

PROMOTING  
**INCLUSION**  
FOR  
**SUSTAINABLE  
SOLUTIONS**

14-15 SEPTEMBER 2023

## FINAL REPORT

2023 UNHCR Regional Consultations  
with NGOs in Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, Thailand  
Hybrid: In-person and online

### Executive Summary

Prior to 2021, UNHCR and NGOs held annual global consultations where topics of strategic relevance to develop policy, advocacy points, and operational recommendations were discussed. Following UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization process, regional consultations were introduced to bring discussions closer to the local realities. These consultations and the global consultations take place on alternate years, with the recommendations made during the regional consultations serving to inform the global consultations.

In collaboration with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), and the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR), the 2023 UNHCR Regional Consultations with NGOs in Asia and the Pacific, "**Promoting Inclusion for Sustainable Solutions**", focused on addressing the challenges and identifying opportunities for over 14.3 million forcibly displaced and stateless individuals in the region. This report provides an overview of the discussions and recommendations made over the two-day event.

### Background

The Asia and the Pacific region continues to be affected by the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and faces a polycrisis (climate, food, energy, finance, conflict, etc.), which has led to increased vulnerabilities. Progress toward realizing the region's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is slow; at its current pace, the 2030 mark will be missed by decades. In this context, the region's 14.3 million refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees, and stateless people are at risk of being further left behind. Whole-of-society responses are needed now more than ever to work towards sustainable solutions for the forcibly displaced and stateless.

### Objectives

The objectives of the Consultations aligned with the Principles of Partnership and focused on regional strategic priorities to develop region-specific recommendations to inform the 2024 global consultations. As this year's consultations took place in the same year as the Global Refugee Forum (GRF), they also offered an opportunity to mobilize partners in preparation of the Forum.



*In-person and online participants of the 2023 UNHCR Regional Consultations with NGOs in Asia and the Pacific © UNHCR / InsightPact*

## Theme and Format

UNHCR Consultations with NGOs for Asia and the Pacific focused on solutions and highlighted the critical roles NGOs and civil society play in this regard. Despite new approaches and global initiatives such as the Global Compact on Refugees and the UN Secretary-General Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, solutions and support have not kept pace with the growing number of displaced and stateless people. This year's Consultations emphasized the benefits of integrating displaced populations into national systems, aiming for predictable support and promoting self-reliance, while positively contributing to host communities, particularly in key sectors such as education and health. The discussions highlighted how inclusion supports resilience and offers solutions for displaced and stateless people, aligning with the objectives outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees. Gender equality, meaningful participation, and evidence-based programming were recurring themes throughout the discussions. The event was divided into two parts: (1) virtual side events that focused on the 2023 GRF and partnerships, which took place in June; and (2) the Consultations themselves, which took place both in-person and online in September and included in-depth roundtable discussions.

## Side Events 14-15 June 2023

- **Global Refugee Forum:** 113 persons from various organizations participated in this event which focused on the objectives of the 2023 GRF and offered the opportunity for participants to exchange on how to strengthen the GRF's impact in the Asia and the Pacific region. Key recommendations included ensuring a collaborative and innovative GRF process, creating space for engagement at different levels, and ensuring inclusive and accessible data.
- **Partnerships:** With 89 participants, this session discussed UNHCR's efforts to advance the localization agenda and foster inclusive strategic partnerships. Key recommendations emphasized the need for enhancing communication and coordination, empowerment and capacity building, and partnership agreements.

## Roundtable Hybrid Sessions 14-15 September 2023

The in-person and virtual event brought together over 180 participants, representing 161 organizations from 19 countries in the Asia and the Pacific to discuss topics around the central theme of “Promoting Inclusion for Sustainable Solutions”. The roundtables were co-led by NGO and UNHCR colleagues. The discussion focused on four main themes:

**1 Inclusion (of forcibly displaced and stateless populations) in national systems:** Co-led by HOST International and UNHCR, this session analyzed the challenges and opportunities for inclusion in national systems, highlighted successful initiatives, and provided recommendations on how to support national systems without creating parallel initiatives. The discussion stressed the importance of access to essential services such as banking, education, social security, housing, and healthcare. It also included how to incorporate protection measures in national policy frameworks and address public misconceptions of refugees in the media.

