

# **Building a Model for Refugee Rights Fulfillment: Community Collaboration at Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre in the Context of International Law**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the model of fulfilling refugee rights through community collaboration, with a specific focus on the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC) in Indonesia. Refugees, as one of the most vulnerable groups globally, often face significant challenges in accessing their basic rights, including education, healthcare, and legal protection. The



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research analyzes how community-based initiatives, especially through the CRLC, contribute to the realization of refugee rights in the context of international law, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. This study emphasizes the importance of collaboration between refugees, local communities, and international organizations in fostering an inclusive environment for refugees to access essential services. By examining the CRLC's efforts in providing education, skills, and advocacy for refugees, this paper proposes a sustainable model for refugee rights fulfillment that aligns with international legal standards.

**KEYWORDS** *Refugee Rights Fulfillment, Community Collaboration, Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC), International Law, Refugee Protection*

## Introduction

The refugee crisis has become an increasingly complex global issue, with the number of refugees rising year after year due to factors such as armed conflict, violence, natural disasters, and political instability.<sup>1</sup> According to data from the UNHCR, over 26 million people worldwide have been forced to flee their home countries, creating significant challenges in fulfilling their basic human rights.<sup>2</sup> These rights, including access to education, healthcare, employment, and adequate housing, are often neglected or unattainable in conditions marked by uncertainty and limited resources.

In Indonesia, while there is no specific legislation governing the status of refugees, the country serves as a host for thousands of refugees from various regions facing crises. The main national instrument for handling refugees in Indonesia is Presidential Regulation No. 125/2016 on the Handling of Refugees from Abroad. This regulation, signed on December 31, 2016, provides a legal framework for refugee management, outlining the roles of various government bodies and procedures for dealing with asylum

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<sup>1</sup> Anita Bhatt, "Refugee crisis: A new era of global conflict." *Education and Society* 46 (2022): 53-57; Sarah Kenyon Lischer, "The global refugee crisis: Regional destabilization & humanitarian protection." *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (2017): 85-97; Sonja Fransen, and Hein De Haas. "Trends and patterns of global refugee migration." *Population and Development Review* 48, no. 1 (2022): 97-128.

<sup>2</sup> Jody R. Lori, and Joyceen S. Boyle. "Forced migration: Health and human rights issues among refugee populations." *Nursing Outlook* 63, no. 1 (2015): 68-76; Adelman, Howard. "From refugees to forced migration: The UNHCR and human security." *International Migration Review* 35.1 (2001): 7-32.

seekers and refugees. It is a key reference for understanding Indonesia's approach to refugee issues<sup>3</sup>.

However, Indonesia faces considerable challenges in providing adequate protection for refugees. On the one hand, the country has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, which means refugees do not receive the full legal protections they are entitled to.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, despite the existence of various policies and aid programs, the government's capacity to provide essential services to refugees remains limited.<sup>5</sup> In the face of these legal uncertainties and resource constraints, local communities and organizations have played a critical role in supporting refugees, for instance Cisarua Refugee Learning Center (CRLC) in Indonesia. In addition, a particularly notable example of these community-driven initiatives is the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC). This organization is especially relevant as a model because it is entirely refugee-led, setting it apart from other local initiatives. Born out of the needs of the community, the CRLC was created and is managed by refugees themselves, a structure that empowers them by giving them agency and purpose during a period of prolonged uncertainty. More than just an educational institution, it serves as a central hub for the community, providing a safe space for social connection and psychological support. The CRLC's success has inspired a dozen other similar refugee-led schools across Indonesia, proving that this model of community self-reliance is not only effective but also replicable, offering a powerful blueprint for other communities to rebuild their lives and contribute to society.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Antje Missbach, and Yunizar Adiputra. "The role of local governments in accommodating refugees in Indonesia: investigating best-case and worst-case scenarios." *Asian Journal of law and Society* 8, no. 3 (2021): 490-506; Nikolas Feith Tan, "The status of asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 28, no. 3 (2016): 365-383; Danang Sugihardana, Novia Indah Prasetyowati, and Nisrina Alya Rindjani. "Protection of Refugees Right to Education from a Legal Political Perspective in Indonesia." *Journal of Law Justice* 3, no. 1 (2025): 73-85; Yordan Gunawan, Carissa Shifa Novendra, and Aldha Febrila. "Indonesia's responsibility towards Rohingya refugees: analysis of the 1951 Refugee Convention." *Legality: Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum* 32, no. 2 (2024): 182-194; Ahmad Lukman Hadi, Kholidatul Muna, and Fanisa Mayda Ayiliani. "Indonesia's Accountability as a State That Did Not Ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention on the Rohingya Ethnic Group in the Perspective of International Human Rights." *Pandecta Research Law Journal* 19, no. 2 (2024): 425-450.

<sup>4</sup> Adinda Destaloka Putri Permatasari, "The Government Social Services Policy on Central Europe-Indonesia for Refugee Protection: Are the Laws Sufficient for Refugee Protection in Both Countries?." *The Indonesian Journal of International Clinical Legal Education* 3, no. 1 (2021): 41-56. See also Mumpuni Tri Utami, "The Implementation of Non-Refoulement Principle in Case of Rohingnya." *The Digest: Journal of Jurisprudence and Legisprudence* 1, no. 2 (2020): 197-222.

<sup>5</sup> Savitri Taylor, and Brynna Rafferty-Brown. "Difficult journeys: Accessing refugee protection in Indonesia." *Monash University Law Review* 36, no. 3 (2011): 138-161.

