ASIA PACIFIC SUMMIT OF REFUGEES

2024

ORGANIZED BY:

ASIA PACIFIC NETWORK OF REFUGEES

MAY 17TH 2024 – MAY 19TH 2024

Location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Joined by: Local Hubs in Indonesia, India, Thai Burma Border, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Japan, Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, Afghanistan & Pakistan

Asia Pacific Network of Refugees

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Forward

It is with great pleasure that the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees introduces this report documenting the proceedings of the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees (APSOR) 2024, held from May 17th to May 19th, 2024.

APSOR marked a significant milestone in the collective efforts towards addressing the challenges faced by refugees and refugee-led organisations in the region as well as sharing their good practices and success stories. Organized simultaneously in 13 countries with the main summit held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the three-day engagement brought together refugee-led organizations, individual refugees, and non-refugee stakeholders to discuss pressing issues and strategize actionable solutions. Together, they engaged in meaningful dialogue, reflecting on the pressing issues confronting refugee communities and refugee-led organisations (RLOs) and exploring innovative solutions to address them.

Key questions guided our discussions, focusing on prioritizing the most pressing needs of refugee communities and RLOs, envisioning reforms in refugee policy at different levels, identifying opportunities for engagement, and empowering refugees to play active roles in response efforts. Throughout the summit, participants had the opportunity to seek clarification, share insights, and engage in constructive dialogue, fostering an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual understanding.

At the heart of our discussions was a shared commitment to ensuring that the voices of participants are heard and respected. We recognize the importance of meaningful refugee participation in decision-making processes concerning their rights. As such, the summit concluded with the launch of the Working Group on EXCOM Conclusion and the endorsement of an Independent Declaration on Refugee Participation, underscoring our dedication to fostering inclusive environments where every refugee's voice matters.

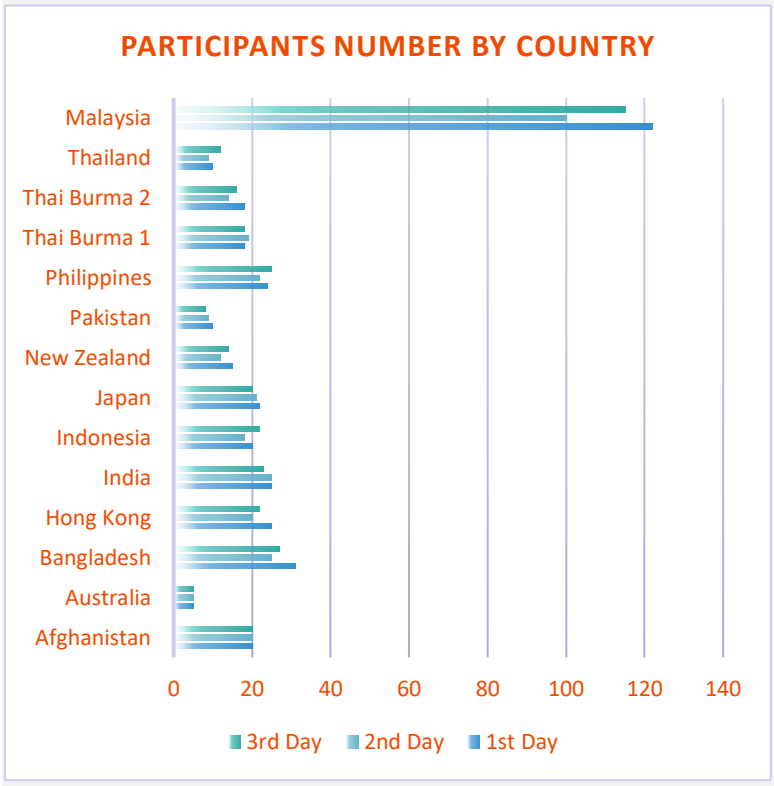
APNOR extends its sincere gratitude to all participants, organizers, and supporters whose contributions made this summit a success. Their passion, expertise, and commitment have been the driving force to redouble APNOR's efforts in amplifying the voices of refugee-led organisations in the Asia Pacific region. As we reflect on the insights gained and the commitments made during the summit, let us remain steadfast in our commitment towards supporting the voices of refugee communities and creating spaces for their meaningful and impactful participation.

Participation – Local Hubs

APSOR was hosted in Malaysia and simultaneously hosted in 13 other hubs in Indonesia, India, Thai Burma Border, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Japan, Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The hubs were established to ensure accessible and inclusive participation keeping in mind barriers to travel for refugees. Through these hubs, APSOR emerged as a unique platform where refugee communities from different countries in Asia Pacific could engage and exchange ideas and experiences.

With over 300 participants, APSOR was a testimony to the determination of refugees and stakeholders to engage and reach sustainable and actionable solutions to combat challenges faced by refugees and RLOs in the region.



Green marks the location of the summit's main hub, while purple marks that of local hubs.

Key Discussions

Throughout the summit, participants engaged in fruitful discussions centered around key questions aimed at identifying priorities and fostering meaningful change. The questions discussed included:

1. **Prioritizing Key Issues:** Participants deliberated on the most pressing needs for refugee communities, addressing crucial aspects such as agency and inclusion in decision and policy making, safety, security, shelter, legal barriers to enjoy fundamental rights, access to education, resettlement processes, barriers due to gender constructs, climate change impact on refugees, access to healthcare and funding.
2. **Policy Reform:** Delving into the realm of refugee policy, participants explored the small and significant changes required for strategic advocacy at national, regional, and global levels for a more supportive and inclusive environment for refugees and refugee-led organisations.
3. **Opportunities for Engagement:** Opportunities for engagement were explored, with a focus on addressing the pressing needs identified during the summit's discussions. Strategies to mobilize resources and continuous engagement were discussed between the refugee community and stakeholders for a deeper understanding and effective implementation of policies.
4. **Empowering Refugee Participation:** Recognizing the importance of ensuring active and meaningful participation of refugees in the response efforts, discussions revolved around strengthening the capacity of refugee-led groups, organizations, and networks. Emphasis was placed on enhancing partnerships with local, national, and international stakeholders.
5. **Enhancing Collaboration:** Participants reflected on the modalities of engagement with each other, emphasizing the importance of open communication, collaboration, and mutual support in collaborative advocacy, reporting and exchange of good practices and learnings.
6. **Continued and strategic engagement:** The discussions among refugee participants as well as with non-refugee stakeholders emphasised the need of effective engagement and representation in international platforms and forums such as Global Refugee Forum and coordination in advocacy between RLOs in the region, like-minded governments, APNOR and UNHCR.

