



PROMISING PRACTICES:

Harnessing the Power of Organizations Led by Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Women



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Cover photo: South Sudan. UNHCR partners with MADE51 to help refugees and internally displaced people to earn income through their craft. © UNHCR/Ala Kheir

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Acronyms and other Abbreviations

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AIMME	Asociación de Mujeres Migrantes en Ecuador
AFRISA	Alliance for Refugees in South Africa
BRWF	Bhutanese Refugee Women Forum
CBO	Community-based organisation
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
GBV	Gender-based violence
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HIAS	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer persons
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RLO	Refugee-led organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WLO	Women-led organization

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Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. UNHCR works around the world to provide international protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees and stateless persons and seeks long-term solutions for them.

UNHCR is committed to ensuring that forcibly displaced women and girls are at the center of all its efforts, and that they are fully engaged and meaningfully included in decisions affecting their lives. For decades, UNHCR has been applying people-centered approaches and working with forcibly displaced and stateless women as active contributors and invaluable partners in the humanitarian response.

UNHCR's commitment to gender equality is institutionalized through the [UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity \(2018\)](#), the [UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022–2026](#) and the [UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence \(2020\)](#). At UN system level, UNHCR's work on localization and organizations led by forcibly displaced women is guided by the [Grand Bargain](#), the [Global Compact on Refugees](#), the [IASC Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action](#), the [United Nations System-Wide Action Plan \(SWAP\) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#), the [Pact for the Future](#), and the [UN Gender Equality Acceleration Plan](#).

This report aims to showcase the transformative work of four organizations led by forcibly displaced women in Ecuador, South Africa, Brazil and Nepal, to highlight the positive impact of their work on the lives of individuals and communities, and approaches that have proved effective in advancing engagement with organizations led by forcibly displaced women. This report aims to inspire others to apply and replicate these practices in different contexts, with a focus on promoting the resilient leadership of forcibly displaced women as key actors in humanitarian programmes.

Rationale and methodology

The purpose of this report is to facilitate knowledge exchange among UNHCR field operations, headquarters, regional bureaux, and partners, and identify emerging and replicable lessons from the implementation of UNHCR's work with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women. It also aims to support UNHCR's operational capacity to capture, reflect and demonstrate innovative and sustainable practices.

The UNHCR Methodology on Collecting Practices and Case Studies was used to document these practices. The data-collection process involved a desk review of primary sources, including operational reports, project documents and reports from both UNHCR and the organizations. Online semi-structured interviews and informal conversations were held with members of the organizations, UNHCR staff at headquarter units, regional bureaux and field operations. This ensured broad participation in the screening, selection and documentation of practices.

Four promising practices were documented in **Brazil, South Africa, Ecuador and Nepal** which all showed evidence of effectiveness in working with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women and have the potential for replication in diverse contexts.



Brazil



Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras

Key Information

TITLE

Protection and Local Integration support for forcibly displaced and stateless people and migrants in Boa Vista in Roraima State

DATES

2023 to 2024

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE

Strengthening community-based protection, legal and physical protection and durable solutions

POPULATION GROUPS

Forcibly displaced and stateless people, migrants, and the host community

Overview

Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras is a women-led organization (WLO) based in Boa Vista, Roraima state, Brazil. Founded in 2022 by Mayra Figuera, a refugee from Venezuela, the organization offers crucial support to forcibly displaced people, migrants, and the local host community. It focuses on those living outside the official shelters provided by Operação Acolhida (Operation Welcome), the Brazilian Government's humanitarian response to the influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras provides a variety of essential services, such as documentation assistance, legal advice, entrepreneurship training, hygiene kit distribution, and health promotion. The organization primarily supports forcibly displaced communities living outside the shelters in Boa Vista, helping them access services available through Operação Acolhida and local networks. Concentrating its efforts on the outskirts of Boa Vista, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras addresses the critical needs of migrant, refugee and stateless communities where support is most needed.

In partnership with UNHCR, other United Nations agencies, and local implementing partners, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras undertakes a range of projects focused on community-based protection. These initiatives emphasize effective communication with communities, comprehensive case management, and robust advocacy to uphold their rights in Brazil.

Context

As of November 2024, Brazil hosted over 790,000 refugees¹ and other people in need of international protection. Most refugees come from Venezuela, through the northern state of Roraima, while others have arrived primarily from countries like Afghanistan, Cuba, Haiti, Syria, and Ukraine. UNHCR is supporting the state to develop comprehensive national and local policies to receive, protect and integrate refugees and others in need of international protection. UNHCR provides protection to refugees and others in need of international protection countrywide, ensuring identification and response to those with specific needs, including gender-based violence survivors, indigenous populations, and unaccompanied children.

Boa Vista hosts a substantial number of forcibly displaced individuals, stateless persons, and migrants, predominantly from Venezuela. This significant influx has placed considerable strain on the city's infrastructure, particularly in the areas of housing, healthcare, and employment. Many migrants reside in temporary shelters, spontaneous settlements, or on the streets, heightening their susceptibility to exploitation, trafficking, and health issues. The crisis has had a disproportionate impact on women, children, and indigenous populations. The city's limited resources have struggled to meet the increasing demand for services, resulting in economic and social strain, as well as occasional tensions between migrants and the host community.²

Resources and partnerships

UNHCR Brazil has worked with Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras since 2023, providing technical support that includes guidance on international protection frameworks and navigating Brazil's national asylum application system. UNHCR has also offered specialized training on key topics such as durable solutions and project management, which has significantly strengthened the organization's capacity.

In August 2024, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras entered into a grant agreement with UNHCR. Through this project, the organization established a team focused on providing documentation access to forcibly displaced and stateless persons residing in Boa Vista's more remote neighborhoods, which often fall outside the reach of Operação Acolhida. Running until December 2024, this initiative significantly improved documentation access for these populations.

¹ UNHCR, "Brazil factsheet", November 2024. Available from <https://reporting.unhcr.org/brazil-factsheet-8973>

² UNHCR, "Multi-year strategy 2023–2025: Brazil" (2023). Available from https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/Brazil%20-%20Strategy%202023%20%E2%80%932025_0.pdf

Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras has collaborated with various organizations, including the Jesuit Service for Migrants and Refugees, World Vision, the Institute for Migration and Human Rights, and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). The organization also partners with several United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). With UNFPA, it has developed activities to prevent gender-based violence, while its collaboration with IOM focuses on documentation and community-based protection. Additionally, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras has implemented initiatives to strengthen community capacity by offering professional training courses.