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Brown, "Refugee-led education in Indonesia." *Forced Migration Review* 58 (2018); Brown, Thomas Mitchell. "Building resilience: The emergence of refugee-led education initiatives in Indonesia to address service gaps faced in protracted

The role of local communities like CRLC is vital in offering not just material support but also psychological assistance, allowing refugees the chance to regain some measure of independence and improve their quality of life. Through a variety of programs, CRLC helps refugees cope with the daily challenges they face, particularly in the area of education, which is key to their future development.

Yet, despite the remarkable efforts of the CRLC and similar organizations, several significant institutional and coordination gaps remain. The most critical issue is the lack of a unified framework, as the government, international organizations, and local communities often operate in separate silos. This disconnect creates a major institutional barrier, as policies crafted at a high level frequently fail to align with the practical needs on the ground. This misalignment is compounded by a lack of effective coordination; information is not shared efficiently between stakeholders, and local refugee-led initiatives are often excluded from the very policy discussions that impact them most. This creates a vicious cycle where solutions are developed without input from the people they are meant to serve, leading to policies that are difficult to implement and unsustainable in the long run.<sup>7</sup>

Collaboration between local communities and international organizations in supporting the fulfillment of refugees' rights, while crucial, is often hindered by a lack of resources, unclear policies, and structural barriers.<sup>8</sup> This creates a significant gap in refugees' access to the services and protections that should be their basic rights. Therefore, it is essential to further explore how collaboration among various stakeholders—local communities, governments, and international organizations—can be more effectively structured to provide refugees with the support they need. This examination will consider not only policy frameworks but also the practical implementation of these collaborations.<sup>9</sup>

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transit." *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2018): 165-181; Damian Maher, "The professional learning of refugee volunteer teachers in Indonesian refugee learning centres." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 93 (2020): 103095.

<sup>7</sup> Maher, "The professional learning of refugee volunteer teachers in Indonesian refugee learning centres."

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Dowd, and Jane McAdam. "International cooperation and responsibility-sharing to protect refugees: What, why and how?." *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2017): 863-892.

<sup>9</sup> Sophie Kolmodin, "Collaboration to support refugees: The importance of local-level relations among civil society organizations." *Journal of Civil Society* 20, no. 2 (2024): 130-149. In the further cases, there are several incidents, such as sexual violence, slavery, or human trafficking. *See also* Khaisya Refaya Vidzal, Ayub Torry Satriyo Kusumo, and Rachma Indriyani. "Examining the State's Jurisdiction in Sexual Assault Stateless Victims on Ships on the High Seas." *Tirtayasa Journal of International Law* 3, no. 1 (2024): 1-21; Vera Novianti, et al. "Perkembangan Kejahatan Internasional dalam Hukum Pidana Internasional: Tinjauan Pertanggungjawaban oleh Peradilan Ad

Furthermore, while international law has established obligations for states to protect refugees, the implementation of these principles remains challenging at the local level.<sup>10</sup> Indonesia, which has ratified several international human rights instruments, continues to face difficulties in translating these commitments into practical, effective measures for refugee protection.<sup>11</sup> One of the most important international instruments in this regard is the 1951 Refugee Convention, which emphasizes the principle of non-refoulement and other fundamental rights of refugees. However, despite Indonesia being a key transit country for refugees, the full implementation of these international commitments has often been impeded by unclear domestic policies and a lack of effective mechanisms to ensure the fulfillment of refugees' rights.<sup>12</sup>

This study aims to analyze in greater detail the ways in which community collaboration can support the fulfillment of refugees' rights, as well as to examine the role of international law in ensuring the effective implementation of these rights, particularly in the Cisarua area. Focusing on Cisarua is particularly relevant given that the region hosts a significant number of refugees in Indonesia, providing a clear example of how local and international actors can collaborate in this context. By exploring the challenges and opportunities in this area, the research seeks to identify strategies that can strengthen refugee protection through more coordinated and effective collaboration.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of community collaboration and the role of international law in supporting the fulfillment of refugees' rights in Indonesia. This research is also expected to offer comprehensive insights into how international legal frameworks can be more effectively translated into local practices to ensure refugees receive the protection they require. Ultimately, this study aims to provide valuable recommendations that could inform policy development and more inclusive, effective practices for protecting refugees in Indonesia and in other countries facing similar challenges.

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Hoc Internasional." *Sultan Jurisprudence: Jurnal Riset Ilmu Hukum* 3, no. 1 (2023): 51-61.

<sup>10</sup> Nafees Ahmad, "Internally Displaced Persons and International Refugee Law: Protection Gaps, Challenges and Implementation in Practice." *The King's Student Law Review* 8, no. 2 (2017): 94-117; Erika Feller, Volker Türk, and Frances Nicholson. "Refugee protection in international law: UNHCR's global consultations on international protection." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 22 (2003).

<sup>11</sup> Bhatara Ibnu Reza, "Challenges and opportunities in respecting international refugee law in Indonesia." *Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Asia Pacific Region* (2016): 117-134; Ridwan Arifin, Yehezkiel Lemuel, and Ngaboawaji Daniel Nte. "International Legal Instruments in Responding to Human Trafficking." *Lentera Hukum* 8, no. 3 (2021): 417-446; Sulaiman Rasyid, et al. "The Role of Indonesian Diplomacy in Managing the Conflict between The Myanmar Government and The Rohingya Muslim Ethnic." *Unnes Law Journal* 8, no. 1 (2022): 159-178.