Local hubs join summit virtually from across Asia

Malaysia Hub Participants

Day one: Collaboration and Needs Assessment

Session 1: Welcome, Introductions and Setting the Scene

The Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees commenced with a warm welcome to all participants in Malaysia, especially all local hubs in Indonesia, India, Thai Burma Border, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Japan, Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The session began with introductions aimed at creating a sense of community among attendees, both refugees and non-refugee stakeholders alike, who had gathered with a shared commitment to addressing the challenges faced by refugee communities and refugee-led organisations across the Asia Pacific region.

The summit's objectives and agenda were outlined, emphasizing the importance of empowering refugee-led organizations in advocacy and policy development. The keynote address by the Malaysia facilitators Dafer Sief and Isack Hassan highlighted the pivotal role of these refugee-led organisations in shaping policies that directly impact refugee communities, underscoring their unique insights and experiences.

Najeeba Wazefadost, CEO of APNOR starting the discussion

Session 2: Opening Plenary: Panel Discussion

The opening plenary featured a dynamic panel discussion open to all attendees, focusing on significant achievements of the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) over the past two years.

APSOR participants had the honour to listen to APNOR's Chair, **Mr. Hayso Thako** in his address. This was followed by a welcoming message by **Ms. Ellen Hansen**, Deputy Director of the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

There was an enriching panel discussion comprising of crucial areas such as the Refugee Leadership Alliance and the future trajectory of aid initiatives designed to empower refugee-led initiatives, APNOR's presence and support to other organisations and refugee leaders at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 and the importance of equitable partnership and collaboration, all underlining the importance of collective action in advancing refugee rights across the region.

Ellen Hansen. Deputy Director, UNHCR Asia and the Pacific

Participants had the chance to understand APNOR's achievements in the last two years by APNOR's co-founder, **Najeeba Wazefadost.** Participants had the opportunity to understand aims and objectives of APNOR as well as programs and achievements of the organisations. APNOR's objective to promote meaningful refugee participation has led the organization to sprout out various programs aiming on advocacy and capacity building focusing on refugee-led organisations. APSOR is one such opportunity where we bring together refugees across the region through hubs and combat the challenge of travel restrictions to facilitate discussions and networking.

Global Refugee Forum Engagement

APNOR was actively engaged during the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, a crucial platform for collaboration between refugee-led organizations and stakeholders. We were one of two refugee organizations nominated by UNHCR to lead the drafting of the refugee statement for the Forum.

"Restrictions in terms of movement can actually impact the ways we (refugees) voice our needs and issues"

- *Najeeba Wazefadost*

To ensure refugees have adequate representation, APNOR supported five refugee delegates to attend the Forum in Geneva. Despite the challenges of facilitating travel for refugees to represent themselves and their communities, we highlighted the irony of limited refugee access at platforms dedicated to refugee rights. To address the exclusion of many refugees from the invite-only Global Refugee Forum, a coalition of donors and RLOS including APNOR created a parallel refugee-led space hub in Geneva. Over forty RLOs gathered to discuss their work and needs with non-refugee stakeholders. It was a unique space which empowered RLOS to showcase their work but also have meaningful conversation with policy makers.

Collaboration with UNHCR Asia Pacific Bureau

APNOR collaborated closely with the UNHCR Asia Pacific Bureau as well as APRRN and ICVA in Bangkok for the UNHCR NGO consultations APRRN. This partnership has strengthened our advocacy and outreach efforts.

Capacity Building and Strengthening Programs

APNOR ran an annual capacity strengthening short course for 21 RLOs, helping them upskill in areas such as training, governance, and institutional policies. APNOR is also running a Meaningful Refugee Participation (MRP) training course for non-refugee stakeholders to help them understand how to work with refugees and RLOs in an effective manner focusing on collaboration and partnership

Refugee Leadership Alliance

Highlighting APNOR's efforts in establishing a funding mechanism for RLOs, Najeeba emphasized the success of the Refugee Leadership Alliance in supporting refugee leadership and self-representation.

Adama Kamara from Refugee Council Australia and Refugee Leadership Alliance spoke about the Refugee Leadership Alliance (RLA) and ways to support RLOs through aid. She spoke about how there is a gap between RLOs working on responding to the needs of refugees and available resources especially on funds and aid. Major challenges RLOs face in accessing funding are difficulties to register RLOs, opening bank accounts, meeting donors and having an effective network of stakeholders and understanding the nitty gritties of funding. To bridge this gap, RLA was established by primarily recognising that there is a systemic issue of overlooking the needs of RLOs and giving them adequate access to resources to facilitate their crucial work. RLA's objectives are threefold, as explained by the speaker, (i) increase access to funding, (ii) access to networks and (iii) influence of RLOs in networks existing in Asia Pacific region. Post consultations with RLOs and experts to design grants processes, they were able to set up an effective system that helps combat barriers to funding for RLOs. The aim was to remove any hesitation or intimidation around access to grants and funding for RLOs by supporting them in their grants application and educating them on the skill of grant seeking.

Adama Kamara speaking

Daniel Gamboa from the New Zealand National Refugee Youth Council spoke on his engagement during the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva during December 2024. He reflected on his experience and APNOR's presence and leadership at the forum for the Asia Pacific region that triggered important discussions. He highlighted the strategic importance of setting up of the refugee-led space hub which enabled broader participation of RLOs and encouraged them to engage more among themselves to come together strategically in the region and uplift the objectives discussed at the Global Refugee Forum in the next four years.

