

# GRF LEGAL COMMUNITY PLEDGE PROGRESS UPDATE 2020 - 2021

## WHY THE PLEDGE?

For the over 82 million people who have been forced to flee their homes and the millions more who are stateless today, even accessing the most basic of rights can be a challenge. For these people, **the law is a key to unlock rights** - such as education, employment, health care, and freedom of movement. **The law is a key to unlock justice** - when refugees and others forcibly displaced have suffered harm or violations of their rights. **The law is a key to unlock solutions** - through the recognition of nationality, legal identity, or protected status and the granting of legal pathways to protection for those at risk.

Yet, for many people who are forcibly displaced, breakdown in the rule of law and use of law as a tool of oppression, wielded by some States against minorities and those that contradict government policy, have meant that the law may be viewed as contributing to displacement, rather than being seen as a solution to it. Once they have fled, **those displaced frequently live outside the protection of the law and lack access to legal information and assistance** to claim asylum or nationality, to regularize their legal status, to navigate legal and protection frameworks and justice mechanisms or access family reunification in third countries or other safe legal pathways. Governments frequently exclude or limit access to state-funded legal aid, and legal assistance and empowerment programs for those displaced are a chronically underfunded component of the humanitarian system. **This must change.**



# WHAT IS THE PLEDGE?

At the inaugural [Global Refugee Forum](#) in 2019, [more than 80](#) legal and community empowerment organizations, law firms, bar associations, refugee law clinics, and corporations came together to **collectively pledge to address the diverse and unmet legal needs of refugees and others forcibly displaced.**

Those that joined the “Mobilizing the Global Legal Community to Protect and Find Solutions for Refugees and Others Forcibly Displaced” pledge - also known as the Global Refugee Forum Legal Community Pledge - expressly committed to support efforts to protect and find solutions for **refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, and other forcibly displaced persons** and to increase the number of those displaced around the world who have access to justice in line with **Sustainable Development Goal 16 which calls for "Equal Access to Justice for All."**

Among the commitments made, the private sector signatories to the Pledge committed to provide **over 127,000 pro bono hours a year** to support the legal needs of those forcibly displaced and of the organizations that work with and for displaced communities. The private and public sector signatories who joined the Pledge agreed to fulfill their Pledge commitments in solidarity with each other, and other stakeholders, as part of a **multi-stakeholder and partnership approach.**

## VISION

**Refugees and other forcibly displaced people can secure legal assistance and have access to rights, justice, and solutions to their displacement.**

## OBJECTIVES

01


**Meet the day-to-day legal needs of refugees** and other forcibly displaced people - and the organizations that work for and with them - including supporting local legal aid providers to mobilize resources and develop effective legal assistance programs.


02


**Advance fundamental systemic change** to ensure that legal assistance, access to justice, and rule of law principles are understood as fundamental to effective responses to situations of forced displacement and are concretely incorporated into response mechanisms.


# WHO HAS JOINED THE PLEDGE?

**103** legal and refugee-rights actors have pledged to support efforts to protect and find solutions for refugees and other forcibly displaced.

