

Lawyers for Human Rights (“LHR”) is a South-African based NGO with programmes that support human rights activism, broad public interest litigation, and individual case assistance. As a partner to UNHCR, LHR also helps identify persons of concern in need of protection through the use of Protection Needs Assessments (PNAs).

A PNA is a structured interview guided by a long-form list of questions, which aims to provide an accurate overall picture of an individual’s current situation with regards to health, education, accommodation, employment, specific vulnerabilities, and security in South Africa. UNHCR and its partners use the PNA process to evaluate an individual’s protection needs in order to prioritize cases for identified interventions.

PNAs came about following widespread attacks against foreign nationals in South Africa in 2008. At that time, UNHCR in Pretoria sought to establish a mechanism to identify individuals who may need additional protection. After conducting an initial series of PNA exercises in the following years in communities affected by high rates of xenophobic violence and/or other crime, it became clear that within a context of competing priorities, UNHCR’s capacity and that of partners to conduct such exercises was increasingly limited.

In response to these challenges, UNHCR, LHR, and the Nairobi-based Church World Service-Resettlement Support Center Africa (“RSC Africa”), collaborated on a pilot PNA project in 2013. A caseworker from RSC Africa was deployed to LHR for three months and focused exclusively on completing PNAs, while UNHCR provided additional logistical support. LHR was able to significantly increase the number of PNAs completed and thereby refer a larger number of clients with protection concerns to UNHCR. However, while the short-term impact of the initial project was considerable, its long-term impact was less significant simply because it prioritized immediate casework with little opportunity to work on system and capacity building.

In 2014, RefugePoint, UNHCR, and LHR implemented a similar partnership but expanded the goals of the project to include trouble-shooting both the referring and receiving sides of the PNA system within UNHCR and LHR. The project resulted in the creation of tools and systems that have improved the overall efficiency of the PNA process, but, most importantly the success of the project has underlined an interagency commitment to collaboration and cooperation in support of the identification and protection of South Africa’s persons of concern. This in turn has resulted in enhanced protection and solutions for such persons of concern.