The panel concluded with **Hafsar Tameesuddin and Klaus Dik Nielsen**, Co-Secretaries General at Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) who talked about the importance of equitable partnership and collaboration. The speakers emphasized the importance of inclusion and diversity as key pillars of advocacy. They made a stark observation that inclusion of refugees is limited to only some refugee leaders and there is a need to be more inclusive and combat challenges of accessibility, networking and language. The speakers commended the idea of local hubs, that as their core, are a great example of inclusivity and bridging gaps such as travel restrictions. APRRN also talked about how they work creatively to ensure ideas around partnerships are constantly revised with an aim of increased inclusivity.

"It is inevident that without collaboration and partnership, we will never be able to work in a sustainable and impactful manner."

- Hafsar Tameesuddin

Following the inclusive sessions open to all stakeholders, the summit transitioned into exclusive breakout sessions held in local hubs, specifically designed to provide a safe space for refugees to express their opinions freely and discuss pertinent issues without restraint.

Hafsar Tameesuddin

Malaysia main hub

Session 3: Opportunities and Challenges

1. Key Issues and Pressing Needs

Participants engaged in identifying and prioritizing the most critical issues facing refugee communities. Discussions centered around agency and inclusion, safety, security, shelter, legal challenges, access to education, resettlement opportunities, healthcare access, and funding constraints.

- **Mental Health Support and Rehabilitation:** A significant focus was placed on mental health support and rehabilitation programs. The Pakistan Hub discussed how the persistent fear of detention, unemployment and the concerns on long resettlement procedures trigger mental health challenges. Malaysia hub also highlighted the state of fear and vulnerability refugees live in with no access to legal protection if faced with cases violence or harassment. Addressing the trauma and challenges faced by refugees is crucial for their overall well-being and integration into new communities given challenges due to lack of documents, legal protection and language barriers.
- **Supporting education and skill-building initiatives:** Afghanistan Hub emphasis on lack of education opportunities in the country and especially for refugees. There are barriers for refugees to access schools and primary education facilities. Malaysia Hub stressed on the importance of educational opportunities and provision of scholarships to promote refugees to upskill themselves and work for better livelihood and combat unemployment and financial difficulties. The New Zealand hub stressed the need of developing and supporting entrepreneurship programs aimed at integrating refugees into the formal economy. These programs would help refugees become economically self-sufficient and contribute to their host communities. They also discussed how providing skill-building initiatives tailored to the diverse needs of refugee communities will enhance refugees' employment prospects and self-sufficiency, ensuring they have the necessary skills to thrive in their new environments.
- **Gender based Violence and Insufficient Support for Survivors:** Thai Burma Border hub highlighted the lack of adequate security and protection for GBV case managers and service providers and the delays in promptly arresting perpetrators increase security risks for both case managers and survivors. Another critical issue discussed was the insufficient support available for survivors and survivors of GBV. Survivors often require sustained assistance, including access to safe shelters and opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Continuous support is essential for survivors to rebuild their lives and regain a sense of security and independence. Without adequate long-term support mechanisms, the risk of re-victimization or prolonged vulnerability remains high.

Pakistan Hub

New Zealand Hub

2. Changes in Refugee Policy

Following the above-mentioned challenges refugee communities face in countries across the region, participants shared their aspirations for policy reform at national, regional, and global levels. The dialogue encompassed both incremental improvements and transformative changes needed to address systemic challenges faced by refugee populations.

One pressing issue that was echoed across hubs pertaining to refugee policy was resettlement. Participants expressed how delays in resettlement processes impact their lives and deprive them from accessing their rights as refugees. They also stressed the social-challenges refugees face while waiting for resettlement such as racial discrimination, hate based on religion, social exclusion and often cases of violence that severely detriments their quality of life and mental health. Malaysia Hub raised the need for policy for psycho-social support and consultation with refugees with lived experience when drafting such policies.

The Japan hub discussed that at national, regional, and global levels, the hope is to see small and big changes in refugee policies. Nationally, simplifying processes and offering more language and cultural training can help and bigger changes include creating policies for better integration and forming a national refugee council. Regionally, countries can work together and share good practices. Globally, more cooperation and including refugees in decision-making are needed. Bigger changes would be increasing resettlement quotas and setting up a global fund for refugees. Japan hub also has participant NGOs that are refugee-led and are hiring refugees to create more opportunities. They agreed that through summits and international connections, people are sharing good practices and learning from each other, which is

Japan Hub

Thai Burma Border Hub

3. Opportunities for Engagement

To wrap up the session, participants explored avenues for meaningful engagement within their communities and on broader platforms. This discussion aimed to harness collective efforts towards advocating for refugee rights and fostering partnerships that amplify refugee voices in policy-making processes.

The India hub discussed that enhancing networking opportunities among various refugee organizations and communities is of key importance. Providing grants and financial support to community-led organizations, enabling refugee-led organizations to hire staff to address their needs could be avenues of structured support offered to refugees and RLOs. The India hub agreed that there needs to be strong advocacy for improved livelihoods and increased access to scholarships as well as for entrepreneurship support and funding.

Day one of the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees set a robust foundation for constructive dialogue and collaboration among diverse stakeholders committed to improving the lives of refugees in the region. The inclusive opening sessions paved the way for deeper, more focused discussions among refugee participants, ensuring their voices were heard and respected in shaping future policies and initiatives.

The day ended with a strong sense of solidarity among refugee participants across the region, recognising their resilience, strength and determination to strive despite the challenges they face. It is best summarised in the following statement made by New Zealand Hub.

India Hub

"We made sure that in the discussions that we had in this (new zealand) hub, it is recognised that the analysis made came from young former refugees in a third settlement country perspective. We acknowledge the need is greater where brothers and sisters are in the most dangerous zones where there are wars and civilian conflicts."

Day two: Proposal Development and Strategy

Day two of the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees was dedicated exclusively to refugees and refugee-led organizations (RLOs). The sessions were tailored to delve into the challenges faced by refugees and explore initiatives to address these challenges effectively.

