



# Synergy of Multi-actors in the Empowerment of Women Refugees in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** Refugees are a severe problem encountering numerous countries, encompassing Indonesia. Although Indonesia is not a country which signed the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Refugee Protocol of 1967, it is actively a stopover country providing a place for refugees from other countries before they are located in the destination country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that until July 2020, there were 13,653 refugees, with 27% female and 73% male. Women refugees possess different challenges than men because they have to provide daily food needs, education, and health for their families, particularly their children. Women refugees own problems when menstruating or pregnant. They require clean sanitation to assure reproductive health. Women refugees are also prone to sexual harassment, violence, and human trafficking. This condition encourages UNHCR to conduct programs in empowering women refugees. However, the single role of UNHCR is not sufficient. This research identifies the synergy of the roles of the primary actors in empowering women refugees in Indonesia, particularly Afghan refugees by employing the qualitative method. The results signify a mutually supportive role of various actors in encouraging women refugees. UNHCR collaborates with the Indonesian government and non-governmental organizations to generate workshops and training for women refugees. Skills and training escalate the economic independence of women refugees. However, there are still obstacles which have to be resolved, that is increasing women's capacity and fulfilling women's rights.

**Keywords:** women empowerment · women refugees · international organization

## 1 Introduction

Abstract. Refugees possess the right to be protected. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights corroborates that “everyone owns the right to a citizenship”; thus, it recognizes citizenship's legal and practical significance for fulfilling human rights. Stateless persons who are encompassed as refugees are designated to international protections endorsed by the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. There is also a 1954 Convention that became an international tool for regulating the status of stateless persons who are not refugees and which guarantees that stateless persons own their human rights without

**Table 1.** Refugees in Indonesia (January 2022)

No	Country of Origin	Number
1	Afghanistan	7,410
2	Somalia	1,354
3	Myanmar	789
4	Iraq	658
5	Sudan	499
6	Others	499
	Total Number	13,219

discrimination. The Convention gives non-national persons an internationally recognized legal status, access to travel files, personal identification papers, and various other essential documentation. It contributes a general framework with minimum standards concerning the treatment of non-national persons.

In actuality, nevertheless, a large number of people still do not possess or have lost their citizenship. They are exposed due to this condition. They make it impossible for them to travel and obtain identity documents, among other difficulties that they encounter every day. Due to their ongoing statelessness, they are also more likely to suffer from stress and psychiatric illnesses. Few options available in the work. In some nations, it might be difficult for refugee children to enroll in school.

Indonesia owns juridically and legally not ratified the 1951 Convention and the 1967 protocol on active participation in regarding with the refugee problem. However, Indonesia is one of the transit countries for the world's refugees. As of January 2022, Indonesia has generated in 13,219 asylum seekers and refugees (see Table 1). Most of the refugees are from Afghanistan (57%), Somalia (10%), and Iraq (5%) (<https://www.unhcr.org/id/>). They reside in several major cities in Indonesia, encompassing Jakarta, Jabodetabek, Aceh, Medan, Pekanbaru, Tanjung Pinang, Batam, Semarang, Surabaya, Denpasar, Makassar, Kupang and others. Its composition comprises of 27% children and 73% adults (25% women and 75% men) (<https://www.unhcr.org/indonesia.html>).

Indonesia has become a transit point for refugees before resettling to a third country. Although Indonesia has not confirmed the law based on customary law, Indonesia has to implement the basic principle of nonrefoulement law. The Indonesian government cannot insist refugees to return to their home countries which are harmful to their lives and should facilitate refugees' shelter before they move to the following placement country accordingly (Asmar, 2019).

The Indonesian government issued a refugee protection policy in accordance with the principles of sovereignty and humanity. However, the two principles encounter with each other. Meanwhile, the existence of refugees can be a threat to Indonesia's sovereignty. On the one hand, Indonesia is responsible for protecting refugees in accordance with humanitarian principles. This conflict of interest caused numerous problems associated with regulations at the local and national levels, and Indonesia's position is merely as a

transit country. Nevertheless, the protracted existence of refugees has increased problems that have not been accommodated in government regulations (Viartasiwi et al., 2021).

