

# 2023 GRF LEGAL COMMUNITY PLEDGE

## PLEDGING GUIDANCE

When joining the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) Legal Community Pledge initiative (the Pledge), participants undertake two key actions. First, they commit to a Joint Legal Community Pledge (the joint pledge), as outlined in the [2023 GRF Legal Community Pledge Framework](#) (the Pledge Framework). Second, they make at least one specific organizational pledge (an organization pledge) that aligns with the purpose of the Pledge and their organization's areas of work.

This Pledging Guidance has been designed as an accompaniment to the Pledge Framework to assist interested pledging stakeholders to develop their organizational pledges. It provides both general guidance on the formulation of pledges as well as information about the strategic focus areas of the Pledge initiative and example texts to help guide pledge formulation.

While pledging stakeholders are welcome to consider making an organizational pledge that includes commitments across all strategic focus areas, this is not a requirement. Instead, it is recommended that pledging stakeholders choose a commitment, or commitments, that best align with their organization's strategic priorities.

### General Guidance on the Formulation of Organizational Pledges

In line with the [general guidance for Global Compact on Refugee \(GCR\) pledges](#), a high-quality pledge is:

- **New or additional**, meaning that pledges do not reiterate commitments already made but involve new or additional support, allocation of resources, or engagement in pursuit of [GCR objectives](#).
- **Quantifiable**, providing, where possible, an implementation timeline, beneficiary data, and details of the activities to be undertaken or support provided or needed for implementation of the pledge.
- **Needs-driven**, aligning the pledge with the key recommendations and the GCR principles and objectives.
- **Measurable**, within a specific period, where possible.

In addition, **high-quality legal pledges** will:

- Recognize that **refugees and other displaced people and local stakeholders are best placed to lead** on the development of pro bono and other projects to address local justice gaps.
- **Build and foster diversity and meaningful inclusion** in all activities and partnerships, including with refugee leaders, other displaced people, and local legal assistance and empowerment organizations.

- **Involve coordinated and collaborative approaches** that seek to maximize resources and impact and support the building of effective, equitable and sustainable partnerships between and within local legal communities and with cross-border legal networks capable of supporting local needs.
- **Facilitate high-quality legal assistance** that complies with and is accountable to the professional and ethical standards for legal service providers, including those relating to privacy and confidentiality.

## Strategic Focus Areas for Pledging

This Pledging Guidance sets out strategic focus areas for pledges aimed at increasing legal assistance for and with refugees and other displaced people or advancing systemic change to facilitate access to rights, justice, and solutions. The focus areas were developed by the [GRF Legal Community Pledge Core Group](#) based on ongoing dialogue with stakeholders involved in the 2019 GRF Legal Community Pledge, with refugee lawyers and other people with lived experience of displacement, and with other relevant stakeholders.

Under each strategic focus area, example pledges are provided to support the formulation of organizational pledges. While these examples tend to be framed in terms of outputs, we encourage pledgers to think about the intended impact of their pledges and, where possible, formulate pledges that stipulate this. Pledges are in no way limited to the examples, or focus areas outlined below; all pledges that align with the purpose of the Pledge are welcome. Pledges involving partnerships with a variety of stakeholders at local, national, regional and global level adopting a whole-of-society and whole-of-route approach are particularly encouraged.

# 01 Legal Assistance for and Legal Empowerment of Refugees, and Other Displaced People

Access to legal assistance - including access to information, counseling, and representation - can be determinative to displaced people being able to successfully claim asylum, exercise general or specific legal rights, or achieve a particular solution, including permanent residency, citizenship, family reunification and other complementary pathways. In addition, host community and refugee-led legal empowerment initiatives, which center refugees in the design and implementation of legal and community-based solutions to violations of their rights, are critical to ensuring relevant, sustainable, cost-effective access to justice and protection in their communities. However, in many situations, including in humanitarian settings and in situations of protracted displacement, the need for legal assistance surpasses the capacity and expertise of State-funded legal aid (where available) and other legal assistance providers.

Private sector pledgers, such as law firms, are encouraged to commit an annual total number of pro bono hours in support of high-quality legal assistance for displaced people, while other legal assistance stakeholders may make other specific commitments, such as to provide pro bono or accessibly-priced legal services, as appropriate in the local context, to a certain number of people.

Pledges in this area could also include the development of new legal aid, clinical legal education, and legal empowerment programs, including in collaboration with host communities or refugee rights and legal empowerment organizations where appropriate. Pledges in this area are encouraged to integrate meaningful participation of affected communities through information sharing, consultation, and direct involvement in the design, implementation, and review of pledged legal services.

Pledges are also encouraged to consider innovative ways that they can deliver legal assistance in contexts where they cannot serve each individual person in the 'classic' way (face to face legal advice), including through the use of digital solutions, co-designed directly with the community where possible.