Session 4: Formulating Action Plans and Initiatives

The focus of Session 4 was to address the pressing needs identified on day one and to ensure that refugees have an active, effective, and relevant role in the refugee response at local, national, and international levels. Key discussions included:

- **Human Rights Focus:** Participants emphasized the importance of human rights as the foundation for all interventions and advocated for moving away from top-down leadership to foster more opportunities for bottom-up and whole-of-community consultation. This can be met with consistent and active engagement of refugee-led organisations at national, regional and international level to adequately address and represent challenges and needs of refugees. The refugee policies and initiatives should be regularly evaluated and revised to update stakeholders on changing needs and challenges.
- **Safe Communication Channels:** There was a strong consensus on the need for safe communication channels free from discrimination, enabling individuals to report actions without fear of retribution. Malaysia Hub stressed on the importance of strengthening the referral pathways on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases and raising awareness on SGBV and getting rid of the stigma around reporting cases concerning SGBV.
- **Advocacy and Support:** Hong Kong Hub presented how advocacy strategy for RLOs can be bifurcated into two approaches (i) advocacy with law and policy makers and (ii) advocacy and awareness within the community. With a holistic approach to gather calls from the community through community leaders representing each community within the refugee community and then take it to stakeholders, RLOs can present the demands in a just and inclusive manner. It was noted that improving advocacy skills and garnering support from countries such as New Zealand and Australia were crucial for advancing refugee rights and support initiatives. The Philippines hub proposed the idea of establishing refugee unions that can lobby with government departments and relevant stakeholders to push for demands and pressing needs of the community, especially on law and policy reform. The unions can gather perspectives from the community members through online/in person meetings and exchange opinions, strategies and raise awareness.

“ Something (policy) that works today, doesn't necessarily mean that it will work tomorrow”

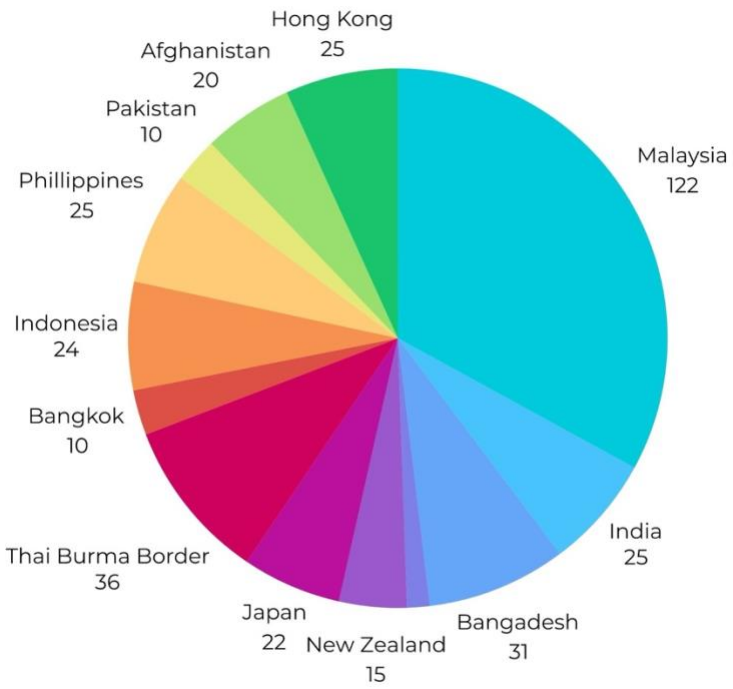
- APSOR Participant

- **Scholarships for refugees to access or continue education:** There was a call for creating scholarships and pathways to promote higher education for refugee students seeking professional degrees. Social inclusion from educational institutions is very concerning and can be combated by recognising the importance of education and prioritising refugee intake in universities for online and in person programs, distance learning programs and skill training workshops. It was proposed that donors can also help RLOs to build community centres since there is potential in the community to pass the knowledge and skills but lack of resources to set up sustainable platforms.

Indonesia Hub

Thai Burma Border Hub

APSOR Participants numbers from each country



Session 5: Strengthening Capacity and Partnerships

Session 5 focused on enhancing the capacity of refugee-led groups, organizations, and networks, and increasing partnerships with local, national stakeholders. Discussions included:

1 Mutual Support among RLOs

Participants emphasized the importance of RLOs supporting each other through financial assistance, knowledge sharing, and similar means. By establishing a network such as the local hubs, RLOs can exchange strategies, learnings and good practices and work for collaborative advocacy to present their ideas and needs at bigger platforms. Suggestions included facilitating opportunities for refugees to travel and share their stories and knowledge, fostering peer-to-peer learning. Thai Burma Border Hub shared how they work on upskilling themselves through partnerships with other RLOs by sharing resource materials, education curriculums and networks and providing opportunities of skill enhancement and education for their communities. It was noted that RLOs should avoid competition and instead seek constructive partnerships and knowledge-sharing opportunities, utilizing social media to build trust and support.

2 Capacity Development and Strategic Guidance

There was a consensus on investing in capacity development initiatives across various skills, particularly vocational training and accessing funding. Participants emphasized the need for developing a robust strategy with clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders involved. Australia Hub stressed that provisioning consultation and mentoring programs for RLOs and refugee leaders can help bridge the gap between stakeholders' understanding of refugee issues and voices directly from the communities. Bangkok Hub mentioned various areas in which RLOs can receive capacity training such as program management, leadership skills, resource sharing and advocacy allowing them to grow their programs and RLOs.

3 Respectful Partnerships and Joint Initiatives

Ensuring that all partnerships are based on mutual respect, understanding, and two-way communication was highlighted as essential for effective collaboration. Develop collaborative projects that leverage the strengths of both refugee-led groups and other stakeholders. This could involve co-creating awareness campaigns, joint advocacy programs or service delivery programs. India Hub pressed the need for refugee participation to be inclusive- new faces and leaders must be given a chance to represent their communities and groups within the communities such as youth, gender identities and community backgrounds.

"We need to ensure that there is no gate-keeping among RLOs and we (refugees) pass down the torch and knowledge and ensure there is mentorship for community members to present their needs locally, nationally and globally."