Governance and core activities

Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras is led by a board of directors. Fieldwork is primarily carried out by volunteers, most of whom are women. At its peak, the organization worked with 40 volunteers; currently, it has a dedicated team of 10–15 permanent volunteers actively involved in field activities.

In 2023, as part of its Multi-Year Strategy 2023–2025³ to increase support to refugee-led organizations (RLOs), UNHCR Brazil conducted a mapping exercise of RLOs through which 80 organizations were identified. These included 20 organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women. UNHCR Brazil also mapped 41 multisectoral governmental bodies (councils or committees) that allow social participation of the civil society, often including the direct engagement of refugees, in shaping public policies that affect and benefit them.⁴ This information allowed UNHCR Brazil to gain a clearer understanding of the different RLOs working in Brazil and the different governance spaces where these organizations could raise their concerns. UNHCR was also able to enhance collaboration with these organizations through grant agreements, training on international protection, resource mobilization and programming.

In early 2023, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras attended the second edition of the National Conference on Migration and Asylum, also known as COMIGAR (Conferência Nacional de Migrações, Refúgio e Apatridia). Their interventions played a crucial role in strengthening public policy actions for the rights of forcibly displaced people, establishing them as a significant women-led actor in this space.

³ Ibid.

⁴ UNHCR, "Annual results report 2023: Brazil" (2024). Available from https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/AME%20-%20Brazil%20ARR%202023_0.pdf.



Venezuelan craft entrepreneur Rosa Bravo Henriquez, who is making macramé at a handicraft fair in the Brazilian capital, Brasília ©UNHCR/Marina Calderon

Following this event, the organization began collaborating closely with UNHCR on several initiatives. UNHCR provided technical support for documentation task forces and capacity-building in legal and physical protection. In partnership with UNHCR and the Serviço Jesuíta para Migrantes e Refugiados (SJMR), Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras established five documentation task forces in Boa Vista, focusing on vulnerable migrants and refugees.

Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras has dedicated significant time and resources to enhancing the expertise and capabilities of its staff, empowering them to deliver specific support to unaccompanied children, survivors of sexual violence, and victims of human trafficking. The organization is committed to providing a diverse array of essential services to the underserved neighborhoods of Boa Vista, where numerous refugees and migrants reside.

At the conclusion of this programme, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras was awarded a grant from UNHCR to support protection. This grant supports the continuation and expansion of their activities, including setting up information sessions on international protection and a documentation task force.

Achievements, results and impact

Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras is effectively implementing several key initiatives:

- **Documentation:** Between 2022 and June 2024, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras assisted approximately 1,810 refugees and migrants in obtaining legal documentation and requesting asylum.
- **Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion:** The organization has successfully facilitated access to and integration into the job market for refugees and migrants through strategic partnerships with World Vision, UN Women, ADRA, UNHCR, and the Jesuit Refugee and Migrant Service. These initiatives encompass Portuguese language courses, entrepreneurship courses for women, information sessions on accessing formal employment in Brazil, assistance in obtaining official Brazilian work permits, and professional training in various fields.
- **Community Integration:** The organization actively promotes the integration of forcibly displaced persons into their new communities by fostering intercultural communication and mutual understanding, with a keen focus on the needs of diverse groups such as older persons, adolescents, and women. It collaborates closely with local social assistance reference centres, basic health units, and various other actors to disseminate information and strengthen community participation.
- **Psychosocial Assistance:** The organization provides psychosocial support through counselling services and support groups, helping displaced individuals and families overcome trauma and improve mental well-being. In 2022, around 350 refugees and migrants participated in information sessions on health and how to access health services in Brazil, organized by Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras.
- **Advocacy:** The organization is one of the founding members of the State Intersectoral Committee for the Assistance of Migrants, Stateless Persons, and Refugees in Roraima (CEMAR/CEIMAR-RR) and is a strong advocate for refugee and women's rights at the regional and state levels, including at the Conferência Nacional de Migrações, Refúgio e Apatridia (COMIGRAR).

Lessons

ENABLING FACTORS

- Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras leverages its robust volunteer network to effectively identify and address the protection needs of forcibly displaced women and communities that are unable to access Operação Acolhida's reception and documentation centres and shelters. By focusing on those without access to the formal system and maintaining

effective communication with hard-to-reach groups, the organization ensures timely and tailored assistance. This targeted approach enables Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras to identify, prioritize, and assist individuals at heightened risk.

- Through active engagement in discussions and consultations with forcibly displaced persons and migrants, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras has deepened its understanding of the community. This ongoing dialogue allows the organization to integrate valuable insights into its programmes and advocate effectively with local, state, and national governments.

ADVERSE FACTORS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras, as a local refugee women-led organization, relies heavily on volunteers and faces significant challenges in accessing adequate financial resources to hire permanent staff. This reliance on volunteer support makes it difficult to maintain a consistent and professional workforce, which is crucial for effective programme implementation and organizational growth.
- The organization faces challenges in accessing training and capacity development opportunities which would help enhance its efficiency and foster innovation.
- Without sufficient resources for operational sustainability, Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras struggles to ensure the long-term viability of its projects and initiatives, and this significantly hampers the organization's ability to scale up its impact.

Tips for replication and scale-up



MAPPING: Integrate the mapping of refugee-led organizations, especially women-led groups and informal organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women, into existing efforts to map local, grassroots, or women's organizations in your context.



USE OF FLEXIBLE FUNDING MODALITIES: Utilize reliable and flexible funding mechanisms, such as grant agreements, to help organizations led by forcibly displaced women maintain a consistent and professional workforce. This reduces reliance on volunteers and minimizes staff turnover. Adequate funding also enables these organizations to scale up their impact, ensuring the sustainability of projects and initiatives, and allows them to plan and adapt to changing circumstances without the constant pressure of financial uncertainty.



ONGOING TECHNICAL SUPPORT: Provide continuous guidance and support in areas such as project and financial management, strategic planning, and other operational capacities. By equipping staff and volunteers with essential skills, these organizations are empowered to improve day-to-day management, resource allocation, and service delivery, and to set long-term goals.



