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LOCALIZATION IN UNHCR AMERICAS

PUTTING THE PEOPLE WE SERVE AT THE CENTER OF WHAT WE DO

There is a great need to empower refugees to take an active role in their various actions, fulfilling the role that corresponds to them in the country where they are located. The UNHCR, as a global organization working with refugees worldwide, has made efforts and allocated resources to create a space for active listening, strengthen ties with refugee-led organizations, and enable more inclusive action while respecting different nationalities, genders, and races. [...] It's a step along a long path, but it's a step that fills us with hope for better days to come, when refugees from around the world can enjoy exercising citizenship and human rights as global citizens.

***Geraldino "Kanhanga"**, Angolan Refugee, Associação dos Angolanos e Amigos do Rio Grande do Sul Brazil*

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCALIZATION IN THE REGION

Localization is a process that promotes effective participation and inclusion of local and national actors in humanitarian action. It allows us to recognize the presence and respect the historical work of local actors who traditionally are the first responders to crisis situations, as well as strengthen their independence, seeking to ensure adequate responses to the context and better address the needs of displaced and stateless persons. UNHCR pursues localization and integration as a means contributing to sustainable results, while promoting local resilience, supporting response capacity, and creating strategic partnerships.

UNHCR in the Americas aims to strengthen its role in supporting civil society and organizations led by refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons (RLO for its acronym in English) in communities of origin, transit and destination, in line with global commitments towards meaningful participation with local actors.

Engaging with local communities along mixed movement routes is central to the **route-based approach** proposed by UNHCR in the region to strengthen protection and solutions in the context of mixed movements of refugees and migrants. Working with local organizations improves the way we identify key routes and areas where interventions are needed the most, and helps promote socioeconomic inclusion, share capacities and advocate for policies that support refugees and migrants.

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UNHCR COMMITMENTS TO LOCALIZATION

UNHCR made commitments at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit to "Empower national and local humanitarian action" for localization. Likewise, the New York Declaration and the Global Compact on Refugees emphasized the importance of direct engagement with communities and forcibly displaced persons. In follow-up to these commitments, UNHCR participates in Working Group 5 of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), holds regular consultations at the local, regional, and global levels with Non-Governmental Organizations, has an Advisory Committee led by displaced and stateless persons, and continuously reviews its processes for establishing cooperation with local and national partners.

- **GLOBAL COMMITMENTS:** Global Compact and New York Declaration, Grand Bargain and World Humanitarian Summit, Consultations with NGOs and IASC Task Team 5.
- **COLLABORATIONS AND PROGRAMS LOCAL AND NATIONAL:** Implementing Partners, Partnership Reform, Operational Guidelines on Localization.
- **ORGANIZATIONS LED BY DISPLACED PERSONS AND STATELESS INDIVIDUALS:** Task Team and Advisory Council, Policy Review and Advisory.
- **WORLD REFUGEE FORUM:** Multilateral Commitment to Drive Localization, Meaningful Refugee Participation.

PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM

> ***The participation of organizations led by refugees and displaced persons in the Global Refugee Forum allows for the direct visibility of lived experiences. If we want to create policies and durable solutions that address the real needs of refugees, it is essential to strengthen spaces that enable meaningful participation, recognizing the capacities and competencies of refugees, and opening spaces for consultation and decision-making for actions that impact our lives.***
>
> ***Ana Valle, Association of Nicaraguans in Mexico***

Held every four years, the Global Refugee Forum is the world's largest international gathering on refugees, designed to support the practical implementation of the objectives set out in the Global Compact on Refugees: easing pressures on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance, increasing access to third-country solutions, and improving conditions in countries of origin. In December 2023, 19 refugees and internally displaced persons from the Americas Region were supported to participate in the event as refugee experts and speakers.

In preparation for the event, refugees engaged in the preparation of pledges according to their areas of interest and previous experiences, providing their valuable input on issues of gender equality, access to education, legal counseling, economic inclusion, and meaningful engagement. Local organizations and organizations led by refugees were also supported to participate, as well as regional networks like the Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families (RIADIS), the LGBTI Network on Human Mobility, and Red Clamor.

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REGIONAL LOCALIZATION AGENDA 2023-2025

The regional localization agenda is a framework document that highlights the initial actions for the regionalization of localization efforts and expected results. It is coordinated by a multifunctional team and based on continuous consultations with Operations. The Agenda encourages UNHCR teams in the field to prioritize actions around participation, representation, and autonomy, maximizing collaboration and capacity exchange, strengthening trust among key actors, and improving visibility for sustainability. Through this document, clear lines of action are defined on the development of the concept and to position as leader in the region in localization processes.