### Major Discussion Points:

- *Amplifying the benefits of inclusion:* Key discussion points under this topic included the need for establishing dialogue between States and civil society organizations, sharing best practices, prioritizing health and nutrition, advocating for birth registration, and collaborating with refugee leaders.
- *Identifying gaps in evidence to support inclusion:* The need for increased data collection, engagement with research institutes, longitudinal studies, and better communication among governments, UNHCR, NGOs, INGOs, and communities was highlighted during this discussion.
- *Key actors:* Advocacy for long-term grants, engagement with donors, and establishing connections with influential global and local entities were emphasized, while local communities, governments, private sectors, and refugees were identified as key actors for engagement.

**2 Legal Pathways:** Co-led by Refugee Council of Australia and UNHCR, this session centred around developing strategies for legal pathways for forcibly displaced and stateless populations. Key topics included resettlement, family reunification, complementary pathways, and other legal mechanisms. Participants drew on their experiences to analyze challenges and opportunities within Asia, highlighting successful initiatives for addressing legal barriers and facilitating legal pathways. In addition, participants tackled best practices in education pathways for Rohingya refugees, skilled migration/labour mobility, and private sponsorship, citing specific programs and initiatives.

### Major Discussion Points:

- *Use of limited resettlement places:* This discussion acknowledged the disparity between the need for resettlement and available places, focusing on prioritizing access and identifying those who urgently need but lack resettlement access.
- *Expansion of complementary pathways:* In anticipation of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, participants urged States to increase access to complementary migration pathways, including community sponsorship, skilled labour migration, education pathways, and family reunification.
- *Addressing barriers to legal pathways:* This conversation focused on how different stakeholders (both host and receiving states) could identify and mitigate barriers and improve protection and support for refugees in Asia.
- *Advocacy and dialogue:* Participants discussed key points for UNHCR and NGOs to raise with governments and publicly advocate for.
- *Enhancing access to legal pathways:* Recommendations were made for Member States, line ministries, UN agencies, NGOs, civil society, and forcibly displaced populations to enhance access to legal pathways.

**3 Socio-Economic Inclusion:** Co-led by Church World Service and UNHCR, this roundtable addressed ways to improve the socio-economic inclusion of refugees, focusing on livelihood opportunities, access to tertiary education and vocational training, financial inclusion, self-employment, entrepreneurship, and social protection mechanisms. Based on their field experience, participants discussed socio-economic inclusion from an NGO perspective and shared the region-specific challenges and best practices.

**Major Discussion Points:**

- **Strategies for socio-economic inclusion:** This discussion focused on understanding socio-economic inclusion, identifying gaps in supporting socio-economic inclusion, main stakeholders and supporters, collaboration with both the private sector and governments, efforts made to progress gender equality and financial inclusion, and best practices.
- **Activities and challenges:** Participants noted their engagement in socio-economic inclusion activities, including financial inclusion and social protection, and highlighted challenges they face, such as legal frameworks, lack of social protection mechanisms, limited private sector interest, unstable political situations, and labour market dynamics.
- **Data collection challenges:** Organizations noted the difficulty in collecting data due to concerns about disclosing economic activity and proposed using alternative methods such as participatory rural appraisals and socio-economic assessments.
- **Role of private sector:** The critical role of the private sector in advocating for livelihoods and employment was highlighted, including making an economic case for refugee inclusion and forming partnerships for advocacy and programme support.
- **Legal rights and decent work:** Discussions included the absence the legal right to work in many Asian countries, the principles of decent work, and the need for explicit efforts to employ refugees.
- **Sustainable programme design:** The importance of designing sustainable programmes in partnership with UNHCR, targeting skills building in line with labour market needs, and linking graduates to job opportunities was highlighted.
- **Investment in socio-economic inclusion:** There was a consensus on the need for more investment in socio-economic inclusion at the country level, with education, health, and financial inclusion outlined as top priorities.