While waiting for the subsequent placement, refugees are placed in refugee homes organized by the Indonesian government. Frequently, during the post, social problems occur which cause numerous conflicts. The factors that affect social problems are triggered by multiple things, such as the condition of refugees who are psychologically vulnerable because of threats in previous countries, health conditions both mentally and physically, and legal citizenship status, and economic difficulties which are not obvious while they live in temporary shelters. These factors eventually cause to new social problems for refugees.

Furthermore, women's refugee problems are more complex than those of male refugees because of the biological, psychological, and economic conditions encountered by women in contrast to men. Women refugees frequently possess the problem of double discrimination compared to male refugees. The problems experienced by women generally encourage resistance among women. However, in refugee camps, the problem of women refugees receives less attention from the government and is frequently not well accommodated in organizing refugees (Rehatta, 2014). Being a refugee in other country is not easy, particularly for women. They are more vulnerable to domestic violence after they leave their countries. With the widespread gender inequality, women, refugees, and girls encounter more significant uncertainty.

In the case of Indonesia, the women refugees experience difficulty pursuing education for themselves and their children. They also encountered obstacles to accepting health facilities which insisted them to live in a refugee camp that was limited in sanitation. Women refugees require health facilities to accommodate their reproductive services, but the Indonesian government used to overlooks it. These women refugees also should resist to afford their children and ensure they have enough food. Even when they actively work to advance the refugee community, they used to encounter the stigma of being displaced, like a woman who frequently wanders outside the house.

The problems experienced by women refugees in Indonesia motivate UNHCR as an organization under the United Nations that assists refugees in creating efforts to empower women refugees. UNHCR organizes training and capacity building for women refugees. However, UNHCR possesses limitations in overcoming the complexity of women's problems. UNHCR partners with the Indonesian government and non-governmental organizations. This paper is going to elaborate the synergy between UNHCR, the Indonesian government, and non-state actors in the empowerment of women refugees in Indonesia and the challenges encountered in empowering women refugees.

## 2 Literature Review

Women Refugees possess different experiences from male refugees. Regarding biological processes, women experience a cycle of femininity. This biological process demands more and other facilities from male refugees, such as the reproductive cycle (menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, postnatal). Women Refugees require to be corroborated by privacy room facilities in supporting their biological process services to avoid discomfort in the refugee camp. This constraint will affect the increment psychological

pressure while in the refugee camp and disrupt mental health, which also influences their reproductive health. Reproductive health is one health problem which requires special attention for Women Refugees bidding (Hanani, 2014).

Women Refugees are also frequently subjected to sexual violence, such as an emotional vent which is highlighted on the instincts of her husband's sexuality who is also a refugee (marital rape) under the pretext of stress, insisted sterilization which is implemented to prevent pregnancy during refugee status, sexual harassment from security officers are supposed to secure refugees even threaten to have sex in receiving social assistance, even young girls should accept forced marriages from their parents. As a result, inevitable pregnancies occur in adolescence, which affects reproductive health problems because the healthy reproductive age for pregnancy and childbirth ranges from 20-to 30 years. Underage pregnancies will be at high risk of mortality and u with adolescent girls' psychology (Nahak, Meo & Simon, 2021). Meanwhile, women refugees who do not possess family or husbands used to experience cases of human trafficking.

For women refugees, the absence of facilities designed exclusively or separately for their needs, such as private bathrooms, sleeping quarters, and locker rooms, frequently serves as a catalyst for sexual harassment. In this situation, women refugees encounter two forms of prejudice: discrimination in accordance with their gender status as marginal women who are treated as property and frequently perceived as sexual objecting; and discrimination based on the status of those who become refugees (Triputra & Handayani, 2021).