- Participant

Session 6: Impact of climate change on refugee Journey

The session on climate change and its impact on refugees during the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees was an interactive dialogue that garnered significant interest from attendees. The moderator, Thomas Gillman, facilitated a discussion involving refugee leaders and participants, focusing on understanding climate change, its effects, mitigation efforts, and related funding opportunities.

Understanding Climate Change: The session began by polling the participants on their understanding of climate change. Responses indicated a strong awareness of the impacts of climate change such as floods, droughts, natural disasters induced by climate change such as landslides that have a direct effect on migration. However, there was a gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms of climate change itself, with only a handful of participants explaining they had a deep understanding of climate change. This suggested a need to support Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) in deepening their understanding of climate change science to better comprehend its causal relationships with observed impacts.

Thomas Gillman, from APNOR

Interest and Engagement: Despite the gap in understanding, there was significant interest in addressing climate change issues. Participants expressed a general consensus on the urgency of climate action and the need for collective efforts to mitigate its effects. Many groups shared their ongoing initiatives aimed at mitigating climate change impacts through their work, underscoring their proactive stance in addressing environmental challenges.

Expertise and Contributions: The session also showcased existing expertise within individuals and RLOs, with several RLOs actively engaged in climate mitigation actions through their programs and past experiences. This expertise underscored the potential for RLOs to play a pivotal role in climate advocacy and action within their communities and more broadly across international forums as well.

Terminology and Advocacy: Notable questions from participants included inquiries about the terminology used to describe individuals displaced by climate change, such as "climate refugees" versus "climate migrants." This sparked a discussion on the importance of understanding the terminology of the climate sector to ensure effective engagement and positive contributions to the sector.

Recommendations: The session concluded with a call for the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) to facilitate more opportunities for RLOs to engage in discussions on climate change advocacy and funding. Additionally, there was a suggestion to address knowledge gaps regarding the science of climate change to empower RLOs in their advocacy efforts.

This was the first time when climate change and its intersection with refugee rights was discussed at APSOR. The session received great response and based on the strong interest in this topic shown at APSOR, APNOR has started the process of building a climate change working group which could provide advocacy and policy recommendations as well as sharing information on climate change to RLO's. This would be complemented by a series of workshops run by climate experts which would enable RLO's to access the latest information on climate change and mitigation/adaptation efforts.

Overall, the session on climate change and its impact on refugees at the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees was highly informative and engaging. It highlighted both the challenges posed by climate change and the resilience and initiative of refugee communities in addressing these challenges.

Afghanistan Hub

Thailand Hub

Day three: Fostering Collaboration, Engagement, and Steps Forward

The third and final day of the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees welcomed both refugee participants and non-refugee stakeholders with a focus on fostering engagement and collaboration between them. The agenda aimed to showcase proposals and solutions developed by refugee-led organizations across various local hubs.

Presentation of Proposals and Solutions

The final day began with reports from all local hubs, where refugee participants presented their innovative proposals and solutions developed over the past two days. It was presented by India and Malaysia Hub facilitators on behalf of all local hubs to the non-refugee stakeholders. With a powerful key summary, the facilitators kickstarted the final day of APSOR and energised the participants and stakeholders to build relationships and have meaningful conversations to address the needs of RLOS.

Dafer Sief, Malaysia Hub

Zaman Sirat, Indai Hub

Panel Discussion: Perspectives on Collaborative Solutions

To begin the conversation between refugees and stakeholders, we started with a panel discussion featuring perspectives from non-refugee stakeholders on collaborative solutions. This session was moderated by Adama Kamara who conveyed the importance of open dialogues through the following thought:

'Refugees are actually leading the way when it comes to responding to challenges and developing solutions. If we are looking at solutions, we need to make sure we are talking to refugees.'

- Adama Kamara

Speakers from left to right: Lauren Minson, DFAT Australia, Brian Barbour, Act for Peace, Susheela Balasundaram, Head of Community Based Protection Team at UNHCR Malaysia, Tien Hiu Woon, Porticus.
On screen: Sara Ward, Foreign Ministry New Zealand.

Australian Government Representative Lauren Minson (DFAT Australia) and New Zealand Government Representative Sarah Ward (Immigration New Zealand and Government of New Zealand) discussed their commitment to meaningful refugee participation pledges.

Lauren Minson from the Australian Government recognised that inclusive decision making is a cornerstone of policy, taking into account intersectionalities such as age, gender and disability. The delegate shared that Australia is one of the first countries to sign up to the pledge on meaningful refugee participation at Global Refugee Forum 2013. Since their commitment, the government has tried incorporating lived experience in their humanitarian policy developments, responses to refugee crisis and engagement with international protection systems.

"We acknowledge that in drawing solutions to forced displacement will only be found through engaging directly with those who were directly impacted"

- Lauren Minson

Sarah Ward highlighted how New Zealand is making an effort to uphold their commitment towards the refugee participation pledge at the Global Refugee Forum given the nomination of New Zealand as co-chair of the coalition of Meaningful Refugee Participation.

Susheela Balasundaram, is the Head of the Community Based Protection Team at UNHCR Malaysia. She provided insights into the role of UNHCR in supporting refugee initiatives. She shared that in Malaysia RLOs are leading exceptional work and responding to needs of the refugees, even though they face challenges such as limited capacity and resources. The speaker shared how RLOs are key partners in delivering facilities and spreading awareness in their community and work as partners with UNHCR in Malaysia. UNHCR also shared that they have developed a community feedback tool to ensure all voices are heard and can effectively work on gaps pointed out by refugees in policy implementation.

Tien Hiu Woon from Porticus highlighted the impact of donor organizations in empowering refugee-led initiatives. The speaker discussed how the organisation committed to work with organisations led by refugees and people with lived experiences. The speaker expressed that while it is important for donors on *who* they fund, it is equally important on *how* they fund the organisations. Donors need to recognise checkpoints such as meaningful participation and equitable partnerships when they fund organisations working with refugees. They have placed meaningful refugee participation and equitable partnership at the core of their work, and have committed to this over the long term.