### ***Examples of potential organizational pledges in line with this focus area:***

- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits **[number of]** pro bono hours **[in time period - ideally annually for reporting purposes]** in support of high-quality, ethical work on behalf of displaced people.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits to provide legal assistance to **[number]** of displaced people **[annually/another time] [in country/region/setting (e.g. humanitarian context)]** in relation to their asylum claims, exercise of general or specific legal rights, such as to be free from arbitrary immigration detention, and/or the pursuit of a particular solution, including permanent residency, citizenship, family reunification, and other complementary pathways.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits to provide legal assistance to **[number]** of displaced people **[annually/another timeframe] [in country/region/setting (e.g. humanitarian context)]** in relation to their registration or pre-registration for asylum determination procedures or eligibility for a certain protection status or solution (e.g. through registration for IDs and other licenses) in host states.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits to the development of a new legal assistance, clinical legal education or legal empowerment program in **[a given location/region]** by **[time]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits to train and support the capacity development of **[number]** displaced people in providing legal or paralegal services to their own communities in **[a given location/region]** by **[time]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits to conduct community consultations to identify the most relevant legal services they can offer to refugee communities within their area of operation/service in **[a given location/region]** by **[time]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits to pilot or expand new ways of providing legal services to affected populations in **[a given location/region]** by **[time]** by **[e.g. working with the community to develop an on-line information app or to provide online legal counseling]**.

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

Refugee Led-Organizations (RLOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other refugee rights civil society organizations, including local women-led organizations, are often at the forefront of responding to situations of displacement. Yet, especially in the case of RLOs and women-led organizations, they are frequently excluded from international programming, lack sufficient resourcing, and are overlooked by international agencies and initiatives. Many of the barriers to greater recognition of these actors are legal. Legal assistance with registration, employment or tax laws, data privacy, cybersecurity, and governance can have a significant impact on an organization's ability to be recognized as a legitimate actor within the refugee response sector and to fulfill its mission. Where legal assistance for organizational capacity building is provided pro bono, this also frees up resources for these organizations to commit towards their programming, ultimately allowing them to reach more refugees.

Private sector pledgers such as law firms, are encouraged to commit some of their pledged pro bono hours or develop specific programs to provide legal advice on organizational, financial, or programmatic matters, to organizations that support displaced people, including RLOs and women-led organizations, so that these organizations are able to operate in a more sustainable manner. Legal assistance NGOs may also consider building specific programs to support the strengthening of the organizational and institutional capacity of RLOs and other local organizations.

### *Examples of potential organizational pledges in line with this focus area:*

- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits an annual total of **[number]** pro bono hours towards organizational, financial, and programmatic matters, to organizations that support forcibly displaced people, including RLOs or women-led organizations.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits to **[develop a specific program to support the strengthening of the organizational and institutional capacity of RLOs and/or to provide such support]** to **[number]** of **[RLOs or other local organizations]** on **[a given location/region]** by **[time]**.

## 03 Refugee Inclusion and Hiring

Notwithstanding that refugee participation should be embedded in all aspects of the Pledge, including the implementation of all commitments made in relation to other focus areas, pledgers are encouraged to make specific commitments to promote greater refugee inclusion and hiring within their work, their organizations, and the wider legal community.

---

Pledgers should commit to meaningfully and practically include refugees in the design, implementation, and evaluation of refugee rights pro bono and legal assistance projects. This may involve making pledges to work in partnership with lawyers and paralegals with lived experience of displacement, or with RLOs and other community-based organizations that provide legal or other direct services to refugees. Pledgers should be aware of the power dynamics that may arise in such situations and should work towards co-designing projects with people with lived experience of displacement, or organizations led by them, in ways that promote co-leadership and co-visibility of such people or organizations. As pledgers seek to undertake this work, they may also need to consider their own internal commitments and policies around diversity, equity, and inclusion and whether those with lived experience of displacement are included in these.

Pledges in this area also include the creation of flexible employment, internship, clerkships and fellowship opportunities for refugees in order to increase the numbers of persons with lived experience involved in legal responses. Pledgers are encouraged to support programs giving refugees access to employment both by employing refugees locally and employing refugees through global mobility programs which provide alternative routes to safety for displaced people.

In addition to hiring refugees, private sector pledgers are also encouraged to consider how, as a business, they can increase the number of refugees they support in their local communities, including by supporting refugee-led businesses in the context of procurement policies. They are also encouraged to promote the importance of refugee inclusion and hiring with their own clients.

Pledges in this area also include law schools or academic institutions committing to undertake measures to increase pathways for displaced people to pursue further study or research in the field of law, forced migration, and related studies or to support the advancement of their academic or professional careers.