<sup>12</sup> Jane McAdam, "The enduring relevance of the 1951 Refugee Convention." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 29, no. 1 (2017): 1-9.

## Literature Review

### A. Refugee Rights under International Law

Building on the previous points, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol serve as the foundational documents of international refugee law. They establish a universally recognized definition of a refugee and outline the fundamental principles and rights that states must uphold to protect those fleeing persecution. The Convention outlines the rights of refugees, which include, among others, the right to not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom (the principle of non-refoulement)<sup>13</sup>, the right to legal protection, and the right to access basic services such as education and healthcare. The 1967 Protocol expanded the scope of the Convention, removing the temporal and geographic limitations that initially restricted the definition of a refugee to those displaced by events occurring before 1951 in Europe. Together, these instruments emphasize the need for protection and the provision of essential rights to individuals who are forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, or violence.<sup>14</sup>

While some might assume international law grants refugees the same basic rights as citizens, this is not the case. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the key legal instruments that clarify this distinction, establishing a tiered system of rights. Refugees are not afforded all rights equal to citizens, particularly when it comes to political participation. They are not guaranteed the right to vote or to hold public office in their country of asylum. Instead, international law focuses on providing refugees with the fundamental rights necessary for a dignified and safe life. This includes the principle of non-refoulement, which is the absolute prohibition against returning a person to a country where they would face a threat to their life or freedom. Refugees are also entitled to rights regarding access to courts, freedom of religion, and access to essential services like public relief and primary education, which they should receive on the same basis as citizens. However, their rights to work and freedom of movement are often subject to the same restrictions as those for other foreign nationals. Therefore, while international law provides a crucial safety net, it does not erase the legal differences between a refugee and a citizen. These rights encompass not only physical protection from harm but also access to vital services such as healthcare, education, and employment. In this regard, the right to education is pivotal, as it enables refugees to rebuild their lives and integrate into the host society. Similarly, the right to

<sup>13</sup> Tamás Molnár, "The principle of non-refoulement under international law: Its inception and evolution in a nutshell." *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2016): 51-61.

<sup>14</sup> Andreas Zimmermann, Jonas Dörschner, and Felix Machts, eds. *The 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 protocol: A commentary*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2011.

health is indispensable, ensuring that refugees are not denied medical care during their time of vulnerability. The right to work and the right to access social services are also critical in allowing refugees to achieve self-sufficiency.<sup>15</sup> However, despite the existence of these rights under international law, challenges remain in ensuring their full implementation, especially in countries where refugees lack formal legal status, as is the case in Indonesia, where legal provisions for refugees are often insufficient or poorly enforced.

## **B. Community Collaboration in Refugee Rights Fulfillment**

Community collaboration, in the context of humanitarian assistance, refers to the cooperative efforts of local communities, NGOs, governmental bodies, and international organizations in supporting the welfare of vulnerable populations such as refugees.<sup>16</sup> In many settings, community-driven initiatives have proven to be effective in addressing gaps in official government services, particularly in refugee camps or urban settings where resources are scarce. Community collaboration is built on the principles of solidarity, shared responsibility, and mutual aid. It acknowledges that refugees, despite their challenging circumstances, are active agents in their own lives and that local communities possess valuable resources, including knowledge of local culture and networks, which can enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions.

Numerous case studies and theoretical frameworks have explored the role of community collaboration in the fulfillment of refugee rights. For example, research on community-based approaches to refugee assistance highlights the importance of involving refugees in decision-making processes and in designing interventions that cater to their specific needs. The concept of participatory aid underscores the idea that empowering refugees through education, skill-building, and advocacy enables them to advocate for their rights and improve their conditions. A review of various community collaboration models also reveals that successful projects often rely on local actors who understand the unique challenges faced by refugees and can offer tailored solutions that international agencies may overlook. Thus, community collaboration serves not only to fill the gaps left by

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<sup>15</sup> Alice Edwards, "Human rights, refugees, and the right 'to enjoy'asylum." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 17, no. 2 (2005): 293-330; Goodwin-Gill, Guy S. "The international law of refugee protection." *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (2014): 36-47.

<sup>16</sup> Kathryn Libal, and Scott Harding. "Humanitarian alliances: Local and international NGO partnerships and the Iraqi refugee crisis." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 9, no. 2 (2011): 162-178; Andrew S. Natsios, "NGOs and the UN system in complex humanitarian emergencies: conflict or cooperation?." *Third World Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1995): 405-420.

government and international aid but also to foster a sense of ownership and agency among refugee populations.<sup>17</sup>

## C. Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC)

The Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC) is a prominent example of a community-based initiative in Indonesia that supports refugees through education, skill development, and advocacy. Established in the early 2000s, CRLC has become a vital resource for refugees living in the Cisarua region, an area known for hosting large numbers of refugees, particularly those who are stranded in Indonesia while awaiting resettlement to third countries. CRLC's mission is to provide a safe space for refugees to access education and develop skills that will enable them to rebuild their lives in exile. The center is unique in its focus on delivering high-quality educational programs, including English language courses, computer literacy, and vocational training, which are essential for refugees to adapt to life in a foreign country and improve their prospects for resettlement.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to educational support, CRLC also engages in advocacy work, helping refugees navigate legal and bureaucratic hurdles related to their status in Indonesia. This advocacy includes assisting refugees with applications for resettlement, providing legal workshops, and ensuring that they are aware of their rights under both Indonesian law and international frameworks. CRLC's approach reflects the growing recognition that empowering refugees with knowledge and skills is a fundamental part of improving their living conditions and facilitating their integration into society. Despite its successes, CRLC faces numerous challenges, including limited resources and the ever-changing landscape of refugee policy in Indonesia. Nevertheless, it remains a critical model for how local initiatives can make a tangible impact in the lives of refugees.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Zeynep Sahin Mencutek, "Refugee community organisations: Capabilities, interactions and limitations." *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2021): 181-199; Volker Türk, and Madeline Garlick. "From burdens and responsibilities to opportunities: the comprehensive refugee response framework and a global compact on refugees." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 28, no. 4 (2016): 656-678; Malahayati Rahman, et al. "Bridging Global Protocols and Local Wisdom: Innovating Refugee Assistance Through a Harmonized Protection Model." *Jambe Law Journal* 7, no. 1 (2024): 195-232.