Women refugees are more vulnerable to the turmoil of gender-based social problems, preventing women's ability and existence to enjoy their rights and freedoms. They have to endure so as not to be harassed, not to be considered as a burden, and not to exchange honors for food and other social assistance. Differences in gender position frequently even place women as a minority group among the male class. Forms of sexual abuse such as sexual exploitation, coercion in marriage, and child marriage are concerned as natural due to the inequality of power relations. Refugee Women should not depend on men to legitimize frequent forms of sexual violence, particularly refugee status which is less supportive in obtaining legal protection for cases of sexual abuse encountered (Rehatta & Veriena, 2014).

Health problems during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal care are also significant problems encountered by Women Refugees. Around 59% of Women Refugees do not follow Ante Natal Care (ANC) and do not provide exclusive breast milk due to nutritional deficiencies and experience obstacles in evaluating health services impacted by the difficulty of communicating between Women Refugees and health workers and restricted corroborated health facilities. The impact is quite fatal for the development of their child's growth (Chalmiers et al., 2022). Maternal depression is frequently encountered by female refugees. They possessed poor experiences in accessing reproductive health services, incorporating xenophobia and discrimination in medical services, language barriers, ill-treatment, financial difficulties, religious and cultural hegemony, lack of health workers and overcrowding of public hospitals (Munyaneza & Mhlongo, 2019; Ahmed, Bowen & Feng, 2017).

In the transition country other problems arose. They owned difficulty to evaluate social services. They lived in discrimination, racism, and poverty affecting the ability to afford food. As in Australia's case, stressors of socio-economic, housing, and employment precariousness and difficulties in receiving halal foods were identified as challenges. The food stress was associated with the food's cultural appropriateness, the food system's complexity, and the women's lack of skills and experiences in organizing the food system (Kavian et al., 2020).

Refugees require social support from the community and government in adapting the new environment (Lewensohn, Abu-Kaf & Al-Said, 2019; Hurly, 2019; Alexandre, Salloum & Alalam, 2019). One of them is inviting refugees to perform social activities in their leisure time for educational advancement, self-improvement, and knowledge-gain, and for companionship. Physically, active leisure afforded fitness and fun, and nature-based leisure were recommended for restoration, nurturing relationships, and social networks. This leisure played a crucial role in mitigating traumatic memories and stress among refugees. Meanwhile, in sustaining the economic capabilities of refugees, they require government policy and NGO actions in corroborating the entrepreneurship activities of refugees.

With the unique conditions experienced, Women Refugees require special attention from the government and non-governmental institutions. Better protection for and empowerment of women refugees is urgently demanded due to their conditions and needs. The policies have to fulfill the specific needs of women. An essential step toward this effort is to enhance a more detailed classification of women and their specific needs. Women refugees' necessities are not merely regulated by their conditions but also the circumstances of those they are responsible for (Yazid & Natania, 2017).

### **3 Research Methods**

This research employs a qualitative approach. Researchers collected data from UNHCR online reports and The Indonesian Women's National Committee reports articles from scientific journals and online mass media. The experiences of women refugees in Indonesia, the initiatives performed by UNHCR, the Indonesian government, and non-governmental organizations to empower women refugees, as well as the difficulties encountered, are the major source of information. Refugees' narratives and testimonies published in a variety of online media become crucial data sources. All information is categorized and assessed a descriptive analysis.

## **4 Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 The Problem of Women Refugees in Indonesia**

Refugees in Indonesia cannot access employment and other fundamental social rights. It is complicated for them to discover work, even in the informal sector. As a result, they live in poor conditions and depend on assistance from UNHCR and its partners. They are vulnerable to stay in exploitation, poor health, and malnutrition. The disregard

of the refugee population is women, and they experience discrimination, violence and harassment due to their status as refugee women (Magdalena, 2019).