Brian Barbabr from Act for Peace emphasized the vital role of a whole-of-society approach and refugee leadership in addressing refugee challenges. Brian Barbabr noted that refugees often do not have a seat at the table, and that governments are often concerned with security but not as much with protection.

"The whole of society approach is not just rhetoric, it is practical. If you want to meet diverse needs, the only way to do that is through collaboration. It cannot be done alone…we need a network. We need to make sure that those with the capacity to meet needs have access to those with needs."

- Brian Barbabr

Establishing Partnership for Change

"Participation is not only about being asked to join or making decisions, but about actively leading, shaping, and strengthening networks to ensure refugees have a powerful and influential voice in every aspect of the response."

- Najeeba Wazefadost

Following the panel discussion, there was an exchange of ideas and feedback between refugee and non-refugee participants, aimed at establishing meaningful partnerships for driving positive change. This was led by Najeeba Wazefadost, co-founder of APNOR and Daniel Gamboa, the Chief Executive Officer at New Zealand National Refugee Youth Council.

Najeeba Wazefadost, CEO of APNOR and Daniel Gamboa, CEO of New Zealand National Youth Refugee Council

"MRP is the DNA of what we do"

- APRRN

During the discussion, several key points were raised regarding opportunities for change and collaboration among stakeholders:

1. **Refugees Setting the Agenda:** There was a consensus on the importance of refugees setting the agenda rather than merely seeking representation. This shift empowers RLOs to drive discussions and initiatives that directly impact their communities.
2. **Peer-to-Peer Support and Resources:** Participants emphasized the need for establishing robust peer-to-peer support networks among RLOs. This would facilitate knowledge sharing, capacity building, and mutual assistance, thereby strengthening the resilience and effectiveness of refugee-led initiatives.
3. **Enhanced Accountability:** There was a call for stronger follow-ups and accountability mechanisms for actions agreed upon by all stakeholders. Implementing robust monitoring systems would ensure that commitments translate into tangible outcomes, adding significant value to collaborative efforts.
4. **Respectful and Constructive Collaboration:** The panel highlighted the importance of creating collaborative environments that are respectful and constructive. This involves fostering open dialogue, mutual respect, and inclusivity among all actors, regardless of their background or status.
5. **Safe Spaces and Access:** It was acknowledged that safe spaces are essential for refugees to freely discuss issues, share knowledge, and address sensitive topics such as LGBTQI+ rights and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Additionally, efforts should focus on reducing technology barriers and increasing access to funding for refugee-led initiatives.
6. **Educational Opportunities:** There was a proposal to create online or virtual educational opportunities for refugees, particularly in countries where access to formal education is limited. Providing relevant certificates that can be recognized upon resettlement would empower refugees with valuable skills and credentials.

7. **Innovative Funding Methods:** Stakeholders discussed the need for innovative approaches to fund refugee-led initiatives. This could include exploring new funding models or partnerships that prioritize sustainability and long-term impact.
8. **Whole-of-Society Approach:** Emphasizing a whole-of-society approach within the humanitarian sector was identified as crucial. This approach integrates diverse perspectives and resources, supported by strong accountability mechanisms to ensure transparency and effectiveness in addressing refugee challenges.

In summary, the discussion underscored the importance of empowering refugees to lead, fostering respectful collaboration, enhancing accountability, and creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and action within the APNOR framework.

"All refugees are facing similar issues, and we are all part of the solution"

- Comment from the room

Side Event: Young Lives Malaysia

As the main hub was set in Kuala Lumpur, a special side event hosted by Young Lives Malaysia titled "Campfire Conversation - Building Bridges Together – Supporting Refugee New Arrivals in Malaysia" provided an intimate setting for discussing the challenges and opportunities in supporting refugee newcomers. The event was co-facilitated by Refugee Action for Change and Young Lives Malaysia.

The event presented a panel discussion with James La Seng, Chairperson at Coalition of Burmese Ethnics Malaysia (COBEM), Alice Tan, Executive Director at Health Equity Initiative (HEI), and Yusra Herzi, Program Officer at PILNet.

Speakers from left to right: James La Seng, Chairperson at Coalition of Burmese Ethnics Malaysia (COBEM), Alice Tan, Executive Director at Health Equity Initiative (HEI), and Yusra Herzi, Program Officer at PILNet.

New Global Working Group on EXCOM

APNOR is honored to join several other organizations in supporting this crucial initiative. Najeeba, along with some of the WG members including Senior Research Associate Dr. Tristan Harley, Dr. Brian Barbour from Act for Peace, Dr. Linda Bartolomei, and Bahata Kanyamanza from IRAP launched this effort during the summit . They discussed how this group of refugee experts, academia, humanitarian and international lawyers will work collaboratively to address a significant void in international law and policy . By developing an independent declaration affirming the right of refugees to actively participate in decisions affecting them, plus comprehensive guidance for states ngos and stakeholders , this working group is driving a more meaningful inclusive approach to refugee protection and empowerment.

Speakers from left to right: Dr. Tristan Harley, Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, Dr. Linda Bartolomei, Co-Convenor, Forced Migration Research Network and Bahati Kanyamanza, Global Partnerships Program Director, International Refugee Assistan

Having such diverse and influential partners in the room was very beneficial and the actions that were shared, such as the EXCOM, gave clear indications about the next steps.

Conclusion

The summit concluded with a thought-provoking theatre performance by Parastoo Theatre, a refugee-led theatre in Kuala Lumpur illustrating the resilience and stories of refugees through art. Participants then gathered for drinks and networking, fostering connections that will continue to drive collaborative efforts beyond the summit.

This day marked a significant step towards building bridges between refugee and non-refugee stakeholders, highlighting the importance of inclusive dialogue and collective action in addressing refugee challenges in the Asia Pacific region.