FOSTER COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES WITH DIVERSE PARTNERS: Enhance cooperation and collective impact by creating joint activities between organizations led by displaced women and other stakeholders. By partnering with various entities, organizations led by forcibly displaced women can bridge gaps in formal support systems, extend their outreach, and amplify their impact in often-overlooked communities, ensuring these populations receive the attention and support they deserve.

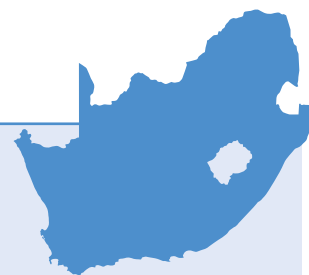
Next steps

Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras and UNHCR Brazil are embarking on the development of a joint workplan designed to significantly strengthen collaboration, enhance capacity development, scale impact, and align resources effectively.

More information:

- Humanidade Mais que Fronteiras - <https://www.instagram.com/humanidadmqf/>
- UNHCR Brazil - <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/brazil>

South Africa



Umoja Skills Development

Key Information

TITLE:

Sustainability built in from the start

DATES:

Ongoing since 2002

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE:

Social cohesion and economic empowerment of forcibly displaced and host communities

POPULATION GROUPS:

Community-based organization led by forcibly displaced women living in South Africa and host communities

Overview

Umoja Skills Development (also known as Umoja for Africa or Umoja) is a community organization based in Cape Town, South Africa, founded by Liliane Mukidi, a Congolese refugee woman who fled to South Africa in 1999. Umoja is among the first refugee-led WLOs in South Africa. It is part of a vibrant civil society of 101 organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons that support 50,000 people through the South African Refugee-Led Network.

Umoja is committed to the economic empowerment of forcibly displaced women and women from the host community through comprehensive vocational training programmes in tailoring and sewing, jewelry beading, catering, and childcare. The organization seeks to mitigate unemployment by facilitating the integration of these women into the economy of the Western Cape and their local communities. As Liliane aptly states, “We are all facing the same situation, and our common enemy is poverty.”

Additionally, Umoja identifies and trains key community members to lead local economic inclusion and social initiatives. Upholding values of support, respect, authenticity, and transparency, Umoja strives to ensure its projects have a positive social impact.

Context

As of December 2024, South Africa hosted 163,410 forcibly displaced and stateless people primarily from countries such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Somalia.⁵

⁵ UNHCR, “SAMCO: Factsheet”. Available from [South Africa Multi-Country Office: Factsheet | Global Focus](#)



HIV and AIDS awareness campaign during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, with Umoja Members in Cape Town. ©Umoja

Unlike some of the neighbouring countries, South Africa does not implement an encampment policy that restricts freedom of movement. As a result, refugees are expected to integrate fully into local communities. One of the main priorities of UNHCR and its partners in South Africa is to strengthen the asylum system and address integration challenges within a complex environment of mixed migration flows.

Since 2002, Umoja has provided support to women, refugees, and asylum-seekers living in the Western Cape region. The Western Cape is one of the three largest refugee-hosting provinces in South Africa. Refugee populations are diverse and dispersed throughout the province, with most residing in the environs of Cape Town.

Resources and partnerships

Umoja financially sustains its operations by producing accessories and clothes for bulk orders, which help fund their programmes. This income stream has been crucial to Umoja's sustainability, allowing it to continue operations without solely relying on external funding. Over time, new income streams and training programmes have been developed. For example, a request for barista training led to the establishment of the Umoja Café coffee shop in 2019, which supported further training.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, UNHCR has supported Umoja with various resources. This assistance included funding to produce reusable masks, as well as reusable pads and sanitizers for distribution in schools and shelters.

Umoja has partnerships with several local and national organizations and is a member of the South African Refugee-Led Network. This network provides support and guidance to fellow refugee leaders and facilitates capacity-strengthening in advocacy and resource mobilization. Through the South African Refugee-Led Network, Umoja has received funds and partnerships with other organizations for skills exchange, girls' leadership training, and workforce development. Umoja also has ongoing collaborations with South African sister organizations like the [Activist Education Development Centre](#) and the [Movement for Change and Social Justice](#), further strengthening its presence and impact in the wider host community.

Governance and core activities

Umoja began as a sewing project for forcibly displaced and stateless women in a church-supported space. Over time, Umoja has expanded and become a legally registered public benefit organization in South Africa. Umoja has a team of 13 staff members, including three facilitators, three production workers, and four early childhood development staff, along with volunteers. Umoja's governance structure includes a board with five national members.

Diverse partnerships, funding sources, and diverse revenue streams significantly contributed to Umoja's growth in its early stages. For example, Breadline Africa (a charity based in South Africa) donated five industrial sewing machines, while the Alliance for Refugees in South Africa (AFRISA) provided 15 additional machines, along with training and production support.



Umoja Skills Development advanced knitting class empowering women to launch their own businesses. ©Umoja

South African National Lottery funds helped purchase more machines and expand Umoja's facilities. Additionally, [COHERE](#) supported skills training for 30 women, and helped Umoja launch its new early childhood development programme for women needing childcare support.

Umoja has effectively leveraged its partnerships with refugee networks and South African women's rights organizations to secure business and training opportunities for its members. These collaborations have demonstrated sustainability and impact, continuing to thrive without specific funding. UNHCR has also facilitated Umoja's participation in significant global events such as the [Global Refugee Forum](#) and the [2024 UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs](#) in Geneva, and provided capacity-building support, which has been crucial in enhancing Umoja's visibility, expanding its networks, and strengthening its organizational capacity.

"Umoja has been a great opportunity for me. Today I am so proud of myself and so blessed to learn a skill at Umoja that can let me stand for myself and provide for my family. Besides, Umoja gave back my confidence and self-esteem, they developed me to have courage, determination and creativity in my skills. Now, I can go forward towards my dream of empowering women and young girls."

Sylvie Nadège Samba, Umoja training participant in South Africa



An Angolan refugee showing her product after participating in a training. She now serves as a trainer at Umoja Skills Development.
©Umoja

Achievements, results and impact

Umoja has made significant strides in fostering self-reliance and community empowerment within the Western Cape communities. Over the past 20 years, Umoja has successfully supported and trained over 1,000 women, girls, and men from both refugee and host communities. These programmes have equipped participants with entrepreneurial and technical skills, enhancing their personal and professional growth. As a result, many have achieved self-sufficiency and financial independence. By focusing on practical income-generating skills, and by providing essential tools, resources, and support, Umoja empowers forcibly displaced women to make positive contributions to their communities.