Participants engage in the Socio-Economic Inclusion session © UNHCR / InsightPact

**4 Refugee-led Participation (Meaningful Engagement):** Co-led by APNOR and UNHCR, this session aimed to foster candid and engaging dialogues to improve collaboration with refugee-led organizations. The discussion focused on generating insights and recommendations to promote refugee leadership and participation in the Asia Pacific region, addressing challenges, solutions, and sustainable decision-making processes.

**Major Discussion Points:**

- *Barriers to refugee participation:* Identified barriers included language, lack of awareness of rights and opportunities, limited resources, and complex legal and administrative processes. Language support, awareness campaigns, anti-discrimination policies, capacity-building programmes, and simplifying legal and administrative procedures were some of the strategies proposed during the discussion.
- *Empowering refugees and refugee-led initiatives:* Gender-inclusive programming, mentorship, networking, and promoting the participation of refugee women and girls in decision-making bodies were outlined as ways to enhance refugee empowerment. Particular emphasis was placed on training, mentorship programmes, and fostering active participation in relevant discussions and dialogues.
- *Examples of successful refugee participation:* The discussions highlighted successful refugee participation through examples such as the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR). Lessons from APNOR's initiatives, including the Refugee Leadership Alliance Funding, emphasized networking, collaboration, amplifying refugee voices, and empowering them in decision-making. Key lessons included empowering refugees, promoting localized solutions, fostering collaboration, and ensuring inclusivity in decision-making within refugee communities. These examples underscore the value of refugee engagement and leadership in shaping effective and inclusive initiatives.



A participant takes notes during a thematic session  
© UNHCR / InsightPact

## Conclusion and Next Steps

At the end of the event, a panel comprised of representatives from the Consultation’s co-convenors, stressed the need for appropriate participation in conversations and effective coordination within networks while acknowledging limits of control. UNHCR’s Regional Director for Asia Pacific concluded the consultations, thanking participants for their specific and actionable recommendations. Recognizing the robust collaboration and growing solidarity between NGOs and UNHCR, the Director extended his heartfelt appreciation for NGOs’ unwavering dedication to supporting displaced persons in the region.

In these final reflections, the significance of strategic engagement, effective coordination, and collaborative efforts emerged as key themes, underscoring a shared commitment to addressing the challenges faced by forcibly-displaced and stateless people in the region. Twelve recommendations from the roundtable discussions were shared and validated by the vast majority (86.5%) of participants. These will inform the 2024 global UNHCR-NGO consultations and the 2023 UNHCR’s Executive Committee meeting. It was also agreed that the co-organizers would reconvene to turn the recommendations into an actionable engagement plan.

## Thematic Recommendations

### Advocacy and Awareness

1. Showcase the benefits of inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people.
2. Leverage UNHCR's convening power and engagement in policy processes to advance inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people.

### Funding and Resource Mobilization

3. Support Donor Sensitization on RLIs’ (Refugee-Led Initiatives) and CSOs’ (Civil Society Organizations) needs for flexible and long-term funding (quality funding).

### Socio-economic Inclusion

4. Develop and implement skill-building programmes informed by refugee recommendations, gaps in the labour market, and national development plans.
5. Enhance focus on financial inclusion within socio-economic activities.
6. Strengthen private sector engagement for expanded partnerships towards inclusion and solutions in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

### Inclusion

7. Utilize complementary approaches for addressing inclusion at national, subnational, and community levels.
8. Organizations working with RLIs ensure adequate financial compensation for volunteers and community-based organizations to participate and lead events, activities, projects, etc.

### Legal Pathways

9. UNHCR and NGOs to continue advocating with States to facilitate departures on legal pathways (exit permits, visa, travel documents for States).
10. Increase information sharing and transparency on legal pathways (Clearinghouse)
11. UNHCR and NGOs to advocate with receiving states to ease requirements for UNHCR identity documents and refugee status determination to access legal pathways.

### Data and Research

12. Improve the quality, collection, analysis, and dissemination of data, in partnership with inter alia academics and refugee communities.