***Examples of potential organizational pledges in line with this focus area:***

- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits to include and meaningfully engage refugees in the design, implementation and evaluation of refugee rights pro bono or legal assistance projects by **[outline specific activity and date, such as working with a RLO to co-design a paralegal program or referral mechanism for legal assistance]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Academic Institution]** commits to increase employment, internship and/or fellowship opportunities for refugees by **[outline specific activity and date, e.g. hiring a number of displaced lawyers through a global mobility program to provide a pathway to safety through a work visa]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO]** commits to establish a specific clerkship or mentorship program by **[date]** for **[number]** of law students or graduates from refugee and displacement backgrounds.

- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, Bar Association, Academic Institution]** commits to undertake measures to increase the number of displaced people that are involved in decisions-making at the organization **[such as expressly including refugees in their diversity and inclusion policy, developing a rights-holder engagement policy, undergoing diversity, equity, and inclusion training, and taking steps to identify and address power imbalances]** by **[time]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation]** commits to **[develop programs or a policy]** to increase the number of refugees or refugee businesses they support in local communities by **[time]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, Bar Association, Academic Institution]** commits to undertake measures to increase pathways for displaced people to pursue further study in the field of law, forced migration, and related studies, such as establishing scholarships specifically for displaced people or developing mentorship programs with alumni by **[time]**.
- **[Academic institution]** commits to undertake measures to support scholars with lived experience of displacement to meaningfully contribute to the academic field of refugee law **[such as developing initiatives to support scholars with lived experience of displacement to undertake research on areas related to refugee law and/or to publish their work]** by **[time]**.

## 04 Legal Advocacy, Policy Engagement, and Asylum Capacity Development

Legal assistance, access to justice, and the rule of law are key components of a comprehensive response to situations of displacement, as are enabling legal and protection frameworks that guarantee access to rights. Pledgers are encouraged to advocate for change in legislation, policy, and practice to advance access to rights, justice, and solutions for refugees, including, but not limited to, ensuring the right to have access to a lawyer. The types of advocacy that could be undertaken by pledgers are wide-ranging, but could include strategic litigation or the development of advocacy campaigns to advance policy or legislative change.

Pledgers may also commit to undertake research to support policy engagement, advocacy on legal reform, and public discourse on issues related to access to rights, justice, and solutions of those displaced. Pledgers may commit to support local actors in developing their capacity and expertise in advocacy and strategic litigation. Private sector stakeholders may raise awareness of refugee and statelessness issues in the legal community they operate in and among their private sector clients. Pledgers are encouraged to commit to ensuring that any pledged advocacy efforts are informed by displaced communities themselves and are encouraged to be led by them. Pledgers are also encouraged to consider partnership approaches, such as working with initiatives relevant to legal advocacy and policy engagement, including but not limited to the Global Strategic Litigation Council on Refugee Rights (GSLC) and the Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network (GAIN).

In addition to contributing to legislative development and law reform, local and international legal stakeholders play other essential roles in developing effective asylum systems, including by assisting decision-makers to properly consider asylum claims in line with the law and fair procedure, contributing to the development of systems of legal assistance, and collaborating through referrals networks to link those with specific needs with those that have the mandates and capacity to address them. For asylum-seekers, access to legal assistance at an early stage has been shown to increase the quality of decisions, which reduces the need for and delays associated with appeals and positively impacts on the overall efficiency of the asylum system.

Pledgers are encouraged to engage in asylum capacity development pledges, including at the national level to support the establishment of fair and efficient new systems and/or the strengthening of existing asylum systems; at the intergovernmental level with the Asylum Capacity Support Group; and with UNHCR and its plans to develop a 5-year strategy on asylum capacity development. Pledgers are also encouraged to think strategically about prioritizing legal service provision at stages of the asylum process which would most support good decision-making and improve the efficiency of the asylum system.

***Examples of potential pledges in line with this focus area:***

- **[NGO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic]** commits by **[year]** to support the **[Asylum Institution]** in **[Country]** by providing technical support on legal assistance in the asylum procedure or on legal frameworks that protect refugee rights.
- **[NGO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic, Academic Institution]** commits by **[year]** to support asylum capacity in **[Country]** by providing an expert research paper to support the fair and efficient processing of asylum claims **[e.g. for claims made by certain vulnerable group(s)]**.
- **[NGO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic, Academic Institution]** commits to engage with State actors **[in country]** with efforts to establish new or strengthen existing asylum systems.
- **[NGO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic, Academic Institution]** commits to engage at the intergovernmental level with the Asylum Capacity Support Group.
- **[Law Firm, NGO, Bar Association, Legal Aid Clinic, Academic Institution]** commits to engage with UNHCR and its plans to develop a 5-year strategy on asylum capacity development.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Academic Institution]** commits to undertake **[certain advocacy or awareness raising activities such as strategic litigation, the development of an advocacy campaign - ideally informed by displaced communities themselves and/or led by them ]** around **[topic]** in **[country]** by **[time]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Academic Institution]** commits to undertake strategically designed research focused on **[topic]** to inform policy engagement by **[time]**.