The National Commission on Violence Against Women (KomnasHam) discovered that they frequently receive messages from women refugees informed that they encounter sexual violence from their husbands in the form of “marital rape,” forced contraception, forced abortion, sexual exploitation and torture. Under the pretext of uncertain resettlement status and economic limitations, they vented their emotions to their wives and daughters. The previous country’s religious pretext and patriarchal system also delivered women’s refugee rights subordinated by the family and social structures they possessed, hence, major Women Refugees experiencing domestic violence considered it even though they were psychically disturbed. For instance, Women Refugees from Afghanistan are located in the Cisarua area of Bogor, comprising of ethnic Hazara and Shia religions. Ethnic Hazara women encounter additional barriers to possess citizenship due to the patriarchy of the country, ethnicity, religion, and civil structure they owned before. Although the 2004 Afghan Constitution guarantees women an extensive range of rights and protections, encompassing property rights, equality before the law, fairness in marriage and family, and daily life, most Afghan women are controlled by family and social structures which embody them all the time (Fiske, 2020).

Women Refugees from Somalia elaborated that they are occasionally offered to exchange sexual services for food assistance by refugee officials. This tragedy occurs due to the lack of legal protection for refugees in Indonesia and the professionalism of the state apparatus. There is no clarity of rules and legal sanctions for officers who provide in refugee camps to produce distance from Women Refugees, resulting in frequent acts of sexual harassment (Zahirah, 2020).

Forced contraceptives or abortion is also a crucial issue in terms of reproductive health and mental health for Women Refugees in Indonesia; it concerns the human rights they possess and have been generated in the International Conference on Population and Development; every woman is designated freely to her sexual and reproductive health. They are independent to decide the number, distance when to raise for children, the right to receive information, and sexual and reproductive health standards. However, it becomes challenging to obtain when in a temporary refugee camp in Indonesia; they are insisted to experience the forced use of contraceptives and actions which lead to abortion to prevent undesirable pregnancies while in the refuge (Nahak, Meo & Simon, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic also causes refugees vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse in refugee camps. More than 2300 reports received by KOMNASHAM during the Covid-19 pandemic escalated by 68% in comparison to the previous year’s report. Inadequate accessibility to various uphold services and enactment of a system of scale restrictions causes them inevitably have to comply to frequently be in the refuge and involved in internal conflicts and accept various sexual harassment and violent acts. Although these actions possess implications for the mental health of refugees, but they cannot receive health services as they do not possess guarantees of legal protection. Occasionally, the government does not consider that the implementation of scale restrictions and the Covid-19 pandemic also influences the potential increased risk of violence against Women Refugees bidding (Muthahari, 2022).

Another problem is the lack of facilities for women and female officers to uphold overcoming the problems encountered by Women Refugees. Women own four natures: menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding; in these circumstances, women refugees require different service facilities from male refugees and require assistance encountering female officers. However, the Indonesian government pays less attention to these needs. Almost all refugees utilize the same bathrooms, bedrooms, and other facilities with no gender distinction and special treatment for women. Women refugees possess distinguished conditions, some are pregnant, breastfeeding, or elderly. Some are also classified as women with disabilities who are concerned the most vulnerable to conflict and violence (Soeparna, 2018).

For accessibility to work and education, women refugees in Indonesia do not have permission due to their unclear citizenship status. They do not possess an identity, even though education is essential for women refugees. Education makes women aware of their rights as human beings and decreases the vulnerability of refugee women to be victims of gender-based violence which haunted them. The lack of education has made numerous victims of violence prefer to be silent because they think that it is taboo to discuss about the problem and do not comprehend human rights. Furthermore, they are not the breadwinner in the family, thus, they merely accept violence which periodically happen in their families.

There are about 4,000 Women Refugees and 3,700 child refugees disseminated across Indonesia, and approximately 60% of the entire refugee population is influenced by not being able to pursue their education and receiving enhance in obtaining a job, not possessing access to public health care, and gynecology and receiving much mental illness because of violence and sexual abuse. Indonesia has not been able to provide services and guarantees of legal protection for refugees to acquire this because Indonesia merely encounters the refugee problem restricted to the application of the principle of non-refoulment, which is repatriation to the country of origin, if possible, integration with residents, and resettlement. The Indonesian government does not allow refugees to work, study or organize small businesses, nor does it subsidize any access to financial, social, or health services (Fitria, 2015).