In addition to providing training, Umoja has mentored refugee women in establishing their own organizations. For instance, Umoja has supported new and smaller women's organizations led by refugee women in developing organizational strategies, cultivating leadership skills, and advocating effectively. This mentorship has been invaluable in helping these organizations navigate challenges and expand their impact.

A notable example of Umoja's mentoring efforts is "Operation Blessing," a project supporting widowed refugee women. Umoja assisted in registering the project, securing funding, and providing advice on income generation through initiatives such as opening a sewing center and a guest house. This project has provided housing for refugees without homes.

By sharing resources such as training materials and best practices with other organizations, and by fostering connections and partnerships, Umoja has expanded its networks. This expansion has led to increased opportunities for collaboration on projects and initiatives with a broad range of local actors.

At the forefront of advocacy, Umoja has raised awareness about the challenges faced by refugee women and worked to advocate for increased visibility, support, and opportunities for refugee women entrepreneurs and refugee-led organizations in local, regional, and global policy discussions. This advocacy has been instrumental in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees and has fostered mutual trust with the host community.

"I heard about Umoja and the training they were offering. I was interested because I was dreaming of becoming a fashion designer. I was worried about how I would communicate, but when I arrived at the Umoja Centre in 2013, I was welcomed, and I found a family."

I joined the nine-month programme. What I learned there was more than being at university, starting from patternmaking to garment construction. I started making bags to sell at flea markets, where I had my stall and displayed what I made. I am now a breadwinner of my family."

Gisele, Umoja training participant in South Africa

Lessons

ENABLING FACTORS

- **Clear organizational mission and community support:** Umoja operates with a clear and compelling mission, deeply committed to fostering positive community impact. This mission underpins all activities. Initially, Umoja leveraged support from its internal network, including family, local churches, and community members. This foundational support was instrumental in the organization's inception. Maintaining strong ties with the local community and promoting social cohesion is vital, particularly when supporting at-

risk and marginalized groups. This effort requires the endorsement and protection of the host community, which acknowledges Umoja's positive contributions. Through networks like South African Sisters, Umoja has established a respected presence in township communities, garnering appreciation and support for its initiatives.

- **Strong partnerships:** Establishing robust partnerships with local communities, governmental bodies, the private sector, and other stakeholders has been pivotal for Umoja. Engaging with refugee leaders through networks like the South African Refugee-Led Network facilitates collaboration and idea exchange. These networks provide essential resources, promote teamwork, and help bridge cultural divides, fostering unity. Umoja has developed its programmes through access to opportunities to build, share and strengthen capacity from these partnerships, which have empowered it to effectively lead and manage its operations and programmes, while also equipping forcibly displaced women with the necessary skills.
- **Conducive national policies:** In South Africa, once organizations are documented, registration becomes straightforward. The organization's staff, who have permanent resident status (unlike those who are asylum-seekers), benefit from this ease of registration.

ADVERSE FACTORS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Managing day-to-day operations with limited staff and resources has been a significant challenge for Umoja. The continuity of Umoja's work is jeopardized by insufficient programmatic and institutional funding. Despite successfully securing financial and material support from various partners and organizations, Umoja continues to face substantial obstacles due to the lack of flexible and sustained funding. This issue is exacerbated by the complex nature of funding application processes and reporting procedures, which often fail to accommodate the unique needs and capacities of refugee women-led organizations.

Tips for replication and scale-up



EMBEDDING THE PROJECT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY to reflect its needs and values is essential. By rooting the project in the community, organizations led by forcibly displaced women can ensure that their initiatives are relevant and resonate with the local population, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and sustainability.



PROVIDING ACCESS TO RESOURCES, TECHNOLOGY, TRAINING, AND CAPACITY-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES empowers forcibly displaced women to lead and manage their organizations effectively, expanding their reach and impact. By investing in skill-building programmes and platforms for women to voice their concerns, organizations led by forcibly displaced women can foster resilience and self-sufficiency.



SUPPORTING FORCIBLY DISPLACED WOMEN HOLISTICALLY, registering their organizations legally, setting up bank accounts, writing project proposals, and connecting with potential funders is crucial for building a solid foundation for their initiatives. Empowering them towards leadership positions strengthens their impact in the community, creating a ripple effect that benefits others. Forcibly displaced women often face significant barriers to leadership, but with the right support, including psycho-social support, they can overcome these challenges.



DIVERSIFYING INCOME SOURCES through various streams can enhance financial resilience and reduce dependency on a single funding source, especially during times of reduced funding. By marketing products made through skill-based programmes, local women's organizations can support their ongoing operations and ensure the continuity of their work. This approach also reinforces the value of skills training for participants, directly connecting their efforts to the organization's sustainability.

Next steps

- Umoja is actively seeking funding to expand its capacity and create new opportunities. Leveraging Cape Town's reputation for clothing manufacturing, Umoja aims to establish a large-scale factory employing up to 500 individuals and eventually launch a dedicated retail store for its products. Meanwhile, Umoja plans to launch a digital shop on its website in 2025, opening new avenues for global customer reach and increasing revenue to support its mission and sustainability.
- Additionally, UNHCR is mobilizing efforts to increase funding opportunities for organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women in 2025. UNHCR aims to connect organizations like Umoja to [MADE51](#), a UNHCR initiative that supports refugee artisans by helping them build sustainable livelihoods through their craftsmanship. This collaboration will provide Umoja with greater visibility and access to international markets, further empowering the organization and its beneficiaries.

More information:

- Umoja Skills Development - <https://www.umojaforafrica.com/>
- UNHCR South Africa - <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/south-africa>

Ecuador

Asociación Integral de Mujeres Migrantes en Ecuador (AIMME)

Key Information

TITLE:

Grant funding to organizations led by forcibly displaced women in Ecuador

DATES:

Ongoing since 2023

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE:

Drive increased representation and leadership of women and girls, specifically through organizations led by forcibly displaced women in the humanitarian response in Ecuador

POPULATION GROUPS:

Forcibly displaced women and girls, host communities



Overview

The Asociación Integral de Mujeres Migrantes en Ecuador (AIMME), an organization led by forcibly displaced and stateless women, was founded by Diana Guzmán, a Colombian refugee who has resided in Ecuador since the 2000s, and two refugee women from Venezuela.