1. PROMOTING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION, REPRESENTATION, AND AUTONOMY.
2. MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES WHILE MINIMIZING RISKS.
3. INCREASING IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY AND VISIBILITY TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY

As part of the process of building and revising the agenda, in October 2023 in Panama City, a Regional Localization Meeting took place, with the participation of 20 local organizations from 17 countries in the region. They had the opportunity to review the agenda and provide input for its update. The main recommendations included defining country-level work plans with key actions to achieve the agenda objectives and defining the local application of the agenda priorities.

THE OBJECTIVES FOR 2024 ARE:

- **Strengthen meaningful participation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons at country level, aligned with the needs and vision of the local organizations.**
- **Strengthen and expand the mapping of organizations, seeking to include others considering their geographical presence, nationality, and nature.**
- **Strengthen the capacities of organizations in different areas, considering support from UNHCR, other key actors, and peer-to-peer support.**
- **Share achievements and goals reached in the localization agenda of the Americas.**

"True humanitarian action is about standing shoulder to shoulder with local organizations, communities, and people directly affected by forced displacement. Our partnership with local and community-based organizations in the Americas has been the cornerstone of our efforts for years. Now, as we aim to strengthen our collaboration with local organizations, we want to rethink our strategies and move further, building trust, sharing responsibilities, fostering innovative partnerships, and promoting more spaces for them to raise their voices across the hemisphere. Above all, we honor the one request echoing from refugees and displaced persons: 'Nothing About Us, Without Us.' Let their voices guide our steps".

***Jose Samaniego** -Director of Regional Bureau of America, UNHCR*

RLO MAPPING 2023

During the months of March and June, through a consultancy developed with the company Equilibrium, an information gathering process was conducted to obtain a mapping of RLOs in our region and strengthen UNHCR's links with organizations of various levels, nationalities, and geographical locations. A total of 305 RLOs were mapped, mainly concentrated in Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, which are the main countries receiving Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean. The main collected data included: Place of activity implementation, areas of work, leaderships, associations with other organizations, as well as knowledge about UNHCR programs.

The mapping allowed us to get a better understanding of the community based and refugee led organizations in the region, of which 75.4% are registered and show a high level of formalization. Moreover, there is a large participation of women in coordination positions. Most organizations operate with less than $2000 USD annually, relying heavily on self-financing and facing significant financial constraints. Moreover, most of these organizations work with fewer than 20 employees and volunteers. The organizations are key actors for identifying persons in heightened protection risk and ensuring humanitarian assistance reaches those who need it the most, as the main areas of work are human rights advocacy, access to documentation and basic services, gender empowerment and support for vulnerable groups, including women, children and the LGBTIQ+ community. The services provided by these organizations also benefit the local communities where refugees and migrants reside. In terms of communication, the main channel for sharing and receiving information is the WhatsApp platform.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

For more information, you can visit: https://bit.ly/4aQQk2p

GRANTS AGREEMENTS

During the year 2023, a total of USD 72,400 in grants agreements were awarded to 19 organizations across the region. The Peru operation is highlighted here as one of those with the widest reach. Additionally, 5 organizations were selected for special partnership agreements on the framework of Refugee Led Innovation Funds, totaling over USD 200,000 to be implemented in 2024.

PERU

The localization strategy implemented by UNHCR in Peru aims to empower local actors, especially community-based and Refugee-led organizations, recognizing their crucial role as first responders in humanitarian situations. The strategy involves improving the quality of protection services, expanding outreach within communities, and strengthening organizational and resource management skills. It includes the creation of a network of mapped organizations, providing specific training, technical advice, in-kind support, and small grants for capacity building and project implementation.

Through the strategy, UNHCR provides logistical and in-kind support, training opportunities, and has coordinated 9 grant agreements totaling USD 34,013 to improve organizational capacities and service delivery. The strategy also emphasizes technical support in grant application processes and organizational development, promoting standardization and facilitating the identification of priorities to achieve self-sufficiency among supported organizations.

STRENGTHENING LOCALIZATION IMPLEMENTATION

ARGENTINA

From December 5th to 7th, 90 representatives from municipalities, regional governments, and civil society organizations gathered to share experiences aimed at improving the reception and integration of refugees and displaced persons in Argentina. In this context,

representatives from Argentina offered city-specific presentations as follows:

- **City of Córdoba:** Center for Attention to Migrants and Refugees (CAPeM - Center for Attention to Migrants and Refugees) dedicated to providing guidance and joining efforts with the private sector to promote job integration.
- **City of Buenos Aires:** Project funded by Loreal - Nosotras Conectadas, to train women in technology.
- **City of Mendoza:** Management Table for Migrants' Rights, a coordination effort to expand the reach of programs and services offered at the community level.