Parastoo Theatre Performance

Key Recommendations and Action Items

1. **Creating Space for Collaboration Between Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs):**
   a. Objective: Facilitate knowledge sharing and best practices among RLOs to enhance their effectiveness and influence.
   b. Actions: Organize forums, workshops, and virtual platforms where RLOs can exchange experiences, strategies, and successes. Provide networking opportunities to foster partnerships and collaborations. Offer training programs and resources tailored to RLOs to strengthen their organizational capacity, leadership skills, and operational efficiency.
2. **Supporting Engagement of RLOs with Donors:**
   a. Objective: Ensure sustainable funding for RLOs to continue their crucial work.
   b. Actions: Facilitate direct access to donors through workshops, networking events, and online platforms. Provide mentorship and guidance on grant applications and fundraising strategies. Advocate for policies that prioritize funding opportunities for RLOs and ensure transparency in donor relations.
3. **Addressing Underfunding of RLOs in Asia:**
   a. Objective: Meet the growing demand for resources and investment in RLOs across the Asia Pacific region.
   b. Actions: Engage with international donors, governments, and philanthropic organizations to increase financial support dedicated to RLOs. Highlight the impact and effectiveness of RLO initiatives through data-driven advocacy and success stories.
4. **Enhancing Training and Capacity Building for RLOs and Refugees:**
   a. Objective: Empower RLOs and refugee communities with skills and knowledge.
   b. Actions: Develop tailored training programs covering leadership development, project management, financial literacy, advocacy, and community engagement. Partner with academic institutions, NGOs, and private sector entities to provide specialized training and mentorship opportunities.
5. **Promoting Dialogue on Climate Change Among RLOs:**
   a. Objective: Address the specific challenges posed by climate change to refugee communities.
   b. Actions: Facilitate workshops, seminars, and forums focused on understanding climate impacts, adaptation strategies, and advocacy for sustainable solutions. Encourage collaboration with environmental organizations and local communities to amplify voices on climate-related issues.
6. **Reforming Humanitarian Systems to Prioritize Affected Populations:**
   a. Objective: Ensure humanitarian responses prioritize the needs and voices of refugees and host communities.
   b. Actions: Advocate for localization of humanitarian aid, where refugees play central roles in decision-making and implementation. Promote the employment of refugees in camp management and community-based organizations. Encourage UN agencies and INGOs to shift focus towards capacity building and support for local initiatives.
7. **Annual EX COM for Refugee Leaders by UNHCR:**
   a. Objective: Provide a platform for refugee leaders to engage directly with decision-makers.
   b. Actions: Advocate for the establishment of an annual Executive Committee (EX COM) meeting exclusively for refugee leaders, ensuring their perspectives are integrated into UNHCR's strategic discussions and policies.

8. **Refugee Speaking Role at UNHCR Meetings and International Forums:**
    a. Objective: Ensure diverse refugee voices are heard and represented in UNHCR's decision-making processes at all levels,
    b. Actions: Push for a rotational speaking role for refugees at UNHCR's Executive and Standing Committee meetings. Ensure training and support for refugee speakers to effectively convey diverse perspectives and priorities. This can be achieved by creating more opportunities for refugee representation in policy discussions and forums such as the Global Refuge Forum and by supporting and empowering refugee-led organisations to take the lead in advocacy and community support initiatives.
9. **Addressing Systemic Barriers to Women's Participation:**
    a. Objective: Promote gender equality and inclusion in refugee leadership and decision-making.
    b. Actions: Advocate for policies and practices that remove barriers for women's participation at all levels. Provide training and mentorship opportunities specifically targeted at empowering female refugee leaders.

10. **Support for Refugee-Led Media Initiatives:**
    a. Objective: Empower refugees to shape narratives and amplify their voices through media platforms.
    b. Actions: Fund and support refugee-led media initiatives that enable communities to share their experiences, challenges, and perspectives. Provide training in media production, storytelling, and digital literacy to enhance communication capacities.
11. **Engaging Refugee Community Leaders in Policy Development:**
    a. Objective: Ensure policies and strategies reflect the needs and aspirations of refugee communities.
    b. Actions: Facilitate participatory processes where refugee leaders actively contribute to drafting and implementing policies. Collaborate with UNHCR and international organizations to integrate refugee perspectives into strategic planning. Advocate for flexible and inclusive policies that support refugee rights and resettlement processes. Engage with local and international governments to implement policies that enhance refugees' legal status, freedom of movement, and access to resources.
12. **Empowering Youth in Refugee Solutions:**
    a. Objective: Recognize youth as key actors in refugee ecosystems and solutions.
    b. Actions:Support youth-led initiatives through funding, mentorship, and capacity building. Ensure meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes and implementation of programs addressing youth-specific challenges.
13. **Supporting National Education Systems to Absorb Refugees:**
    a. Objective: Expand education opportunities for refugee children and youth within national systems.

b. **Actions:** Provide financial and technical support to national governments to build and expand schools, enhance teaching capacities, and create inclusive learning environments for refugee students. Advocate for favorable trade conditions and financial incentives to strengthen national education infrastructures.

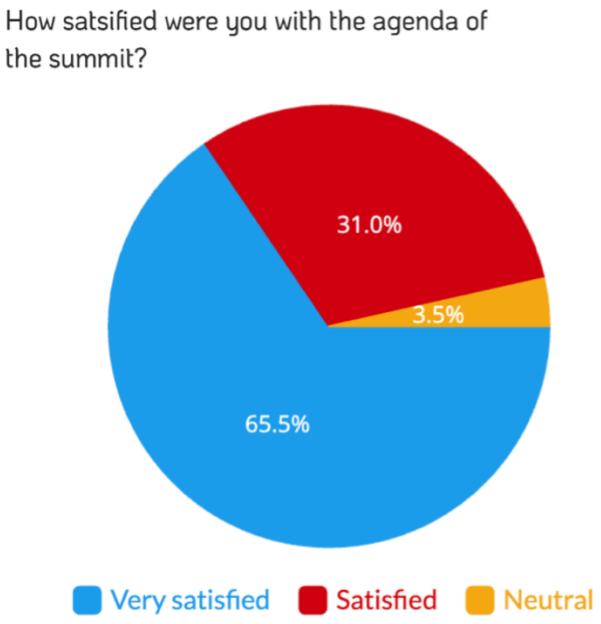
14. **Rethinking Durable Solutions with Refugee Empowerment:**
    a. Objective: Redefine durable solutions to reflect refugees' evolving needs.
    b. Actions: Involve refugees in planning and decision-making processes regarding durable solutions. Empower refugees to participate actively in shaping their future pathways, including voluntary return, local integration, or resettlement.
15. **Conducting Scoping Exercises and Engaging Refugees in Program Development:**
    a. Objective: Improve program effectiveness by understanding local responses and needs.
    b. Actions: Conduct comprehensive scoping exercises to gather insights from refugee communities. Engage refugees in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs to ensure relevance and sustainability.
16. **Reforming the Structure of Refugee Humanitarian Response:**
    a. Objective: Enhance effectiveness and accountability in refugee response efforts.
    b. Actions: Propose reforms where UNHCR takes a central role as budget holder, convener, and coordinator. Ensure refugees and host communities play primary roles in program implementation, supported by INGOs as capacity builders and advocates for refugee protection.