<sup>18</sup> See Witri Elvianti, "Pemberdayaan Pemuda dalam Pengenalan Budaya dan Bahasa Indonesia untuk Pengungsi Anak-Anak di Cisarua, Bogor." *E-Dimas: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 11, no. 4 (2020): 460-467; Muzafar Ali, Lucy Fiske, and Nina Burridge. "'Here we are equal': refugee-run schools as a vehicle for human rights pedagogy." *Activating Cultural and Social Change*. Routledge, 2021. 47-59.

<sup>19</sup> Suzie Gibson, "Lives in transit: The egalitarian perspective of the 'staging post'." *Screen Education* 91 (2018): 58-63; Linda Briskman, and Lucy Fiske. "Asylum Seekers in Indonesia." *The Routledge Handbook of Community Development*. Routledge, 2017, pp. 358-369.

## D. International Law and the Role of the State in Refugee Protection

The concept of the state as the primary protector of refugees is deeply embedded in international law. While the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol outline the rights of refugees, the ultimate responsibility for their protection lies with the host states. Under international law, states are required to provide refugees with basic protections, including safety from refoulement and access to essential services.<sup>20</sup> However, the degree to which states fulfill these obligations varies widely, with many states, particularly those in the Global South, facing significant challenges in meeting international standards due to political, economic, and social constraints.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of Indonesia, the role of the state in refugee protection is somewhat ambiguous. Although Indonesia is a signatory to several international human rights agreements, it has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. As a result, refugees in Indonesia do not have the same legal status as they would in countries that have ratified the Convention.<sup>22</sup> While the Indonesian government has made efforts to provide temporary protection to refugees, the absence of a comprehensive national policy on refugees leaves many gaps in the protection framework. Refugees in Indonesia often find themselves in a legal limbo, lacking the formal rights to work, access social services, or education without the intervention of NGOs or community-based organizations. In this context, local initiatives, such as CRLC, play an essential role in filling the void left by state policy, offering refugees the support they need to navigate their difficult circumstances.

## Method

This research framed within a community-based service model of engagement, which emphasizes participatory development and empowerment. In this model, refugees are not merely recipients of aid but active participants in their own recovery and advocacy.<sup>23</sup> This service model fosters collaboration between refugees and host communities, encourages

<sup>20</sup> Tom Clark, and François Crépeau. "Mainstreaming Refugee Rights. The 1951 Refugee Convention and International Human Rights Law." *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 17, no. 4 (1999): 389-410.

<sup>21</sup> Laura Barnett, "Global governance and the evolution of the international refugee regime." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 14, no. 2\_and\_3 (2002): 238-262; Michelle Foster, *International refugee law and socio-economic rights: refuge from deprivation*. No. 51. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Debby Kristin, and Chloryne Trie Isana Dewi. "The Rights of Children Refugee in Transit Country under the CRC, A Case of Indonesia: An Intended Negligence?." *Padjadjaran Journal of International Law* 5, no. 1 (2021): 114-136.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Leidig, and William Oakes. "Model for project-based community engagement." *International Journal for Service Learning in Engineering, Humanitarian Engineering and Social Entrepreneurship* 16, no. 2 (2021): 1-13.

mutual learning, and strengthens local ownership of solutions. By investigating how such a model operates at CRLC, the study will offer practical insights into how community engagement can be enhanced in refugee support efforts. The findings aim to contribute to the improvement of refugee protection practices, both in Indonesia and globally, by promoting sustainable, collaborative models of community-based service delivery that prioritize refugees' rights, dignity, and agency.

In addition, this study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach to explore the role of community collaboration in supporting the fulfillment of refugees' rights. By focusing on the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC), the case study aims to provide a detailed understanding of how this community-based organization collaborates with various stakeholders, including refugees, local communities, and international organizations, to address refugee needs. The study examines the impact of CRLC's efforts in facilitating access to education, vocational training, and advocacy, as well as the challenges involved in providing sustainable support for refugees in Indonesia.<sup>24</sup>

The Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC), located in the Cisarua region of West Java, serves as the primary site of this study. The center plays a crucial role in supporting refugees by providing education, skills development, and advocacy services aimed at helping them rebuild their lives. Participants in this research will include refugees, who directly benefit from CRLC's programs; CRLC staff, who facilitate and manage these services; international organizations that collaborate with CRLC in refugee support efforts; and the local community surrounding Cisarua. The study will investigate how these diverse groups work together to address the multifaceted challenges refugees face, emphasizing the significance of community collaboration in achieving the fulfillment of refugees' rights in Indonesia.