Since 2023, AIMME has operated in Ecuador's Santo Domingo Province, focusing on community initiatives aimed at preventing GBV and promoting women's empowerment. The organization engages in local advocacy efforts and connects survivors of violence to specialized services available within the community.

AIMME was one of the first three WLOs in Ecuador to enter a partnership with UNHCR through a grant agreement aimed at strengthening AIMME's organizational structure and enhancing its capacity to implement community initiatives focused on preventing GBV and empowering forcibly displaced and stateless women, as well as members of the host community.

Context

Ecuador currently hosts one of the largest populations of recognized refugees in Latin America. As of 31 December 2024, 149,315 refugees and other displaced people were supported and registered in proGres, among them, 78,629 individuals are registered as active refugees.⁶ Displacement trends in Ecuador have surged, with the number of Colombian asylum seekers rising dramatically. In the first quarter of 2024 alone, Colombian asylum requests doubled compared to 2023, driven by the intensification of violence in Colombia. Asylum applications

⁶ UNHCR, "UNHCR Ecuador: Operational Update 2024 in Review". Available from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/114112>



Community members take part in a march during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, raising their voices for safety, dignity, and equality. @AIMME

of Venezuelans continued to be significant, underscoring the country's role as one of the primary destinations for refugees in the region. The ongoing international protection needs prompted the government to extend and refine its regularization process, allowing for better documentation and protection for migrants and refugees.

Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas is a province of Ecuador where a significant number of Colombians and Venezuelans are concentrated. Gender-based violence is a serious problem in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, as in the rest of the country. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Census, as per the Gender Violence Survey 2019, 68.3% of women in Santo Domingo have experienced some type of violence, and the femicide rate in Ecuador is estimated at 5.09 per 100,000 women between 2014 and 2021.⁷ In the case of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, the rate rises to 7.37 per 100,000 women.

Upon arrival in Ecuador, many forcibly displaced women face urgent concerns regarding the availability of safe shelter, food, and comprehensive health care, including physical, mental, and reproductive health needs. Many are exposed to sexual violence and exploitation, compounded by experiences of violence in their home countries, additional risks during displacement, and specific protection needs in the host country.

⁷ Iniciativa Spotlight, "Datos de la encuesta nacional sobre: Relaciones familiares y la violencia de género contra las mujeres (ENVIGMU 2019) y de femicidio" (Quito, 2021). Available from [Relaciones Familiares y la Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres \(ENVIGMU 2019\) y de feminicidio](#)

UNHCR has been working in Ecuador since 2000, supporting the protection and integration of asylum-seekers, forcibly displaced and stateless persons, and others forced to flee their countries. UNHCR complements the efforts of the State, civil society and communities in the prevention, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence, through direct protection support to survivors, their families, and communities.⁸

UNHCR works with 40 community-based organizations (CBOs) across the country, including 18 women-led groups that receive support as part of its multi-year strategy.

Resources and Partnerships

UNHCR has established a grant agreement with AIMME, significantly enhancing the organization's capacities and playing a vital role in its growth. The funds were utilized to purchase office equipment, cover staff costs for AIMME's team of volunteers and partners, and support workshop facilitators. Additionally, the grant provided material support for capacity-strengthening workshops and outreach meetings with women in various communities in Santo Domingo.

Beyond financial support, UNHCR provided digital tools and facilitated access to digital learning platforms for workshop participants. AIMME staff also benefited from multiple training sessions on a broad range of topics conducted by the UNHCR team to further build their institutional capacity.

AIMME has established several key partnerships to support its mission. Initially, a collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) provided legal support and guidance for setting up the organization, along with essential resources such as laptops to start its operations. HIAS Ecuador has since made a significant contribution through a grant agreement, strengthening AIMME's organizational and programmatic capacities and enhancing its formal structure.

Additionally, AIMME partners with Alianza Migrante to raise awareness about the protection risks faced by refugee and migrant women. Together, they maintain an ongoing dialogue with the Colombian Consulate in Ecuador, focusing on initiatives that specifically address the needs of Colombian nationals.

⁸ UNHCR, "UNHCR Ecuador: GBV Factsheet" (2024). Available from UNHCR Ecuador, Gender Based Violence Fact Sheet, September 2024, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111902>

Governance and core activities

AIMME's team is comprised of six volunteers and two junior volunteers, who receive financial incentives based on their contributions to the projects and activities within the programmes. AIMME's governance is overseen by a general assembly, consisting of registered members. This assembly is responsible for electing the board of directors from among its members and approving budgets and work plans during meetings. The elected board of directors includes a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and coordinator, and currently includes Colombian, Venezuelan, and Ecuadorian women. The board meets monthly to discuss operational matters, strategize future initiatives, and ensure the organization remains aligned with its mission.

MULTI-YEAR ENGAGEMENT WITH WLOS

Since 2020, [UNHCR Ecuador](#) has been actively collaborating with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women. They began by conducting a mapping exercise to identify community-level governance structures and organizations led by these women. In 2022, UNHCR organized participatory consultations with these organizations, fostering engagement and collaboration.

This initiative is part of the UNHCR Ecuador Multi-Year Strategy 2023–2025, which includes specific commitments to working with refugee-led organizations. In 2024, UNHCR Ecuador's operational plan prioritized strengthening and working with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women, such as AIMME, Mujeres en Movimiento, and [Las Reinas Pepiadas](#).

COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF ISSUES, NEEDS AND SOLUTIONS

AIMME organized six women's circles in Santo Domingo to identify and address the specific needs of migrant and refugee women, with a focus on empowerment and inclusion. These circles provide opportunities for women to share their experiences, receive support, and build their capacities through various activities. They often address issues such as gender-based violence, legal rights, and economic empowerment. Additionally, they facilitate access to digital tools and learning platforms, helping women develop skills to improve their livelihoods and independence.

To address gaps such as a lack of information about rights in the host country, difficulties accessing legal assistance, and a shortage of supportive spaces for guidance, AIMME proposed establishing a safe space. This space would offer legal guidance to navigate the justice system, psychosocial support, and awareness-raising workshops.



