

2023 GRF LEGAL COMMUNITY PLEDGE

PLEDGE FRAMEWORK

Purpose

To increase legal assistance for and with refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people, and internally and other displaced people and to advance systemic change to facilitate access to rights, justice and solutions.

Background

At the inaugural Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in 2019, 83 private and public-sector legal stakeholders made a joint pledge - known as the 2019 GRF Legal Community Pledge - to support efforts to protect and find solutions for refugees and other displaced people, including by working together to leverage and increase resources available for legal assistance. Notably, private sector legal signatories collectively pledged to provide 127,000 pro bono hours annually towards this goal. Coordinated by [PILnet](#) and the [GRF Legal Community Pledge Core Group](#) (the Core Group), the 2019 Pledge has grown to include 113 signatories, while the committed pro bono hours have increased to 135,180 hours annually, which has been exceeded every year.

Building on the achievements of the past three and a half years, PILnet and the Core Group are cultivating the 2023 GRF Legal Community Pledge (the Pledge), to be launched at the GRF in December 2023. All signatories to the 2023 GRF Legal Community Pledge will commit to the Joint Legal Community Pledge (the Joint Pledge) outlined below and develop their own organizational pledges to stipulate how they will put their commitment to the Joint Pledge into action.

The Approach

With support from PILnet and the Core Group, this multi-stakeholder pledging initiative will:

- **Mobilize organizational pledges by civil society and private sector stakeholders** to provide services, resources, expertise, and policy solutions that facilitate access to rights, justice, and solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people, and internally and other displaced people (hereinafter refugees and other displaced people) in line with the purpose of the Pledge.
- **Build an integrated legal community** that works locally to globally to maximize resources and impact, supports the building of effective partnerships to address local needs, and centers the meaningful participation and leadership of refugees and other displaced people in all core aspects of the Pledge.
- **Resource and support the localization of legal practice and advocacy**, including direct resourcing of host community and refugee-led legal initiatives and support for the development of local and regionally-led coordination efforts to increase collaboration, mutual-learning, and joint legal advocacy and strategy building.

The Joint Legal Community Pledge

All signatories of the Pledge commit to the following:

We, members of the global legal community, hereby commit to take action for and with refugees and other displaced people to increase legal assistance and to facilitate improvements to the systems through which rights, justice, and solutions are accessed.

We do so in solidarity¹ with displaced people, one another, and other stakeholders as part of a multi-stakeholder initiative that recognizes the mobilization of legal stakeholders is essential to a whole-of-society and whole-of-route approach to refugee response and to the realization of the Global Compact on Refugees' (GCR) four objectives. We acknowledge this mobilization must occur from a local to global level and in partnership with affected populations.

Legal Assistance for and Legal Empowerment of Refugees and Other Displaced People

We commit to work in partnership to increase access to legal assistance and to resource and strengthen host community and refugee-led legal assistance and empowerment initiatives, including in humanitarian contexts, in order to increase the number of displaced people who enjoy equal access to justice (in line with the GCR and Sustainable Development Goal 16 "Equal Access to Justice for All").

Legal Assistance for Refugee-Led Organizations and Refugee Rights Non-Governmental Organizations

We commit to increase access to legal assistance for refugee-led organizations (RLOs)² and other organizations that work with displaced people to address their organizational and programmatic legal needs and to strengthen their legal and institutional capacity and resilience.

Refugee Inclusion and Hiring

We commit to fulfill these commitments through refugee inclusion and leadership, and to take action that is supportive of the wider refugee participation agenda. We specifically commit to support refugee-led and staffed, local, community-based initiatives, as well as host community initiatives that create opportunities for people with experiences of displacement to be meaningfully involved in all stages of legal assistance, empowerment, advocacy, and education programming.

1. We adopt the definition of meaningful participation as developed by the [Global Refugee-Led Network](#) and others in advance of the 2019 GRF which defines refugee participation as: "When refugees — regardless of location, legal recognition, gender, identity and demographics — are prepared for and participating in fora and processes where strategies are being developed and/or decisions are being made (including at local, national, regional, and global levels, and especially when they facilitate interactions with host states, donors, or other influential bodies), in a manner that is ethical, sustained, safe, and supported financially."

1. We use the term RLOs in an inclusive way to include a broad range of refugee-led initiatives, including those that are less formally structured and those that may not be formally registered.

Legal Advocacy, Policy Engagement, and Asylum Capacity Development

We commit to undertake legal advocacy such as: strategic litigation, policy engagement, and legal assistance to advance systemic change to laws, policies, and practices that ensure the rights of refugees and other displaced people, including to foster accessible, fair, and effective asylum procedures and legal assistance schemes.

Funding and Resource Mobilization

We commit to provide direct financial and human resources or to undertake other efforts to support host community and refugee-led legal assistance and empowerment initiatives in order to address the barriers that hold them back from attracting sustainable financial and human resources.