Data collection will involve semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentary analysis. Interviews will be conducted with refugees, CRLC staff, and representatives from international organizations to gather qualitative insights into the experiences of refugees and the role of CRLC's programs in improving their livelihoods. Direct observation will allow the researcher to gain firsthand insights into CRLC's educational, vocational, and advocacy activities, capturing how community-based initiatives are practically implemented. Documentary analysis will involve reviewing CRLC's reports, records, and secondary sources, including relevant academic articles, policy papers, and reports from international organizations, to provide additional context. The data will be analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying key patterns and themes to assess the impact of community collaboration on refugees' rights fulfillment.

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Mark Silverman, and Kelly Patterson. *Qualitative research methods for community development*. Routledge, 2021; Ian F. Shaw, "Research networking and collaboration: a case study." *Qualitative Inquiry* 25, no. 9-10 (2019): 1128-1136.

## Result & Discussion

### A. Community Collaboration Model at the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre

The Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC) employs a distinctive model of community collaboration aimed at addressing the multifaceted needs of refugees living in Indonesia. This model is grounded in the principles of mutual aid, empowerment, and shared responsibility, and it seeks to bridge the gap between the institutional support provided by international organizations and the more informal, community-based initiatives that often arise in response to refugee crises.<sup>25</sup> The core of CRLC's approach is to create a collaborative environment where refugees, local staff, and the surrounding community work together to address the specific needs of displaced populations. This inclusive approach acknowledges refugees not as passive recipients of aid but as active participants in the creation and implementation of solutions that directly impact their lives.

At its heart, the collaboration model at CRLC focuses on education, vocational training, and advocacy, with the aim of fostering independence, dignity, and integration for refugees. CRLC staff facilitate educational programs that offer refugees essential skills, such as English language proficiency, computer literacy, and basic vocational training.<sup>26</sup> These programs are designed to increase refugees' employability and empower them to take control of their futures. Moreover, advocacy programs ensure that refugees' voices are heard and that they are informed about their legal rights and the resources available to them, particularly in navigating the bureaucratic and legal challenges they face in Indonesia. This collaborative model, therefore, not only focuses on the immediate survival of refugees but also works towards their long-term development and self-reliance.

#### 1. *Types of Collaboration Between Refugees, CRLC Staff, and the Local Community*

The collaboration at CRLC is characterized by various forms of interaction between refugees, CRLC staff, and the local community. One of the most significant aspects of this model is the active involvement of refugees in both the design and execution of the programs offered at the center. Refugees are not only the beneficiaries but also contributors to the

<sup>25</sup> See Lilis Sulistyowati, *The Teaching English for Refugees (A Case Study on Refugee Learning Center under UNHCR in Jakarta Greater Area 2021/2022)*. MS Thesis. Jakarta: FITK UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2022; Laetitia Lemaistre, *Acts of Quiet Rebellion: Refugee-led Education in Indonesia*. Diss. UCL (University College London), 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Mitchell Brown, "Building resilience: The emergence of refugee-led education initiatives in Indonesia to address service gaps faced in protracted transit." *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2018): 165-181; Raylinn Nuckolls, and Leticia Villarreal Sosa. "Human rights, collaborative advocacy, and a global approach to practice: Lessons from a field experience in Indonesia." *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work* 6, no. 1 (2021): 82-89.

community, playing roles as peer educators, facilitators, and advocates within the programs. This creates a sense of ownership and agency, allowing refugees to regain a measure of control over their lives and circumstances, despite their displacement.<sup>27</sup>

The collaboration extends to the CRLC staff, who are crucial in guiding the refugees and providing the expertise and structure needed to implement educational and vocational programs. However, staff members at CRLC also encourage participatory learning, where refugees are actively engaged in determining what types of programs they need. This dynamic fosters a more equitable relationship, where staff and refugees work together to create a supportive learning environment. Furthermore, the involvement of local communities—including Indonesian citizens—adds an additional layer of collaboration that strengthens the connection between refugees and the society that hosts them. For example, local volunteers and community members contribute to the center by teaching, offering support for events, and helping refugees navigate everyday challenges in their host environment. This fosters social cohesion and mutual understanding between displaced populations and the local community.<sup>28</sup>

## **2. Successful Activities and Programs at CRLC**

CRLC has implemented a number of programs that illustrate the success of its community collaboration model. One of the standout programs is the English language course, which plays a crucial role in improving the communication skills of refugees. This program is often led by both local volunteers and refugees themselves, with refugees participating as peer teachers. This not only increases the program's sustainability but also empowers refugees by giving them the chance to share their knowledge and experiences with others. The English course has proven to be effective in enhancing refugees' opportunities for resettlement, as many resettlement countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, require a certain level of language proficiency for refugees to be eligible for relocation.<sup>29</sup>

Another significant program at CRLC is the vocational training initiative, which includes courses in computer skills, hospitality, and craftwork. These programs are designed to equip refugees with practical skills that will be valuable both in Indonesia and in any future resettlement countries. The collaboration between refugees and local experts in these

<sup>27</sup> See Cisarua Refugee Learning Center, "Building Communities from the Ground Up", <https://www.cisarualearning.com/what-we-do>

<sup>28</sup> Cisarua Refugee Learning Center, "Building Communities from the Ground Up". See also Renatha Ayu Rossdiana, "Masa Depan di Perbatasan: Pendekatan Humanitarian Pendidikan Pengungsi Anak di Indonesia." *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional* 15, no. 1 (2022); Sri Hapsari Wijayanti, Aditya Gunawan, and Pinky Sibuea. "Pemberdayaan Pengungsi dalam Program Persiapan Kerja." *Dinamisia: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 5, no. 5 (2021): 1164-1169.