## 05 Funding and Resource Mobilization

In many contexts, local NGOs and RLOs play a leading role in providing legal assistance to refugees and other displaced people, particularly in situations where State-funded legal assistance programs are absent or there are barriers to access. Despite their critical contributions, these organizations often encounter obstacles in being recognized as legitimate actors in the refugee response sector and are excluded from traditional coordination and funding channels. They frequently suffer from severe underfunding and limited human resources, primarily as a result of this exclusion.

Even when pro bono services may be able to enhance the capacity of local NGO or RLO legal assistance programs, engaging with pro bono lawyers, including training and supervising them to provide high quality legal services, requires a certain degree of staff expertise and capacity which many RLOs and NGOs don't have.

Pledges in this area can encompass both financial and in-kind resources to support NGOs and RLOs. Pledges may include commitments to provide part or full-time secondments and other human resources to enhance staff capacity and support their essential work.

### *Examples of potential pledges in line with this focus area:*

- **[Law Firm, Corporation]** commits to increase financial or in-kind resources towards NGOs and RLOs, including for RLOs that are not legally registered, for **[either to support general costs or for a certain purpose, such as to support interpretation costs, Psychosocial training and social workers to assist RLOs and NGOs in their mission]** by **[time]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation]** commits to second **[number]** legal professionals to NGOs and RLOs in **[year]**.

## 06 Coordination, Collaboration and Legal Capacity Development

The best way to meet the diverse legal needs experienced by displaced people with limited resources is for different stakeholders to collaborate and coordinate their efforts, including directly with affected communities and other local actors. This multi-stakeholder pledging initiative envisages stakeholders committing to work together as part of an integrated legal community, coordinating and collaborating at a local level and across borders at points of, or prior to, departure, in transit countries and in destination, host or third countries to support inclusion and the attainment of a durable solution. This whole-of-route, whole-of-society approach to refugee response, requires that different stakeholders recognise the position they hold in the legal community and the ways in which their skills, experience and resources can be of benefit to refugees and others within this community, while also recognizing where they require capacity development to provide more effective legal services.



Pledges are encouraged that seek to maximize resources and impact and support the building of effective, equitable and sustainable partnerships between and within local legal communities and with cross-border legal networks capable of supporting local needs. This may include pledges that focus on facilitating partnerships or connections for displaced people or communities, or the organizations that work with them, to legal stakeholders that can work with them to design solutions to their legal needs.

Pledges in this area may include organizing or attending global, regional or national coordination meetings and collaborating in practice at a local level. Pledges may also involve committing to share good practice models or to undergo or provide legal and other capacity development training or ongoing technical assistance to enhance the delivery of more effective legal services.

Pledges should seek to strengthen synergies between humanitarian, human rights and development actors working on legal assistance. This can be achieved by committing to conduct joint analysis of the legal assistance landscape and establishing tools and platforms to facilitate partnership building, collaboration, and coordinated responses. Pledgers are also urged to make commitments that promote the representation of national legal assistance actors, including RLOs, in existing humanitarian, human rights, and development coordination spaces. Such pledges will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of existing national capacities and responses and foster the inclusion of local actors in joint planning and implementation of legal assistance activities, which will enhance their effectiveness and impact.

***Examples of potential pledges in line with this focus area:***

- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Academic Institution, Law Clinic]** commits **[by year]** to share good practice models to increase access to legal assistance in local contexts and to empower refugees to access rights, justice and solutions.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Academic Institution, Law Clinic]** commits **[by year]** to undertake and/or support collaboration between different legal stakeholders, and engagement between refugee and legal communities **[e.g. by building coordination mechanisms, developing referral networks or supporting matching mechanisms/clearing houses]**.
- **[Law Firm, Corporation, NGO, RLO, Bar Association, Academic Institution, Law Clinic]** commit **[by year]** to undertake a specific legal capacity development activity or program for **[legal stakeholders, displaced people, or other relevant actors]**.

This Pledging Guidance should be read in conjunction with the [2023 GRF Legal Community Pledge Framework](#), both of which have been developed by the [GRF Legal Community Pledge Core Group](#) through a consultative and inclusive multi-stakeholder process.

If you have any questions about the Pledge, please contact: [grfpledge@pilnet.org](mailto:grfpledge@pilnet.org)