Workshop with women on sexual and reproductive health and prevention of violence, in Atahualpa, Santo Domingo province ©UNHCR/Diana Montero

GRANT AGREEMENT FUNDING

As a result of their findings and the identified community needs, AIMME received a grant from UNHCR Ecuador through the “Safe from the Start” initiative. This initiative focuses on establishing protection measures from the outset of crises for women, girls, and other persons at high risk. It aims to improve safety and access to resources for those at risk by providing funding, training, and support to strengthen local and CBOs capacity to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV), empower women, and incorporate a survivor-centered approach throughout humanitarian responses.

In mid-2024, UNHCR and AIMME launched the project “*Apoyo y Empoderamiento Emocional a Mujeres Migrantes, Refugiadas, Solicitantes de Asilo y de las Comunidades de Acogida*” (Emotional Support and Empowerment for Migrant, Refugee, Asylum-Seeker, and Host Community Women). This project primarily aims to prevent GBV by creating safe spaces for women of all ages from refugee, migrant, forcibly displaced, and host communities. It also seeks to strengthen community capacities in selected areas to effectively identify and mitigate GBV risks, provide support to GBV survivors, and promote shared responsibility and inclusion.

The project’s activities include establishing women’s circles that provide emotional support and foster connections among diverse groups of women, along with capacity-building workshops designed to enhance local skills and resources in basic concepts on prevention and response to gender-based violence. AIMME has facilitated workshops on women’s rights, including on rights of displaced women and host communities. Approximately 150 people, mainly women, girls, boys, and adolescents, have participated in these workshops so far.

Achievements, results and impact

AIMME continues to enhance its impact by focusing on the following areas:

- **Organizational Strengthening:** AIMME has improved its formal structure by establishing a Board of Governance, which now has clear policies and enhanced internal communication strategies.
- **Community engagement and community-driven solutions:** AIMME has implemented initiatives in three key locations in the province of Santo Domingo. Additionally, AIMME continues to enhance community engagement in protection and prevention from violence through sensitization and information on available services and women's rights. These local communities have started implementing GBV risk mitigation mechanisms to better protect women and girls at risk of violence, thereby developing solutions tailored to their needs.
- **Advocacy for refugee and migrant rights:** AIMME participated in drafting recommendations as part of the update to the Organic Law on Human Mobility, which were presented to Ecuador's National Assembly in 2021. This law includes various measures to regulate immigration and protect the rights of migrants and refugees in Ecuador. By promoting collaboration with organizations such as the Migrant Alliance and GIZ, AIMME ensures its participation in relevant events and through joint programming. This has secured increased institutional resources and a stronger ability to implement more projects that support the local community.

Lessons

ENABLING FACTORS

- **Strategic multi-year and intersectional approach:** UNHCR in Ecuador has implemented a multi-year strategy focused on collaborating with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women. This approach enabled AIMME to initiate its work at the field office level in 2023 and expand to the national level in 2024. Additionally, UNHCR provided consistent technical support to prepare AIMME for receiving grant funding and has provided capacity building support which has empowered the organization to effectively implement its community-based initiatives.
- **Formal registration:** Initially an informal organization, AIMME later registered as a formal entity, enhancing its influence with partners in Santo Domingo. Importantly, UNHCR did not require formal registration for AIMME to receive grant funding. As a result, AIMME could successfully leverage UNHCR funding to attract further institutional and programmatic support.



- **Effective partnership building:** AIMME has cultivated partnerships and networks with local organizations. UNHCR's additional support has facilitated AIMME's access to new spaces for representation and engagement at national and regional levels. This assistance has enabled AIMME to form new partnerships and discover new advocacy and funding opportunities, including collaborations with other United Nations agencies.

ADVERSE FACTORS AND CONSTRAINTS

- **Administrative and funding barriers:** Refugee-led organizations, including women-led organizations, often face significant challenges in accessing flexible and long-term funding in Ecuador, due to strict criteria. Moreover, local banks impose many administrative barriers, making it difficult for these organizations to access and register a formal account.

Tips for replication and scale-up



SIMPLIFY FORMAL REQUIREMENTS: To avoid placing unnecessary pressure and stress on these organizations, donors should simplify and streamline the formal requirements for agreements. This allows WLOs to focus on their core mission and activities. Simplified processes can significantly reduce administrative burdens, enabling WLOs to allocate more resources to their programmes and services.



LONG-TERM CAPACITY STRENGTHENING: Strengthening organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women must be seen as a long-term process, carried out over several years. This involves listening to their ideas and learning from their insights, as they function as the voice of their communities. Long-term support helps build sustainable capacities, ensuring that WLOs can continue to advocate for and support their communities effectively.



FACILITATE FINANCIAL ACCESS: Considering the challenges posed by local banks' administrative barriers to accessing and registering a formal account as a women-led organization, donors could further support by reinforcing digital and financial literacy, and exploring collaboration with relevant actors to support access to mobile money, or alternatives thereof. This could include providing financial literacy training, assisting with the establishment of bank accounts, and offering flexible funding options more accessible to WLOs.



MUTUAL BENEFIT AND TRUST BUILDING: Recognize the mutual benefit for the humanitarian actors and displaced women-led organizations to work as a team to address challenges and enhance community impact without attempting to transform or institutionalize them. It is important to respect and recognize the leadership and autonomy of these organizations, valuing their capabilities beyond the specific programme focus and supporting their broader contributions across sectors. This approach fosters a collaborative environment where both parties can learn from each other and achieve greater impact together.



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: Empower communities to implement measures to protect and prevent violence in collaboration with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women. This ensures collective community ownership of responses and timely, efficient actions for the benefit of women and girls at risk. Community-driven initiatives are more likely to be sustainable and effective, as they are tailored to the



specific needs and contexts of the communities they serve.

BROADEN NETWORKS AND OPPORTUNITIES: Support organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women by connecting them with broader networks, opportunities, and potential donors to enhance their reach and independent sustainability. This should be done while anchoring their projects in broader humanitarian response plans. Expanding their networks can provide these organizations with access to new resources, partnerships, and platforms to amplify their impact.

Next steps

AIMME plans to develop comprehensive training sessions for refugee and migrant women in Ecuador, focusing on their rights, including access to justice, asylum, regularization pathways, and violence prevention. The organization aims to establish a support network of refugee and migrant women leaders across various communities, fostering collaboration and providing resources for local initiatives that promote inclusion, entrepreneurship, and mutual support.