<sup>29</sup> Sulistyowati, *The Teaching English for Refugees (A Case Study on Refugee Learning Center under UNHCR in Jakarta Greater Area 2021/2022)*.

fields has resulted in several successful workshops, with refugees not only gaining new skills but also boosting their self-confidence.<sup>30</sup> This form of training also opens doors for refugees to engage in income-generating activities, whether through freelance work or through small entrepreneurial ventures.

Additionally, CRLC runs advocacy programs that focus on educating refugees about their rights and the legal processes they must navigate in order to seek asylum or resettlement. One notable example of successful advocacy is the legal workshops CRLC organizes, often in collaboration with international NGOs and legal professionals. These workshops provide refugees with essential knowledge about their rights under both Indonesian law and international conventions, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. By empowering refugees with legal literacy, CRLC helps them become more informed and confident when dealing with bureaucratic hurdles and when advocating for their own needs.

### **3. *Impact of Community Collaboration on Refugee Rights Fulfillment***

The collaborative model at CRLC has had a significant impact on the fulfillment of refugees' rights. Through the provision of education, vocational training, and legal advocacy, CRLC has contributed to the empowerment of refugees, enabling them to gain a sense of agency over their own lives.<sup>31</sup> The community-driven nature of the programs ensures that refugees are not only recipients of aid but also active participants in creating solutions to their challenges. This active participation has helped refugees regain a sense of dignity and purpose, which is often lost during displacement.

Furthermore, the involvement of local communities and volunteers has facilitated a greater integration of refugees into the broader society, helping to overcome potential social barriers and foster mutual understanding. The collaborative efforts have helped reduce feelings of alienation and marginalization, which are common among displaced populations. Instead, refugees are able to contribute to the society that hosts them, enhancing their sense of belonging and purpose. This collaboration also fosters a greater degree of social cohesion, as refugees, local communities, and CRLC staff work together towards a common goal of improving refugees' living conditions and securing their fundamental rights.

### **4. *Challenges and Areas for Improvement***

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<sup>30</sup> Rahman, et al. "Bridging Global Protocols and Local Wisdom: Innovating Refugee Assistance Through a Harmonized Protection Model."

<sup>31</sup> Nino Viartasiwi, "Nonstate Actors' Practices and Agency in Indonesian Refugee Protection the Importance of Communities of Practice." *Refugee Protection in Southeast Asia* (2025): 237.

While the model of community collaboration at CRLC has proven effective in many ways, several challenges remain. One of the primary obstacles is resource limitations. Despite the considerable success of CRLC's programs, the organization faces significant constraints in terms of funding, personnel, and physical space. These limitations often prevent CRLC from expanding its services to meet the increasing needs of refugees, as the number of displaced individuals in Indonesia continues to rise. Moreover, while the local community has shown strong support for CRLC, there are still some instances of misunderstanding or tension between refugees and locals, particularly regarding competition for resources or jobs. Therefore, there remains a need for continuous efforts to promote community awareness and cultural sensitivity in order to address these issues effectively.

Additionally, the uncertain legal status of refugees in Indonesia remains a major challenge. As Indonesia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugees in the country are left in a legal limbo, without formal recognition or full access to their rights. This lack of legal clarity hinders refugees' ability to access formal employment, social services, and long-term solutions.<sup>32</sup> CRLC's advocacy programs help address this gap, but policy reform at the national level is necessary to ensure more comprehensive protection for refugees in Indonesia.

## **B. The Role of International Law in Fulfilling Refugee Rights at CRLC**

### *1. Link Between CRLC Programs and International Legal Provisions*

The programs provided by the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC) closely reflect the core provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, even though Indonesia has not ratified these documents. Nevertheless, Indonesia's cooperation with the UNHCR and the humanitarian efforts of local organizations like CRLC contribute to fulfilling refugee rights in a manner consistent with international legal standards. The 1951 Refugee Convention sets out fundamental principles regarding the protection and rights of refugees, and CRLC's activities align with these principles, notably in the areas of education, vocational training, and legal assistance.

The 1951 Refugee Convention establishes a framework for the treatment and protection of refugees across signatory states. Key provisions such as Article 3 ("Non-Discrimination") and Article 33 ("Prohibition of Expulsion or Return ('Refoulement')") are central to CRLC's mission.

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<sup>32</sup> P. Nugroho Adhi, I. Gst Putu Agung, and Bernadette Gitareja. "Challenge and opportunity to implement the right to education for child refugees in Indonesia." *1st International Conference on Law and Human Rights 2020 (ICLHR 2020)*. Atlantis Press, 2021.

Article 3 prohibits discrimination between refugees based on race, religion, or country of origin, while Article 33 forbids the expulsion or return of refugees to a country where they face persecution. Though Indonesia is not a party to this Convention, CRLC adheres to these principles through its non-discriminatory educational programs, providing equal access to all refugees regardless of their nationality or status. By offering education, vocational training, and legal services without discrimination, CRLC embodies the principle of non-discrimination laid out in Article 3.

