralegals and the RLN into the research process as researchers.

What are the benefits of this PAR approach for the ARPR Project?

Enhanced relevance: Research outcomes are directly applicable to the experiences and challenges faced by refugees. For example, the researchers conducted surveys to find what laws are most important to refugee communities and paralegals have used the results from

the surveys to plan and conduct legal clinics for their communities.

Empowerment: Involvement in the research process empowers paralegals and RLN members, fostering ownership and engagement. For example, the researchers collectively work on data collection tools to collect the feedback of the participants to show how effective their activities are.

Improved outcomes: Continuous feedback from participants helps refine programs and policies to better address refugee needs. For example, the researchers collaborated to develop indicators to improve their work which led to a plan for capacity building trainings.

What methods are used in this research?

In the ARPR Project, the researchers use different methods to collect data from refugee communities. The researchers get informed consent from the community before collecting their information.

Surveys: Designed and administered by the researchers to gather data on community knowledge and needs regarding laws and legal mechanisms.

Pre- and post-tests/Evaluation form: Used during legal clinics and advocacy events to assess learning and effectiveness of legal empowerment sessions.

Qualitative methods: Including interviews and focus groups to gain deeper insights into refugee experiences and challenges.



03 KEY FINDINGS



What are the key findings so far from the research in Thailand?

Limited legal knowledge: Surveys have shown that most refugees have limited knowledge of key legal mechanisms available to them, but a high willingness (96%) to learn about Thai laws. They are in strong need of legal education.

Refugee challenges: A law review has shown that refugees face risk of detention or imprisonment, lack of job opportunities and restricted access to healthcare.

Advanced refugee protection: A law review has shown that the National Screening Mechanism (NSM) offers temporary protection to some refugees as protected persons despite Thailand not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. With this temporary protection, refugees can stay in Thailand temporarily with access to healthcare and education. However, the practice has been implemented without clear guidance and few refugees have obtained temporary protection. Therefore, most refugees are still at risk of being arrested and detained.

04 KEY ACTIVITIES/PROGRESS



What are the key activities/progress made as the RLN so far?

As RLN members, key activities include identifying community needs, engaging in brainstorming sessions with partners and addressing legal issues faced by community members. Progress involves strengthening RLN advocacy efforts and collaborating with networks and organizations interested in supporting refugees to address systemic issues through strategic planning.

Capacity building: Received training on NSM, criminal justice, child protection, communication, team building, stakeholder mapping, and cultural competency.

Advocacy initiatives: Engaged in various advocacy activities, including speaking at a World Refugee Day event, co-developing and speaking at a session on Access to Banking/Financial Inclusion of Refugees and Climate Displacement in Asia Pacific at the PILnet Global Forum in Bangkok, and organizing an event at Chulalongkorn University to address policy gaps and promote more inclusive refugee protection measures.

Network building: Strengthened partnerships with other stakeholders such as Chulalongkorn University and The Coalition for the Rights of Refugees and Stateless Persons (CRSP) to amplify project impact and advance joint advocacy initiatives.

What are the key activities/progress made by paralegals so far?

Paralegals have made significant progress by conducting legal clinics, providing legal information to the community. Paralegals have

also received training on various legal topics, such as child protection, NSM and criminal justice, and have successfully managed community engagement despite challenges to encourage community members to join legal clinics.

Legal support and education: Provided essential legal assistance and education to refugees, helping them navigate asylum processes and know their legal rights.

Development of tools: Developed important tools to support the paralegals' work, including a Thai law handbook which they collaborated on with RLN members, a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) framework, a training guide for legal clinics and legal clinic materials.

05 PLANS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE PROJECT

What are the plans for the remainder of the project as the RLN?

For the remainder of the project, RLN will continue its advocacy efforts and enhance its capacity. The focus will include increasing network visibility, developing communication channels, joining other networks, engaging in strategic discussions on emerging issues, and improving outreach to effectively address community needs. RLN members aim to improve their impact through targeted interventions and community support.

Enhanced advocacy: RLN aims to enhance advocacy by delegating tasks effectively, expanding advocacy efforts, and improving communications and relationships to reach a broader audience.

Broaden community engagement: RLN will expand its outreach by bridging between the Thai public and refugee communities, offering refugees opportunities to participate in advocacy and share their firsthand experiences.

What are the plans for the remainder of the project as paralegals?

Paralegals plan to expand their outreach, aiming to involve a larger portion of the community in legal clinics. They also intend to address specific needs identified in the community and continue to enhance their knowledge on various legal topics to better support the community.

Continued legal assistance: Maintain and expand legal support services for refugees, focusing on emerging needs and challenges.

Legal clinics: Provide additional legal clinics and resources to improve the legal knowledge of the refugee community.

POTENTIAL RISK OF THE RESEARCH

The research process may pose risks to participants, such as distress from interacting with authorities or discussing sensitive experiences. Refugee paralegals and advocates will work with Asylum Access to assess and mitigate potential harm through measures like ensuring informed consent, protecting confidentiality, providing access to counseling and legal support, and establishing emergency response protocols.

PROJECT TIMELINE: 2023-2025

May-June 2023

Project initiation and stakeholder engagement: Start of the project: AAT consulted the paralegals and advocates. Paralegals and advocates assessed initial community interest through consultations.

May-June 2023

Capacity building: Chula Mandela Center conducted training sessions for paralegals and advocates to prepare them for effective community engagement and their roles as researchers.

July-December 2023

Needs assessment: Researchers developed and implemented a comprehensive survey to identify the legal needs and challenges faced by communities. Analyzed survey data to inform subsequent actions.



January 2024

Knowledge and utilization survey: Researchers designed and deployed a second survey focused on understanding community awareness of Thai laws, as well as how these laws are utilized and adapted for protection and justice

February-August 2024

Specialized training and resource development: AAT's experts provided targeted training on criminal justice, child protection, and the NSM. Additionally, the paralegals and RLN members created a detailed handbook outlining Thai legal frameworks.

June 2024-August 2025

Community legal clinics: Paralegals conduct regular legal clinics within their communities, focusing on criminal justice, child protection, and the NSM. They will also assist community members with navigating Thai legal processes.

September 2024-December 2025

Ongoing support and tool development: AAT continues to support and train paralegals and advocates on Thai laws, research methodologies, and other relevant topics as needed. The paralegals and RLN members develop and refine legal tools and resources.

Late 2025/Early 2026

Regional conference: The final results from the research will be presented at a regional conference in Bangkok.



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