Additionally, AIMME intends to create a resource and empowerment center where refugee and migrant women can access information on mental health, education, and employment opportunities to support their integration into Ecuadorian society.

UNHCR aims to continue supporting AIMME by providing capacity-building opportunities and assisting in the search for new funding sources. The organization also seeks to monitor the results of AIMME's interventions, connecting them with additional support opportunities to ensure their programmes can expand to more communities in Santo Domingo, thereby enhancing their reach and impact.

More information:

- Asociación Integral de Mujeres Migrantes en Ecuador - <https://www.instagram.com/aimme.sd/>
- UNHCR Ecuador - <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/ecuador>

Nepal

Bhutanese Refugee Women's Forum

Key Information

TITLE:

Meaningful engagement unfolds over decades with Bhutanese Refugee Women's Forum

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE:

Capacity strengthening of Bhutanese forcibly displaced community-based organizations in Nepal

POPULATION GROUPS:

Community-based organization led by forcibly displaced Bhutanese women living in Nepal (prima facie refugees), host communities.

DATES:

Ongoing since 2001

Overview

The Bhutanese Refugee Women's Forum (BRWF) was established in 1995 by forcibly displaced Bhutanese women who were recognized as prima facie refugees in Nepal. It is a legally recognized women-led organization at the municipal level that focuses on the empowerment of forcibly displaced and stateless women. BRWF provides support to survivors of gender-based violence, offers health promotion programmes, and facilitates access to legal and administrative services. Since its inception, BRWF has aimed to connect women across the seven Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal to address their collective needs.

Context

UNHCR Nepal supports over 12,500 Tibetan refugees, 6,365 Bhutanese refugees and around 1,000 urban mandate refugees and asylum-seekers.⁹ Since 2020, UNHCR in Nepal has shifted from a direct assistance model to an advocacy and capacity-development approach, focusing on registration and self-reliance through livelihoods, while continuing efforts to document Bhutanese and Tibetan refugees. Key interventions include facilitating refugees' access to labour markets, registering businesses, facilitating access to social protection, and offering skills training and inclusive public health programmes, while considering age, gender and diversity.¹⁰

After decades of advocacy to find sustainable solutions for the Bhutanese refugee community, a large-scale resettlement program between 2007 and 2017 successfully relocated over 113,000 Bhutanese refugees¹¹. The remaining Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are predominantly older individuals and those with heightened needs, with 11.8% over the age of 60 and a

⁹ UNHCR, "Nepal factsheet", March 2023. Available from <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/unhcr-nepal-factsheet-march-2023>.

¹⁰ UNHCR, "UNHCR country strategy evaluation: Nepal" (17 January 2023). Available from www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/unhcr-nepal-country-strategy-evaluation-report.pdf.

¹¹ UNHCR, "Nepal", no date. Available from www.unhcr.org/countries/nepal (accessed 3 January 2025).



Celebration of 16 Days of Activism Against GBV in the Pathari-Sansichare settlement.
© BRWF

disability prevalence of 3.4%,¹² higher than in the local population¹³. Children make up one-third of the refugee population, underscoring the need for targeted educational and protection services. While the Nepalese refugee situation is relatively stable, with no significant new arrivals, the high risk of natural disasters due to climate change, such as earthquakes and floods, poses a significant threat of displacement and heightens the vulnerability of both refugees and locals.

BRWF operates in the two remaining settlements of forcibly displaced Bhutanese people in Koshi province, eastern Nepal namely Beldangi in Damak municipality and Pathari Shanishchare in Morang municipality. These settlements are home to 6,365 Bhutanese refugees, who remain after being forcibly displaced in the 1990s.¹⁴

¹² Data from health screening undertaken in both Bhutanese refugee settlements in 2024 by the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia in Nepal, under a partnership with UNHCR.

¹³ National Federation of the Disabled – Nepal, “Disability data from Nepal census 2022”, 4 April 2023. Available from <https://nfdn.org.np/news/disability-data/> (accessed 3 January 2025).

¹⁴ UNHCR, “Nepal factsheet”, March 2023. Available from <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/unhcr-nepal-factsheet-march-2023>

Resources and partnerships

Since 2002, UNHCR has collaborated with the Bhutanese Refugee Welfare Foundation (BRWF) as a key partner and primary community-based organization to provide services and assistance to Bhutanese forcibly displaced people, through sub-agreements with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Association of Medical Doctors for Asia (AMDA), among other actors.

UNHCR covers transportation and communication costs for BRWF's operations and provides monthly stipends for BRWF volunteer incentive workers who contribute their time to the organization. UNHCR provides material support to BRWF. This includes office space and equipment, such as laptops, and funding for a security guard for the office. UNHCR also offers a modest education allowance to refugee children attending public schools to cover costs such as uniforms and stationery.¹⁵

UNHCR's support extends to technical assistance, including training programmes to its staff, mentorship and coaching to help BRWF improve its project management, documentation and reporting. UNHCR also facilitates connections between BRWF and local government institutions and supports the organization's registration with relevant entities.

Governance and core activities

BRWF is governed by a central committee consisting of six elected women members. This committee includes a president, general secretary, treasurer, and three other members. Elections are held within the refugee community, allowing members to vote for their representatives.

In addition to the central committee, each settlement has its own committee. The Beldangi settlement committee has 40 elected members, while the Pathari Shanishchare settlement committee has 22 elected members. Alongside these elected representatives, the organization currently employs around ten volunteers. All Bhutanese forcibly displaced people can access the services provided through BRWF programming, allowing people of third gender¹⁶ and men to participate in its activities; however, men cannot be elected to the central committee.

UNHCR's focus within the region is on prioritizing assistance for populations in greatest need of access to livelihoods and services, while transferring remaining responsibilities to community-based organizations. In this regard, UNHCR supports BRWF in independently managing essential services, such as protection and support for individuals at heightened risk, health care, and livelihood programmes. Over several decades, there has been a gradual shift from UNHCR-led services to BRWF-led services.

¹⁵ UNHCR, "Nepal factsheet", March 2023. Available from <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/unhcr-nepal-factsheet-march-2023>.

¹⁶ Constitution of Nepal 2015 as amended to 2020 (English). Article 18 legally enshrines the rights of sexual and gender minorities, including "metis" or third gender people.