## 2. *Application of Refugee Protection Principles in International Law*

One of the most significant provisions in the 1951 Refugee Convention is Article 22, which guarantees refugees the right to primary education on an equal basis with nationals. The article specifically states, Article 22: "*The Contracting States shall accord to refugees lawfully in their territory the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education.*"<sup>33</sup>

CRLC's educational programs directly align with this legal obligation, as they offer primary and secondary education to refugees, often providing literacy and language courses that are essential for refugees' integration into their host communities. CRLC's approach goes beyond merely providing education: refugees are encouraged to become peer educators themselves, fostering an inclusive learning environment where refugees have the opportunity to both teach and learn. This aligns with the Convention's call for ensuring that refugees have access to education, thus enabling them to rebuild their lives in a sustainable manner. Although CRLC cannot provide formal public schooling as Indonesian law prohibits access to public education for non-citizens, the center works to ensure refugees are not excluded from opportunities to learn and grow, directly reflecting the spirit of Article 22.

Moreover, Article 17 of the 1951 Refugee Convention specifically addresses the right to work and to engage in self-employment for refugees. Article 17: "*Refugees shall be accorded the same treatment as nationals with respect to the right to engage in wage-earning employment.*"<sup>34</sup>

While Indonesia does not provide refugees with full rights to formal employment, CRLC's vocational training programs offer a practical solution to this gap by teaching refugees valuable skills that can help them become economically self-sufficient. For example, CRLC offers courses in computer literacy, English language skills, and small business entrepreneurship. These programs not only help refugees develop important skills but also align with Article 17, as they contribute to refugees' ability to support themselves through self-employment or informal sector work. In this sense, CRLC plays a pivotal role in facilitating the self-reliance of refugees, despite the lack of formal employment rights granted by the host country.

<sup>33</sup> See The 1951 Refugee Convention

<sup>34</sup> See The 1951 Refugee Convention

Additionally, Article 18 of the Convention requires states to provide refugees with access to public relief, Article 18: "*The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to public relief and assistance.*"

While refugees in Indonesia may not have full access to state-provided services, CRLC effectively fills this gap by providing community-driven support services that address both immediate and long-term needs. Through various educational and social programs, CRLC offers refugees vital resources to ensure their well-being. This is an example of how a community-based approach can complement legal provisions when state support is insufficient. The center's activities offer refugees alternatives to public assistance, ensuring their rights to basic relief, shelter, and services are still met.

### *3. Advocacy and Legal Support in Line with International Law*

An important aspect of CRLC's work involves its advocacy programs, which are designed to inform refugees about their legal rights and the process for seeking asylum or resettlement. This directly aligns with Article 35 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which calls for cooperation between UNHCR and host states to facilitate the protection and resettlement of refugees. Article 35: "*The Contracting States shall cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the exercise of its functions.*"<sup>35</sup>

CRLC's legal workshops and advocacy efforts help refugees navigate the often complex asylum process in Indonesia, ensuring that they understand the procedures for resettlement and the protections available to them. By providing legal literacy programs and supporting refugees in their interactions with government authorities, CRLC is fulfilling a role similar to that envisioned by Article 35—cooperating with relevant international bodies and institutions to assist refugees.

The right to legal assistance is also emphasized in international refugee law, particularly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which grants everyone the right to seek asylum in another country (Article 14).<sup>36</sup> CRLC supports refugees in exercising their right to seek asylum and assists them in understanding both international protection norms and their legal options. By providing these services, CRLC effectively upholds the right to legal recourse for refugees, as outlined in the UDHR and consistent with international refugee protection standards.

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<sup>35</sup> See The 1951 Refugee Convention

<sup>36</sup> Michael J. Parrish, "Redefining the Refugee: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a Basis for Refugee Protection." *Cardozo Law Review* 22, no. 1 (2000): 223-268; Natasha Saunders, "Beyond asylum claims: refugee protest, responsibility, and Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 22, no. 7 (2018): 847-868.

## C. Challenges in Implementing the Community Collaboration Model

### 1. *Barriers Faced by CRLC in Facilitating Refugee Rights Fulfillment*

The Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC), despite its critical role in supporting refugees in Indonesia, faces a range of challenges that hinder its ability to fully facilitate the fulfillment of refugee rights. One of the most significant obstacles is Indonesia's lack of formal refugee protection laws. As Indonesia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, refugees in the country are not granted the same legal rights and protections that refugees in other host countries might receive. This creates an immediate gap in legal and policy support, making it difficult for CRLC to fully advocate for refugees' right to work, access to public services, and protection from deportation.

For instance, refugees' legal status in Indonesia is uncertain and they are often treated as illegal migrants rather than recognized refugees. Without formal legal status, refugees are unable to legally work, open businesses, or even access basic healthcare and education services in the same way as Indonesian citizens.<sup>37</sup> CRLC tries to mitigate these gaps through community-based programs, but these efforts cannot overcome the structural barriers created by the lack of legal recognition. A specific case in point is the struggle of a refugee family from Afghanistan who, despite their enrollment in CRLC's educational and vocational programs, were unable to find formal employment due to their lack of work permits. This legal gap not only affects their livelihood but also reinforces the cycle of dependency on humanitarian aid, limiting long-term prospects for self-sufficiency and integration.

In addition, financial constraints are a consistent challenge for CRLC. While the center has been able to operate with some degree of success, it is largely dependent on donations and external funding from international organizations. The unpredictability of such funding, especially in a context of global economic uncertainty, means that programs—ranging from language classes to vocational training and legal aid—are sometimes disrupted or scaled back. For example, CRLC's computer literacy program for refugees was temporarily suspended when funding dried up, leaving a critical gap in skill development. Refugees who had been trained in previous cohorts were unable to access advanced courses or follow-up skills development, delaying their potential economic integration. Without a consistent and reliable funding stream, these interruptions create a significant barrier to the center's ability to offer comprehensive, long-term support.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> M. Alvi Syahrin, Hari Budi Artono, and Faisal Santiago. "Legal impacts of the existence of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia." *International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology* 9, no. 5 (2018): 1051-1058.