These events were an opportunity to jointly analyze the implementation of the Solidarity Cities initiative in preparation for Cartagena+40.

BRAZIL

Twenty-six (26) Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) were selected to receive up to $500 from UNHCR to start their projects of sports, artistic, informative, and cultural activities aimed at serving refugee communities. The results of the UNHCR's Small Grants Pilot Program 2023 reflect a significant milestone in the recognition of RLOs in Brazil.

By directing their efforts towards projects focused on sports, arts, and culture, RLOs have not only promoted community participation but also fostered peaceful coexistence and integration between refugee communities of various nationalities and host communities. This program evidenced a significant shift in the perception of RLOs, recognizing them as active agents in building more integrated and harmonious societies.

"We have been waiting for this for a long time, fighting for the right to speak, and today we can bring proposals and ideas about refugees. So, this meeting is wonderful," said Congolese refugee @prudencekalambay, leader of the Immigrant and Refugee Women's Center (CEMIR) in São Paulo.

From January 5th to 17th, a face-to-face meeting was held with representatives from the 26 Refugee-led organizations, marking the conclusion of the Small Grants 2023 project. The overall objective of the meeting was to promote the exchange of experiences and best practices among the organizations, strengthening their capacities in political advocacy and fundraising, with the aim of fostering refugee participation in decision-making and policy formulation, and stimulating the financial sustainability of these organizations. Through various sessions and activities, specific needs and opportunities faced by Refugee-led organizations in Brazil were identified, which serve as the starting point for developing more effective strategies and programs to address these needs and leverage these opportunities in the future.

This meeting was developed in conjunction with the Ministries of Justice, Human Rights, and Citizenship, CONARE, and Fonacceram, and included invited partners such as IMDH, Aldeas Infantiles, SJMR, and the Ministry of Social Development and Assistance, Family and Hunger Combat.

Participants demonstrated a strong commitment to action and the empowerment of their communities. Various initiatives and concrete activities were debated and proposed to strengthen.

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ECUADOR

UNHCR organized the first National Strengthening Workshop for Community Organizations that took place on December 12th and 13th, 2023. Thirteen organizations from Esmeraldas, Guayas, Pichincha, Santo Domingo, and Cotopaxi participated in this activity, representing refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and women-led organizations (WLOs). The participation of 14 female leaders was essential and significant in the workshop to showcase their leadership, organizational capacities, and contributions to their communities. In total, 18 representatives from organizations participated.

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The meeting allowed for the identification of collaboration spaces with the organizations and the discussion of their experiences, strengths, and opportunities for improvement, mainly regarding humanitarian access, strengthening the community and the society, mitigation the risks of violence, and contribution to gender equality and the participation of women and girls in decision-making.

As a result of the workshop, good practices of the organizations regarding interventions on prevention, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence; forced recruitment and exacerbation of criminal violence, were compiled.

HAITI

UNHCR organized a four-day training workshop from November 7th to 10th for 31 community leaders (15 women, 16 men) in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in collaboration with OHCHR, UNFPA, and the General Directorate of Civil Protection of the government. The training focused on strengthening the capacity of community leaders in protection, including community-based protection, gender-based violence, and protection of persons on the move, to increase local resilience and reduce community exposure to risks and the use of harmful coping strategies.

At the end of the training, community leaders collectively identified risks and threats, as well as recommendations to improve community-based protection, and joined a WhatsApp group funded by UNHCR for this initiative, which was coordinated by the OCHA ProCap Advisor working on the centrality of protection and the Protection Cluster Coordinator.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Between October to December 2023, UNHCR held three (3) meetings focused on creating dialogue spaces and identifying opportunities for joint efforts.

The meetings were held with representatives of organizations led by and working with the following groups:

- Stateless, or persons in need of a nationality solution,
- Refugees and asylum seekers, and
- Young refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons.

Among the main conclusions of these spaces, the following are identified:

- Reinforce communication channels to ensure transparency and fluidity, as well as increase the visibility of civil society organizations.
- Continuous meetings and field visits, as well as workshops for local organizations on accessing funds and resources. Strengthening the capacity of local organizations and leaders to seek funding, mobilize resources, and create partnerships.
- Expansion of projects focused on youth, reinforcement of access to information, and education so they can access their rights. They recommend creating dialogue spaces and establishing communication channels between UNHCR and youth.
- **For more information:**

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