For 20 years, UNHCR has worked to provide comprehensive support to BRWF to strengthen its institutional capacities. This support included several long-term deployments from UNHCR to work with BRWF at the local level. Additionally, UNHCR ensured the strategic inclusion of BRWF in dialogues with local authorities, particularly in discussions on legal services for forcibly displaced people, such as the registration of births. Through building these connections with local authorities, BRWF has gained recognition, with authorities referring cases at heightened risks directly to them. This recognition has been further solidified with the registration of BRWF as a community-based organization with the municipality.

BRWF helps refugees in Nepal obtain documentation and collects essential records for birth registrations. Their advocacy extends to promoting inclusive documentation policies and challenging gender-discriminatory laws, particularly those impacting marriages between refugees and local community members, which can leave children without legal status. UNHCR has gradually stepped back from direct assistance, and BRWF now takes the lead in working with municipal authorities in managing essential services and advocacy efforts. However, UNHCR continues to provide limited, targeted support for the most vulnerable persons and maintains its advocacy efforts for birth documentation in Nepal and repatriation to Bhutan.

Achievements, results and impact

Over the past 30 years, BRWF has evolved from an informal group to a legally recognized organization that now independently manages key protection programmes, following the transfer of these programmes from UNHCR.

Initially, UNHCR solely managed all high-risk protection cases, however this role has since been transferred to BRWF. Now, BRWF receives referrals from forcibly displaced women, the host community, and local municipal authorities. The organization is responsible for identifying individuals at risk, assessing their specific needs and risks, developing tailored action plans, coordinating and delivering necessary services and support, and regularly monitoring progress.

BRWF has gained the trust and recognition of local authorities and other community-based organizations. It has fostered strong partnerships with organizations, such as the Bhutanese Refugee Association of Disability, the Bhutanese Refugee Children Forum, and the Settlement Management Committee, ensuring inclusive and meaningful community participation.

Supported by UNHCR and private donations, BRWF engages women livelihood activities such as bag production, pig and poultry farming, thereby empowering them economically. Additionally, the younger generation of refugees has achieved high literacy levels, a significant improvement from the largely illiterate first generation who fled Bhutan. Basic education is now standard, and adult literacy programmes are no longer necessary.



Bhutanese refugee women play significant leadership roles within their community, actively participating in local committee elections and holding 50 percent of positions in settlement management, which surpasses Nepal's national quota of 33 percent for women's leadership. Many of these women have held or currently hold leadership roles within BRWF.

Lessons

ENABLING FACTORS

- **Robust organizational structure:** BRWF's organizational structure, featuring an elected committee, enhances trustworthiness and accountability, which fosters strong community ownership and support for its initiatives, while ensuring that the organization remains responsive to the community's needs.
- **Joint programming:** UNHCR has integrated BRWF into its operational framework, ensuring that BRWF leadership is consistently involved in all programmes and advocacy efforts. BRWF leaders participate in strategic decision-making spaces and dialogues



Moti Maya Rai, makes snacks for the client at her shop in Beldangi refugee settlement, Jhapa, Nepal. Rai runs a small eatery shop at her home. © UNHCR

with key partners which has empowered them with relevant information and credibility to strongly advocate for their community's needs and issues with government entities. This collaborative approach between UNHCR and BRWF has strengthened credibility and positive engagement with government entities.

- **Sustained funding:** Financial support from private donors from diaspora networks has become a vital funding source for BRWF, enabling the organization to concentrate on projects that align with community priorities. This backing not only enhances BRWF's ability to address the specific needs of the refugee community but also reduces reliance on UNHCR and other external aid sources. This financial stability allows the organization to plan long-term and address community needs more sustainably.

ADVERSE FACTORS AND CONSTRAINTS

- **Legal barriers to accessing funding:** The government mandates that community-based organizations must be officially registered by citizens of Nepal to qualify for international funding. This restriction hinders the BRWF from accessing a range of funding sources and opportunities. The legal constraint has led to a dependence on UNHCR for resources and support. Such ongoing reliance complicates the transition of Bhutanese refugees and CBOs towards self-reliance and growth.

Tips for replication and scale-up



SUSTAINABILITY FROM THE START: Integrate sustainability measures early to build a strong foundation and ensure the longevity and effectiveness of women-led initiatives. Establish a clear long-term strategic vision for engaging organizations led by forcibly displaced women in the humanitarian response, including holistic support and investments in training, deployments and capacity-building programmes, involving community members in planning and decision-making, engaging in advocacy and policy efforts, forming alliances with other organizations, financial planning, and implementing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress and identify areas for improvement.



COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP: Collective leadership, rather than having a single woman leader, can be an effective model for women-led organizations, promoting shared responsibility and diverse perspectives. BRWF encouraged the election of office-bearers within the community at the local level to foster accountability and strengthen ties with the broader population across multiple settlements. This model is replicated at the central committee level, where roles such as president, vice-president, and secretary are also elected.



MULTI-YEAR JOINT PROGRAMMING WITH ORGANIZATIONS LED BY FORCIBLY DISPLACED WOMEN: Develop joint programmes with aligned goals and objectives to ensure that both organizations benefit from the partnership. Joint programming is an effective strategy for these organizations to leverage the expertise and resources of larger organizations and enhance their capacity to implement their initiatives more effectively. Offer flexible, multi-year grants that allow these organizations to plan long-term and adapt to changing circumstances, allowing them to focus on their core mission.

Next steps

BRWF will continue its work to empower the Bhutanese refugee community, with a dedicated focus on women's economic empowerment. BRWF is expanding its services to provide broader support to the entire refugee community in Nepal, particularly in documentation and registration, fostering a strong community network for mutual support.

Recognizing the gradual reduction of UNHCR's involvement, BRWF is actively building relationships with other potential donors to sustain and diversify its initiatives, while pursuing sustainable livelihood options to enhance community resilience. As BRWF continues to expand its reach and impact, the organization seeks new funding sources to sustain its initiatives.

More information:

- Bhutanese Refugee Women's Forum - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100077289791688>
- UNHCR Nepal - <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/nepal>



Women leaders participating in the linked event focusing on “Working with Organizations Led by Displaced or Stateless Women and Girls” at the 2024 UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs on Solutions, Inclusion and Gender Equality.

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