 **34** Law Firms and Bar Associations

 **106** Jurisdictions

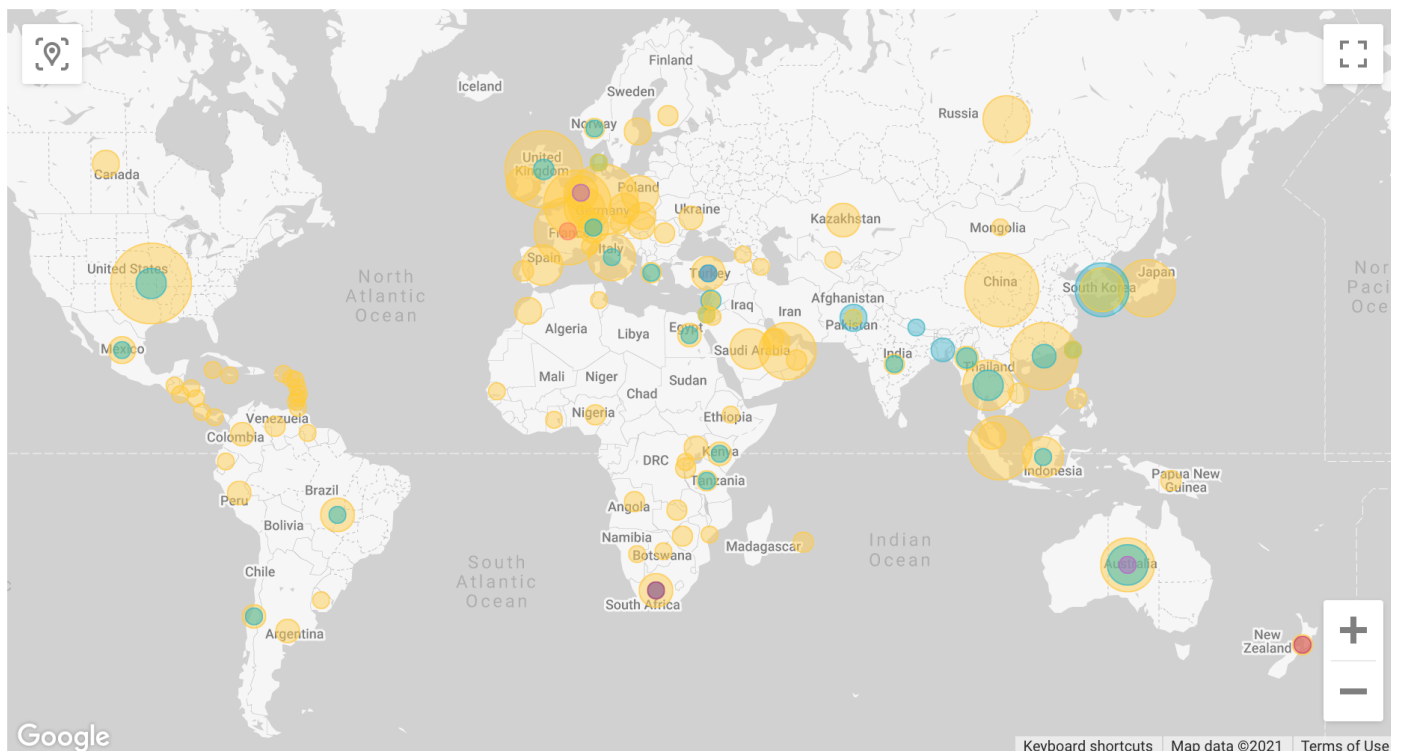
 **66** NGOs

 **133,080** Hours Pledged\*

\* Static number

As of 22 November 2021

**Number** 1 • ● 20  
**Organization Type** ● Law Firm ● NGO ● Refugee Led Initiative ● Bar Council/Legal Association ● Academia / Law Clinics



[Current signatories](#), the [wording of the Pledge](#), and up-to-date information about its implementation can be found on [PILnet's forced displacement](#) page.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## 01 Refugee Agency & Participation

Ensure that refugees and others forcibly displaced have access to legal knowledge and assistance to exercise their rights, have greater agency, and meaningfully participate in the implementation of the Pledge

## 02 Resource Mobilization

Increase the availability of material and financial resources to address the legal needs of refugees and others forcibly displaced

## 03 Partnering for Impact

Build partnerships between and within local legal communities and with cross-border legal networks capable of supporting local needs

## 04 Capacity Development

Strengthen the capacity of the legal community, displaced people, governments, and other actors, including developing good practice models to increase access to legal assistance in local contexts and empower refugees to access justice, rights, and solutions

## 05 Building Pro Bono

Activate and strengthen refugee rights pro bono culture to increase the quantity and quality of pro bono legal assistance available

## 06 Advocacy

Undertake joint advocacy around legal needs, gaps, and the essential role of the law to comprehensive refugee response

# PROGRESS HIGHLIGHTS

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Despite the challenges presented by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the actors that signed the GRF Community Legal Pledge effectively mobilized themselves in an unprecedented way in 2020, including:

- A Core Group of NGOs and individuals was established to support the implementation, growth, and sustainability of the Pledge.
- The private sector signatories to the Pledge exceeded their committed pro bono hours by 30%.
- Funding was mobilized to pilot capacity development and resource mobilization activities in Asia, including a national-level collaborative pilot project.
- A Pro Bono Toolkit was developed to support NGOs and Refugee-led Organizations/Initiatives (RLO/Is) to design and implement pro bono projects.
- Over 100 RLO/Is and NGO participants attended capacity development workshops and a Pro Bono Pitching Roundtable in Asia.
- RLO/Is pitched a wide variety of pro bono projects, which were matched with law firms, unlocking millions of dollars' worth of legal services, provided for free.

Further information and highlights of the first year of implementation of the Pledge can be found in the [GRF Legal Community Pledge - 2020 Progress Report](#).

**165,000**

pro bono hours provided by the private sector to address the legal needs of those displaced

**100+**

new legal partnerships created by actors involved in the Pledge



# PROGRESS HIGHLIGHTS

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The Core Group expanded the range of actors involved in the Pledge and created greater opportunities for needs-identification and pro bono matching, including:

- A [GRF Legal Community Pledge Matching Portal](#) was launched by PILnet; the portal is the first-ever global refugee clearinghouse and serves to identify and match legal needs with pro bono hours pledged.
- An [Urgent Consultation on the Legal Needs Arising from the Situation in Afghanistan](#) was held in August and a joint plan of action developed.
- PILnet launched a [Legal Resource Mapping Survey - Afghanistan](#) to track resources, strengthen coordination and information consolidation, and support the development of pro bono projects.
- Four regional refugee-led networks joined the Pledge and two refugee-led organizations were matched with free legal help from private sector actors.
- Six workshops were held in Thailand to facilitate local legal and refugee actors to co-design a collaborative private-public model for legal assistance delivery.
- The Core Group started to scope regional models for implementation of the Pledge, including hosting a scoping workshop with local actors in Latin America and conducting prioritized outreach in Africa, Europe and the Middle-East.