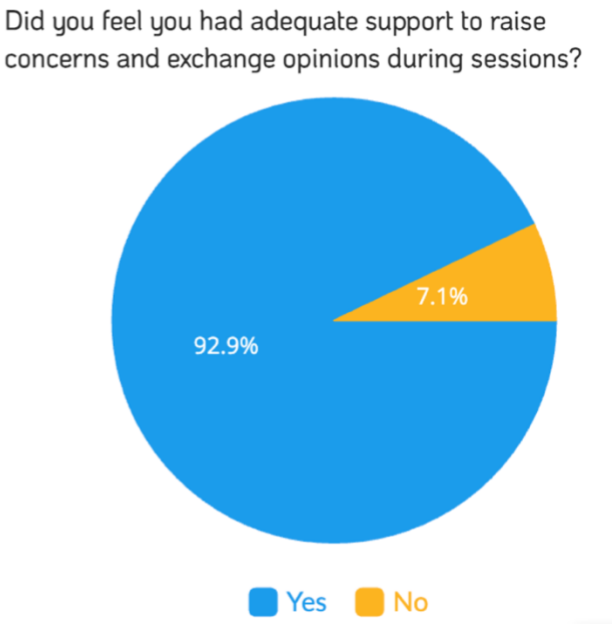
These recommendations aim to foster inclusive, responsive, and sustainable approaches to supporting refugees and empowering their communities, addressing systemic challenges through collaborative efforts and strategic advocacy.

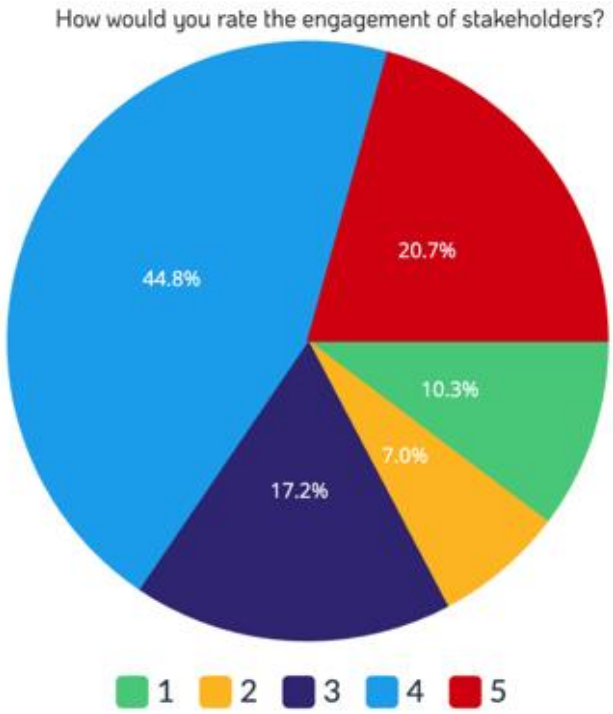
Feedback

Participants at the Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees had a profoundly enriching experience, marked by opportunities to voice their concerns and connect with fellow refugees, refugee-led organizations, and stakeholders across the region. The summit provided a platform for exchanging insights, sharing experiences, and building valuable networks.

Throughout the event, participants engaged in meaningful discussions, workshops, and networking sessions that enabled them to learn from each other's experiences and build collaborative relationships. They appreciated the chance to be heard and to contribute to discussions that directly impact their lives and communities.







Feedback from attendees was positive, highlighting the summit's effectiveness in facilitating dialogue, promoting solidarity among refugees, and fostering partnerships with organizations committed to supporting refugee rights and well-being. Participants left with renewed inspiration, strengthened networks, and a sense of empowerment to continue advocating for themselves and their communities in the Asia Pacific region.

Testimonies

> Refugees are not just numbers; they are individuals with dreams, hopes, and the resilience to rebuild their lives. Our commitment to supporting them is a testament to our shared humanity and the belief that everyone deserves a chance to live with dignity and peace.

> Such summits make us close to issues and much closer to solutions with collaboration and partnership we can achieved together

> Together our voice is stronger, We refugees left no one behind us , Empower us but don't Decide for us, Support refugee led organizations for long term solution or sustainable solution.

> The APSOR Summit was a beacon of hope, demonstrating the power of collective action and shared understanding among refugees and stakeholders. It provided us with the platform to not only share our challenges but also to collaborate on innovative solutions that respect and elevate our community.

> The most enjoyable part of the Asia Pacific Summit in Malaysia 2024 for me was the opportunity to engage in vibrant discussions with diverse stakeholders, exchanging innovative ideas and solutions for addressing the pressing issues facing the Asia Pacific region in particular and other countries.

> The collaborative efforts and innovative solutions discussed promise a brighter, more sustainable future for the Asia-Pacific region. This summit not only reinforced the importance of regional cooperation but also highlighted the shared commitment to overcoming challenges together. Thank you to all the participants and organizers for their invaluable contributions and dedication.

Acknowledgment

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all participants, steering committee members, local hub leaders, organizers, partners, and supporters whose contributions made Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees 2024 a resounding success. Together, we reaffirm our commitment to stand in solidarity with refugee communities and strive for a future where the voices of refugees are at the forefront of decision making.

Special Thanks

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