

Strategic Reflections: Global Refugee Forum 2023



New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel

The role of the New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel (NZRAP) is to provide people with lived experience of forced displacement in Aotearoa New Zealand, with an opportunity to participate in the development of refugee resettlement strategies and policies in an effective and meaningful manner. The NZRAP aims to ensure that the interests, perspectives, and knowledge of refugees inform and influence strategic direction and policies on national, regional, and international refugee issues. The NZRAP represents a collaborative space for refugee communities, groups, and organisations to represent themselves and advocate collectively.

The NZRAP does not represent the 'refugee voice' nor claim to represent the entire refugee community in Aotearoa. Importantly, the NZRAP is not intended to replace existing structures or modes of engagement between Immigration New Zealand and refugee communities or refugee-led organisations (RLOs). It is an alternative means to facilitate the participation of different groups in policy-making, rather than establish a new organisational body to represent refugee voices.

The NZRAP seeks to both complement and collaborate with the broader refugee ecosystem in Aotearoa and acknowledges the diverse collective of stakeholders working within this space. In particular those refugee background individuals, groups and organisations who have been working in this space for many years.

Meaningful Refugee Participation

Meaningful refugee participation occurs when refugees from diverse backgrounds and at all levels have sustained and tangible influence in all fora where decisions, policies, and responses that impact their lives are being designed, implemented, and measured in a manner that is accessible, broad, informed, safe, free, and supported. MRP requires upskilling and training refugees how to strategically advance the objectives of their participation and how to identify and address tokenistic approaches. MRP happens when refugees choose to participate or not to participate based on their expertise as well as their lived experience.

Strategic Reflections: Global Refugee Forum 2023



The Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 2023, held in Geneva from December 13-15, 2023, focused on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), including the realisation of its main objectives to ease pressures on refugee-hosting states, to empower refugees and to find solutions. The GRF was co- convened by five states — Colombia, France, Japan, Jordan, and Uganda, —and co-hosted by Switzerland and the UNHCR.

Members of the New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel attended the GRF in different capacities, including one as the Refugee Advisor for the New Zealand Government: Paula Santacruz; Rabia Talal Almbaid and Julia Sheikh in their capacity as New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel (NZRAP), Madiha Ali, Antoinette Umugwaneza, Mustafa Derbashi (resigned member) in their capacity as Refugee Experts sponsored by the UNHCR.

This document provides a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted dynamics observed at GRF from the perspectives of the six delegates. In addition to these collective reflections, the NZRAP offers nuanced insights and key recommendations for the New Zealand Government to strengthen the evolving landscape of the refugee sector in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Key Themes

Importance of Meaningful Refugee Participation (MRP) and Inclusion

The NZRAP reflected on the pivotal role of MRP and inclusion as overarching themes resonating throughout the GRF. This was illustrated by the deliberate inclusion of speakers from diverse refugee backgrounds, speakers and the active engagement of refugees in decision-making processes. The recognition of refugee inclusion and leadership emerged as important elements crucial for the realisation of MRP, reinforced strongly by numerous states and civil society actors.

Conversely, the NZRAP also identified the need for relevant stakeholders to address logistical barriers hindering the participation of other refugee representatives, thereby ensuring the inclusivity of the dialogue. Nonetheless, the collective commitment to bolstering refugee participation signifies a positive trajectory and a promising shift for MRP globally and within national contexts.

"The event's focus on meaningfully involving refugees at the forefront of making pledges and strategic decisions that will impact refugees worldwide."... "Acknowledgment of refugees as change agents signal[s] a promising shift."

Addressing key issues

The GRF addressed critical issues such as refugee inclusion in national systems, and the intersection of climate action and forced displacement. The NZRAP participated in multi-stakeholder pledges addressing critical issues such as inclusion in national health systems and fostering mental health and psychosocial well-being. For example, pledges covered policy changes, financial support, capacity building, and data utilisation to improve health outcomes for refugees and host communities. Specifically, the NZRAP noted the need to address the intersection of climate action and forced displacement in regions like Asia-Pacific that are currently facing climate-related challenges.

"It is crucial to recognise the continuous rise in climate-induced displacement and prioritise efforts to support and protect these vulnerable populations seeking refuge in other nations" - Refugee Statement ATCR June 2023

Opportunities for Networking

The GRF was a significant opportunity to directly provide input into the global dialogue and connect with other government and civil society representatives to share learnings and experiences. The NZRAP noted the great value of networking opportunities and in-person interactions.

"In-person interactions highlighted so much efficiency and long-lasting impact, that is better than online interactions."

Global innovations and collaborative efforts

The GRF showcased a range of global innovations and collaborative efforts that extended beyond governmental support. This included the involvement of the private sector in funding refugee-led initiatives and mental health programmes. For example, the Lego Foundation, in collaboration with UNICEF and partners, have provided play materials and support to children in refugee camps to help them cope with the trauma and stress of displacement. The NZRAP also noted the significant contributions of key states such as Australia, which have made substantial progress in their work to develop and expand complementary pathways (in addition to resettlement) through both employment and education avenues. Further state collaboration was illustrated in sessions focussing on practical challenges and approaches to resettlement and integration. Housing initiatives were shared by Ireland, Canada, and the United States, such as Refugee Housing Solutions, a US initiative aimed at expanding access to quality housing for refugees and newcomers by facilitating connections to real estate agents and landlords willing to rent to refugees.