In doing so, we recognize the essential role that these organizations and initiatives play in the global legal ecosystem and we acknowledge that host community and refugee-led legal initiatives are often at the forefront of legal assistance provision, but that they are frequently excluded from coordination spaces, lack connections to donors, and are chronically underfunded.

Coordination, Collaboration and Legal Capacity Development

We commit to work collaboratively in order to leverage networks, partnerships, and resources and to strengthen coordination, share knowledge, and monitor the impact of our efforts as diverse stakeholders within the global refugee legal ecosystem. We specifically commit to cooperate with other GRF Pledges and relevant initiatives that involve a legal assistance or refugee rights dimension.

Organizational Legal Community Pledges

In addition to committing to the above Joint Pledge, all signatories are required to make at least one commitment particular to their work that aligns with the Joint Pledge; these will be known as organizational pledges. Please refer to the accompanying [2023 GRF Legal Community Pledge - Pledging Guidance](#) (the Pledging Guidance) for guidance on what constitutes a high quality organizational pledge. The Pledging Guidance also provides further information on the suggested strategic areas of focus for organizational pledges, which align with the above Joint Pledge, as well as examples of pledges that could be made under each area of focus.

Joining the Pledge

To join the Pledge stakeholders are encouraged to:

- Review the [Pledging Guidance](#) for further information and examples of potential organizational pledges.
- Download the template of the [Pledging](#) form to support the drafting of an organizational pledge.
- Sign up to the 2023 Pledge and submit your organizational pledge using this [Pledging form](#).
- PILnet will share the collected information (apart from the specific number of pro bono hours pledged) with the UNHCR to be uploaded to the Global Compact of Refugees [online portal](#).

The Pledge is open for signature to a broad range of legal stakeholders. Recognizing the value that different stakeholders play in the legal assistance and empowerment ecosystem, we take a holistic view of what constitutes a legal stakeholder. This includes traditional legal service providers, such as legal assistance and empowerment NGOs and law firms, and other stakeholders engaged in legal assistance, empowerment, education and advocacy, including RLOs and other community-based initiatives. In-house legal counsel and legal teams at corporations that engage in pro bono are also welcome to join the Pledge.

Stakeholders that are interested in greater collaboration with these legal actors and who would like to make a specific pledge to increase access to legal assistance or rights for refugees and other forcibly displaced people are also welcome to join the Pledge. This could include refugee rights organizations engaged in advocacy around access to legal assistance committing to undertake coordinated legal advocacy or NGOs and RLOs providing other services to refugees (such as mental health services) committing to developing a referral mechanism to their legal partners.

Pledges made by donors to increase resourcing for legal assistance programming, especially host-community and refugee-led legal assistance initiatives, are especially welcomed. Donors, who may not consider themselves a part of the legal community, may not wish to sign on to the Joint Pledge. However, they are welcome to reach out to PILnet, which is coordinating pledge mobilization, to discuss ways they could support or align their efforts with this multi-stakeholder pledging initiative.

Implementing, Monitoring and Reporting on the Pledge

Pledgers are responsible for implementing, monitoring and reporting on their own pledges.

PILnet and the Core Group will provide Pledge coordination and operationalization support, the degree of which will be contingent on the success of their resource mobilization efforts. Coordination support is likely to include information sharing, partnership building and mutual learning opportunities, such as convening dialogue platforms around certain thematic, contextual, or geographic focus areas or in response to certain legal needs (e.g. in advance of or during situations of mass displacement).

In addition, to ensure that the Pledge is implemented in a needs-based way, PILnet will undertake targeted outreach to and awareness-raising with RLOs and NGOs to identify their individual legal needs and scope projects that the legal community can support. It will also build collaborative pro bono projects and support the establishment of multi-stakeholder models of legal assistance delivery to support the implementation of legal community pledges.

Pledgers will be responsible for monitoring their pledges and will be requested to provide annual reports to the UNHCR regarding the progress of their implementation. These reports will be submitted using a short standardized reporting form which will be shared at the start of each year. PILnet, in collaboration with the Core Group, will consolidate these individual reports to monitor the combined impact of the Pledge. Any information shared with PILnet during this reporting process will be anonymized by PILnet if shared externally, unless explicit consent is obtained prior.

If you have any questions about the Pledge or the development, implementation, monitoring of or reporting on organizational pledges, please contact: grfpledge@pilnet.org

Cultivation of the Pledge Framework

The cultivation of the 2023 GRF Legal Community Pledge was led by the Core Group, with staff members of the Core Group with lived experience of displacement being involved in the initial drafting of the Pledge and in consultations with relevant stakeholders.

In-line with the multi-stakeholder nature of this initiative, input on the Pledge was received from law firms, international and local legal assistance NGOs, RLOs, refugee lawyers, and others with lived experience of displacement. UNHCR and relevant initiatives, such as the Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG) and the Global Strategic Litigation Council on Refugee Rights (GSLC), were also consulted in the development of the Pledge Framework and Pledging Guidance.

The Core Group is made up of the following stakeholders:

