

REFUGEES SEEKING EQUAL ACCESS AT THE TABLE (R-SEAT)

BRIEFING NOTE
2024

R:SEAT



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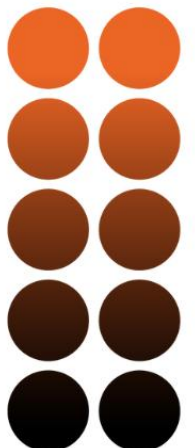
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ABOUT R-SEAT



Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table (R-SEAT) is an international refugee-led organization working to enhance the effectiveness of global refugee responses by co-designing transparent, structured, and institutionalized refugee advisory mechanisms. These mechanisms aim to amplify and activate refugee leadership ecosystems and increase the participation of refugees at state levels in a meaningful, sustainable, and transformative way.

Policymakers can benefit from tapping into networks of refugees whose expertise and solution-oriented ideas are embedded in their lived experience of forced displacement and expertise. Refugees frequently have insightful and innovative solutions to address both their own needs and those of host communities. By including refugee perspectives and knowledge into policy frameworks, decision-makers can gain a comprehensive understanding of refugee needs and priorities, enabling them to pinpoint deficiencies in services and policies, identify emerging issues, and cultivate innovative strategies for more effective responses.

R-SEAT's mission is to secure the commitment of 20 Member States of UNHCR's Executive Committee. R-SEAT collaborates closely with refugee leaders and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) within each unique national context to co-design refugee advisory mechanisms, while facilitating dialogue and consensus-building with governmental authorities. To ensure the transparency and credibility of the selection process, R-SEAT assists in convening an independent selection committee comprising refugee leaders, government representatives, academia, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders. After an open-call for applications is made, the selection committee appoints both established and emerging refugee leaders who then constitute the membership of the refugee advisory mechanism for fixed term cycles.

Once formed, these national mechanisms serve as pivotal conduits, leveraging local insights and experiences to influence global policies and practices. By bridging perspectives and expertise from refugees with high-level decision-making, the mechanisms complement and enhance existing efforts aimed at addressing refugee issues. Moreover, these mechanisms facilitate seamless continuity between national and international spheres, as advisors selected from these platforms maintain consistent engagement across both domains, thereby amplifying the impact of refugee voices on the global stage.

R-SEAT also works to enhance capacity within the global refugee leadership ecosystem by connecting refugee leaders and RLOs with relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, private foundations, and non-profit organizations. R-SEAT is dedicated to engaging, amplifying, and connecting international refugee leadership ecosystems.

WHAT IS MEANINGFUL REFUGEE PARTICIPATION?

Paragraph 34 of the Global Compact on Refugees states that, *“responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist. Relevant actors will, wherever possible, continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable refugees and host community members to assist in designing appropriate, accessible, and inclusive responses. States and relevant stakeholders will explore how best to include refugees and members of host communities.”*

At R-SEAT, we believe meaningful refugee participation occurs when refugees from diverse backgrounds have sustained influence in all fora where decisions, policies, and responses that impact their lives are being designed, implemented, and measured in a manner that is accessible, broad, informed, safe, free, and supported. Meaningful participation requires actors to listen to refugees, and for refugees to have tangible influence over the priorities and outcome of the policy process.

Meaningful refugee participation also requires a shift in how stakeholders view refugees—not as beneficiaries of aid, but as rights-holders who already actively participate in shaping opportunities and outcomes in their lives and communities.

R-SEAT'S THEORY OF CHANGE



R-SEAT's academic partner, The Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (LERRN), conducted a comprehensive mapping of countries that had made statements in support of refugee participation since the adoption of the New York Declaration in September 2016, accounting for their policies, positions on key issues, and domestic refugee leadership ecosystem. The mapping indicated that 33 countries (plus the European Union and the African Union) had made statements specifically indicating their support for the principles of refugee participation or refugee inclusion during the preparatory sessions for the development of the Global Compact on Refugees, meetings of UNHCR's Executive Committee, or during the 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF).

From these 33 countries, R-SEAT identified its list of 20 target states as specifically primed for engagement. When adopted by 20 states within the global refugee system, R-SEAT believes that refugee participation will become a standard of behavior for the system and other member states will follow similar practices, resulting in more effective and informed global responses to refugee issues.

Further information on R-SEAT's Theory of Change can be found in the article [Meaningful Refugee Participation: An Emerging Norm in the Global Refugee Regime](#) by Dr. James Milner, and R-SEAT'S Co-Managing Directors Mustafa Alio, and Rez Gardi.

COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE ESTABLISHED REFUGEE ADVISORY MECHANISMS

● CANADA

Canada was the first country to establish a refugee participatory mechanism, the **Refugee Advisory Network of Canada (RAN Canada)**, after successfully including a refugee advisor in their 2019 GRF delegation. R-SEAT's work in Canada is primarily focused on supporting and connecting RAN Canada and engaging relevant officials on the development of meaningful refugee participation.

● NEW ZEALAND

R-SEAT worked closely with refugee leaders, the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS), and government officials in New Zealand throughout 2021 towards the establishment of the **New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel (NZRAP)**. Launched in mid-2022 and supported by Immigration New Zealand, NZRAP has demonstrated the value of refugee-led insights in New Zealand's engagement for the GRF and beyond.

● THE UNITED STATES

R-SEAT, in partnership with Refugee Council USA and Refugee Congress, formed the **United States Refugee Advisory Board (USRAB)** in 2022. With the inclusion of a refugee advisor to U.S. delegations since the 2021 High-Level Officials Meeting, USRAB has actively contributed to the GRF and other major convenings. USRAB members are supported by their Secretariat, Refugee Congress.

● AUSTRALIA

The **Australia Refugee Advisory Panel (ARAP)** was launched in advance of the 2023 GRF after R-SEAT co-designed the concept with refugee leaders in Australia. The inclusion of a member of the ARAP as the official refugee advisor to the Australian delegation at GRF 2023 was specifically noteworthy as it was the first time Australia piloted this model. Work is underway to finalize the commitment of a Secretariat body for the ARAP. Australia also acts as State Co-Chair to the Multistakeholder Coalition on Meaningful Refugee Participation.

TARGET COUNTRIES

GERMANY



Germany's inclusion of a refugee advisor in its national delegation to the High-Level Officials Meeting in 2021 has since evolved into the commitment to develop a permanent refugee advisory mechanism, as announced at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. Collaborative efforts with R-SEAT have involved strategic training for respective German refugee advisors, connecting with academia, and coordinating a working group towards the establishment of the refugee advisory mechanism in Germany.

BRAZIL



Brazil has pledged to establish a mechanism for meaningful refugee participation. R-SEAT was pleased to provide strategic training to the refugee advisor to Brazil's 2023 GRF delegation, marking the first time Brazil has included a refugee advisor in an international convening. Further work is ongoing to develop a participatory mechanism, demonstrating Brazil's commitment to refugee participation.

SWITZERLAND



Switzerland's pledge at the GRF to establish a refugee advisory mechanism is cause for celebration. This commitment comes from sustained engagement within Switzerland and underscores a proactive approach to refugee participation. R-SEAT was pleased to provide strategic training to Switzerland's first official refugee delegate ahead of the GRF.

PORTUGAL



Portugal's willingness to engage in meaningful refugee participation practices has been strengthened by R-SEAT's strategic guidance, resulting in the inclusion of a refugee delegate to its delegations for the 2023 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement and the GRF. Portugal's engagement with R-SEAT remains robust, having connection with a strong network of refugee leaders, and plans to build on these efforts following their successful pilots.

THE NETHERLANDS



The Netherlands' work on meaningful refugee participation has led to R-SEAT's engagement with academics and officials. As State Co-Chair of the Multistakeholder Coalition on Meaningful Refugee Participation, the Netherlands is in position for more thorough engagement with refugee-led organizations and to utilize participatory methods for developing refugee policy. The Netherlands also pledged to improve funding access for local actors including refugee-led organizations at the 2023 GRF, in addition to their Migration and Displacement Program Grant opportunity in which refugee-led organizations were able to directly apply for significant funds in 2023.

MEXICO



Pledged at the GRF in 2019 and reiterated in 2023, Mexico has planned to create a multi-stakeholder consultative mechanism which would include refugee perspectives. This pledge towards refugee participation, as well as Mexico's pledges on enhancing asylum capacity and economic inclusion, highlight the country's further relevance to the work of R-SEAT. Work here is ongoing with local partners, including refugee-led organizations and refugee leaders.

COLOMBIA



R-SEAT has been working with partners in Colombia since 2021. The progressive stance on refugees and forcibly displaced people seen in this state is significant, and particularly visible in its co-convening of the GRF in December 2023. The addition of R-SEAT's Latin America-based team members has further developed our engagement, leveraging Colombia's regional leadership potential.

KENYA



R-SEAT's work in Kenya has coordinated a wide range of refugee-led organizations to co-design a concept for a refugee advisory mechanism tailored to the Kenyan context. Other efforts include sustained collaboration with the Department of Refugee Services (DRS). R-SEAT's East Africa-based Lead is engaged with numerous entities to further the practice of meaningful refugee participation in the country.

UGANDA



R-SEAT's collaboration with refugee leaders in Uganda has initiated conversations with the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF), seeking to create a refugee advisory mechanism to strategically advise this body. R-SEAT's ongoing dialogue with the REF and the Office of the Prime Minister highlights a strong commitment to institutionalizing refugee participation.

MALAYSIA



Malaysia's role in the Asia Pacific as a host to many refugees and as a contributor to the dialogue on solutions for Rohingya refugees remains significant. Despite political changes, R-SEAT's partnerships with refugee leaders and academics continue to support Malaysia's vital participation in regional discussions, and new avenues for engagement are being explored.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

R-SEAT is dedicated to fostering meaningful refugee participation through strategic partnerships, training, and crucially, the development of participatory mechanisms. Should you have any questions about our work, please reach out to us at info@refugeesseat.org.

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