"Involvement of the private sector in funding refugee-led initiatives and mental health programs emerges as a positive trend."

The NZRAP seized upon opportunities to learn about novel initiatives aimed at fostering connections and inclusivity within refugee communities at the local level. Additionally, other areas of interest included refugee perspectives on and participation in peacebuilding initiatives and governance frameworks, underscoring broader areas of interest and engagement.

"Impressive to learn about the peacebuilding initiatives that play a huge role in the international space in mitigating refugee crisis."... "Involving qualified former refugees in governance boards that make positive changes."

Logistics and coordination challenges for MRP

The NZRAP highlighted key challenges which impacted the participation of other international refugee delegates. Logistical barriers to participation regarding visa arrangements for refugee speakers and award winners revealed potential areas for improvement in event coordination.

The NZRAP members reflected on challenges in their participation and the imperative for effective practical training, particularly for newcomers to high-level forums. Furthermore, to effectively address the challenge of moving beyond symbolic participation, the NZRAP collectively highlighted the need for improved assistance in preparation and coordination to support the involvement of future delegates.



NZRAP & Fiona Whiteridge (MBIE) representing New Zealand at the GRF 2023 (Photo credit: R-SEAT 2023)

Recommendations for New Zealand

Enhanced Refugee Participation and Inclusion in New Zealand

- Actively involve refugees in decision-making processes related to refugee policy and support programmes in New Zealand by ensuring refugee inclusion within leadership and governance structures. This includes ensuring that former refugees are adequately set up to occupy these positions by accessing (a) quality education and (b) quality employment opportunities to fill these leadership positions. Refugees should be empowered to be in those positions, not just because they are refugees but because they can (and do) have the required skills as well as lived experience.
- Develop or adopt meaningful refugee participation guidelines across MBIE's engagement with refugee communities in New Zealand. Work with the NZRAP, refugee community groups, and civil society to ensure that MRP is implemented effectively, and inclusively. In addition, evaluate current opportunities for refugee participation in addressing key settlement challenges in collaboration with NZRAP, refugee community groups, and civil society.
- Provide meaningful and ongoing opportunities for refugees to contribute to discussions and initiatives to improve their integration and well-being.
- Explore opportunities for peacebuilding initiatives within New Zealand refugee communities, leveraging former refugees' expertise and experiences.
- Involve qualified former refugees in governance boards and decision-making processes at local and national levels to drive positive changes in policies and programmes.
- Directly fund refugee-led organisations to ensure their sustainability and engagement at the local and national level.
- Develop and implement long-term support for employees from refugee backgrounds, such as opportunities for permanent contracts and opportunities for skilled workers to be linked with companies for employment. For example, working in collaboration with organisations such as Talent Beyond Boundaries to match refugees with employment opportunities in New Zealand.
- Ensure that all future emergency intakes are in addition to the refugee quota and an additional humanitarian pathway is established rather than an ad hoc response to crisis and conflict.

Working with future refugee delegates

- Continue to conduct practical training and team-building activities (where appropriate) to strengthen collaboration and cohesion among stakeholders working with refugee populations in New Zealand. When working in close collaboration with future refugee delegates, this should always occur well before engaging in any formal dialogue, with adequate time to finalise collaborative planning.
- Evaluate engagement with the 2023 Refugee Advisors in anticipation of working with future Refugee Advisors. Include a joint evaluation of the support, resources, and information provided for the Refugee Advisor.
- Discuss and confirm the Refugee Advisor's strategic role and expectations for their engagement in national and international dialogues.

Education and Private sector engagement

- Encourage collaboration with the private sector to fund refugee-led organisations and initiatives similar to the global positive trends.
- Engage with IKEA and New Zealand refugee-led organisations to discuss how some of IKEA's current initiatives focussed on working with and supporting refugee communities could be adapted to the New Zealand context. For example, IKEA's "Welcome Refugees" program, which provides support for continued professional development for refugees to build necessary skills (such as targeted education programmes and language training) and find employment opportunities.
- Foster partnerships with businesses to create sustainable employment opportunities and support economic integration for refugees in New Zealand.
- Increase funding to mental health services to establish and support at least one mental health service provider in each settlement location.
- Provide direct support (and, where possible, support the establishment of) targeted student groups/ organisations within universities for refugee students, specifically for students new to Aotearoa and needing an established support system.
- Engage refugee communities to explore alternative education and employment pathways.
- Expand the Refugee Resettlement Strategy to include climate refugees.
- Address gaps in New Zealand's education sector by preparing temporary education programmes for refugee children.



Julia Sheikh - Announcing the UN Common Pledge 2.0 on Refugee Inclusion

Resources

Global Refugee Forum Resources

New Zealand Government Pledges GRF 2023

[Topics include: Jobs and livelihoods; health, MRP, asylum, education and travel documents](#)

R-SEAT “Great leap forward or status quo?”

[R-SEAT’s initial reflections on the 2023 Global Refugee Forum](#)

UNHCR Outcomes Report GRF 2023

[Summary of the key discussions and outcomes from the Global Refugee Forum 2023.](#)

Joint Pledge on Meaningful Refugee Participation

[This pledge now supports 15 governments and more than 100 other signatories.](#)

Multistakeholder Pledges GRF 2023

[Explore the range of multi-stakeholder pledges announced at the Global Refugee Forum 2023](#)