1000+

lawyers from pledge signatories were mobilized in response to Afghanistan



20%

growth in the number of signatories to the Pledge

# WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ?

Transforming a global commitment to leverage legal resources and networks into an initiative that tangibly increases access to legal assistance for refugees and other forcibly displaced people is an inherently challenging task. **Legal service provision is highly localized**, demanding contextualized legal programs, that respond to the specific needs of displaced communities, local legal frameworks, and legal professional requirements, while also being connected to local-level advocacy efforts. To achieve this transformation, it is **vital that the Pledge is driven by the unmet legal needs of those displaced and the views of local legal actors**, rather than the supply of pro bono hours pledged.

Where the Core Group successfully partnered with RLO/Is this greatly enhanced the mobilization of the legal community and ensured that the needs of those displaced were rightly at the centre of implementation activities. For example, in response to the crises in Afghanistan, Core Group members partnered with the Global Refugee Led-Network's Asia Pacific, Middle-East and European regional arms, to co-design and undertake joint activities to address the diverse and overwhelming legal needs experienced by those impacted by the situation in Afghanistan. There is a need to **expand efforts to include more RLO/Is** in Pledge implementation, as well as to ensure an equal level of **focus on engaging local legal aid providers** and strengthening the capacity of both actors to identify and respond to legal needs.



*Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK) staff offering free legal advice to members of the public at Kakuma Law Courts (October 2021).*

The impact of the Pledge has been greatest in Asia Pacific, where resources were mobilized to support both regional and national-level implementation activities. There is **a need to develop and resource regional models of implementation**. These could draw from the experiences, lessons learned and good practices in Asia Pacific but must be led by local actors and designed specifically for each unique regional context.

# WHAT IS NEXT ?

The long-term value of the Pledge will depend on its ability to adapt to and meet the legal needs of refugees and other forcibly displaced people as they are experienced on the ground. PILnet and the Core Group will **continue to mobilize, connect, and support the global legal community to make and meet Pledge commitments** to increase access to legal assistance and justice for refugees at a local level. This includes:

Developing **regional models for implementation of the Pledge**, to enable resources available through the Pledge to be harnessed at a local level, while connecting local actors to an ever-increasing global community of lawyers committed to improving access to justice for refugees.

Ensuring greater awareness within displaced communities about the legal resources available through the Pledge, as well as supporting greater **participation of refugees in decision-making** around Pledge implementation, the development of pilot and other pro bono projects, and in assessing impact.

Continuing to mobilize, connect, and support the legal community to **respond to the legal needs of impacted Afghans** by supporting them to secure their rights, regularize their status in countries of asylum, and seek legal pathways to safety. We will support the consolidation of legal information, strengthen referral pathways and coordination and support RLO/Is and local legal aid providers to respond to legal needs.



Undertaking **joint advocacy** around the fundamental role of legal assistance, the rule of law, and access to justice for those displaced - in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16 ("Equal Access to Justice for All") - as well as to strengthen legal procedures and other laws, policies, and practices. We will advocate for greater **funding of legal aid and empowerment programming**. We will also call on States, donors, NGOs, and other actors to **support existing pledges**, and **make new pledges** at the next GRF, focused on strengthening **access to legal assistance and justice** for those displaced.



# HOW TO GET INVOLVED?

You can **join the Pledge** [here](#), sign up for our **Pledge newsletter** [here](#), or reach out to us at [grfpledge@pilnet.org](mailto:grfpledge@pilnet.org) to **learn more.**

**"Seeing this community and presence here gives me hope."**

Najeeba Wazefadost,  
Asia Pacific Network of Refugee-led Organizations (APNOR), Urgent Consultation on Afghanistan

**"The Pledge is an incredible sign of global solidarity."**

Sharon Ekambaram,  
Lawyers for Human Rights,  
2021 PILnet Global Forum

If you are a **RLO/I, NGO or legal service provider** and would like to be matched with free legal help you can learn more about our **matching portal** [here](#).

**Over 100 legal and refugee rights actors** have joined the Pledge, each working together to implement their pledged commitments.

This progress update was compiled by **PILnet** and the other members of the **Core Group** that supports the implementation and sustainability of the Pledge.



**Refugee Legal:**  
Defending the rights  
of refugees.