<sup>38</sup> Bazlin Fadilah, *Resiliensi bagi Urban Refugees Melalui Program Livelihood di Jesuit Refugee Service Cisarua Bogor*. BS Thesis. Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2021.

Furthermore, coordination issues between various actors—international organizations, local authorities, and refugee communities—have created inefficiencies in service delivery. The lack of a cohesive national refugee policy results in fragmented efforts, where each organization works on its own agenda, rather than aligning with the needs of refugees or the broader goals of refugee protection. A clear example of this lack of coordination occurred when CRLC's legal team was providing assistance to a group of refugees seeking resettlement, but local authorities were unaware of their status or the legal proceedings involved. This led to unnecessary delays in processing asylum applications, as well as conflicting messages from different actors on how refugees should proceed with their claims. This example underscores the need for a more coordinated approach to refugee support, both locally and internationally.

## *2. Challenges Relating to the Lack of Support from International and Local Actors*

Another key challenge is the limited support from international and local actors. Despite the involvement of the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in Indonesia, there is a fundamental gap between the humanitarian assistance provided by international agencies and the practical, everyday needs of refugees. For instance, the UNHCR plays a vital role in refugee registration and protection, but its resettlement programs are severely limited due to the small number of available slots for resettlement countries. This has created a situation where refugees find themselves living in temporary housing for extended periods, often for years. One particular example comes from a refugee family in the Cisarua area, who have been waiting for resettlement approval for over three years with no clear timeline in sight. This protracted uncertainty about resettlement options exacerbates the psychosocial distress refugees experience and makes it harder for CRLC to offer sustainable solutions for long-term integration.

The Indonesian government has also been reluctant to provide refugees with legal rights such as access to formal education or healthcare services. While CRLC works to fill these gaps through its programs, the absence of clear government policies means that refugees are often excluded from mainstream services. For example, a group of refugee children in the Cisarua area enrolled in CRLC's language courses were unable to attend public schools because they are not officially recognized as legal residents of the country. This situation is compounded by the fact that Indonesia's educational system does not have a framework for integrating refugees, leaving organizations like CRLC to develop ad-hoc solutions. While CRLC's educational programs have been successful, they are far from sufficient to meet the educational needs of all refugees, leading to inequities in educational access.

Locally, negative perceptions of refugees contribute to the challenges of integration. There is a notable lack of local support for refugees, often stemming from xenophobia and misunderstanding about refugees'

presence in the community. For instance, a refugee family attempting to set up a small business in the Cisarua area faced strong opposition from local residents, who feared that refugees would take jobs away from local Indonesians. This type of community resistance makes it difficult for CRLC to integrate refugees into local economic activities and is a barrier to the long-term sustainability of the programs it offers. Despite CRLC's attempts to build local partnerships and foster cooperation between refugees and host communities, miscommunication and prejudices often disrupt these efforts.

Furthermore, the absence of a national refugee framework in Indonesia exacerbates the difficulty of coordinating responses. While some local NGOs and community organizations try to provide support to refugees, there is no unified refugee policy that facilitates effective collaboration. A case in point is the inconsistent access to healthcare for refugees. Refugees who have encountered medical issues were at times denied treatment at local hospitals because of their lack of legal status. While CRLC does its best to connect refugees to private or donor-funded healthcare providers, these are often insufficient and do not guarantee long-term access to healthcare.

## Conclusion

The study reveals that the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC) plays a vital role in supporting the fulfillment of refugees' rights in Indonesia through community-based collaboration. CRLC's programs—such as education, vocational training, and advocacy—demonstrate the effectiveness of community involvement in bridging the gaps left by the absence of a formal refugee protection framework. However, the lack of legal recognition for refugees, along with financial limitations and coordination challenges, significantly hinders the long-term impact of these efforts. While CRLC's initiatives align with international law principles, especially the 1951 Refugee Convention, their implementation is constrained by Indonesia's non-ratification of the Convention and the absence of a legal framework that protects refugees' rights. Despite these challenges, the connection between community collaboration and international law remains clear. CRLC's work embodies principles such as the right to education, right to work, and non-refoulement; however, the lack of formal legal protection for refugees prevents the full realization of these rights. The inability of refugees to legally work, access health services, or receive formal education illustrates the gap between humanitarian practices and state obligations. The findings suggest that international law can only be truly effective when host countries, like Indonesia, integrate these principles into national policy and legal frameworks. To improve the situation, it is recommended that the Indonesian government ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and develop comprehensive national policies to integrate refugees into society. International organizations should also increase their support for community-based initiatives like CRLC by providing stable funding and ensuring better coordination among

stakeholders. Lastly, local communities need to be educated on the rights and contributions of refugees to foster better social integration. Addressing these gaps at both the legal and community levels will ensure that refugees can fully enjoy their rights and integrate into society with dignity and opportunity.

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### **Funding Information**

This research and program funded by Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia.

### **Conflicting Interest Statement**

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

### **Generative AI Statement**

This research was conducted with the support of generative artificial intelligence tools, which were used to assist in data analysis, literature review, and the formulation of academic writing. While AI played a role in facilitating certain aspects of the research process, all interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations presented in this study are based on the authors' critical analysis and judgment. The use of AI was intended to enhance the research process, but it does not substitute for the expertise and insights provided by human contributions throughout the study.