## 4.2 The Role of UNHCR in Indonesia

The history of UNHCR's occurrence in Indonesia began when in 1975, Indochina refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia came to Galang Island. However, it was not until 1979 that UNHCR was officially present in Indonesia by signing an MOU with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of The Republic of Indonesia that authorized UNHCR to protect refugees in Indonesia. The Ministry's assistance to UNHCR enables the agency to organize the arrival of refugees in Indonesia ([https://www.unhcr.org/id/en/government-relations-and-capacity-building#:~:text=UNHCR%20regularly%20conducts%20capacity%20building,local%20authorities%20in%20communities%20where](https://www.unhcr.org/id/en/government-relations-and-capacity-building#:~:text=UNHCR%20regularly%20conducts%20capacity%20building,local%20authorities%20in%20communities%20where).)).

UNHCR guarantees that refugees and asylum seekers are protected from coercion to return to which their home countries or freedoms are in danger. UNHCR then performs the registration process by verifying identity and individual documentation. Asylum seekers will obtain a schedule for the Refugee Status Determination Procedure (RSD).



There were officers interviewing refugees by employing the language of origin or utilizing translators. Asylum seekers will possess a decision to be declared a refugee or not by the UNHCR. If rejected, asylum seekers can appeal. For those with refugee status, UNHCR is able to discover solutions, encompassing transferring to the third countries or voluntary repatriation. Recently, with 79.5 million people displaced worldwide, UNHCR is attempting to unveil other alternatives. One of them retains them in transit countries and provides them access to jobs, and educational scholarships (translation of <https://www.unhcr.org/id/en/unhcr-in-indonean.translation>).

UNHCR Indonesia operates with the government, other UN agencies, NGOs, and civil society. Various programs are conducted to provide assistance and fulfill the refugees' needs (<https://www.unhcr.org/indonesia.html>). In performing its role in Indonesia, UNHCR acquired financial assistance from various countries, that are Australia, Canada, Germany, Denmark, the EU, Japan, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Norway. There are also private donors from Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States. UNHCR also receives funding from Bina Nusantara School, Dato' Tahir, Sekolah Jaya Global, Indonesia for Refugees, PT Eagle Indopharma, Metro TV, PT Tan Kiang, Uniql, SPH Lippo Cikarang School, SCTV, Tahir Foundation, Tunas Muda School Unilever (UK), Bank Mayapada, HIV/AIDS Program & Wanda House, and IOM (UNHCR, 2021).

In 2008, UNHCR and the Indonesian government agreed upon decision on the draft "10 Point Plan of Action in Addressing Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration in Indonesia". This activity is an attempt in upholding government to develop refugee protection mechanisms. The 10-Point Action Plan encompasses capacity building efforts within government. UNHCR conducts capacity building and advocacy activities collaborating with the Government of Indonesia, Indonesian lawyers, NGOs activists, academic institutions, and mass media in various workshops and discussions. The objective is to generate awareness about refugee issues and promote policies and protections for refugees (<https://www.unhcr.org/id/en/government-relations-and-capacity-building#:~:text=UNHCR%20regularly%20conducts%20capacity%20building,local%20authorities%20in%20communities%20where>).

### 4.3 Synergy for Women Empowerment

UNHCR attempts to advocate that refugees can be allowed to perform empowerment activities to reside with dignity while also creating a positive contribution to the Indonesian people (Dianti, 2021). In performing its role in Indonesia, UNHCR synergizes with the Indonesian government, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and non-governmental institutions. The Indonesian government authorizes UNHCR Indonesia in providing protection, discover solutions for refugees in Indonesia and determine refugee status. Meanwhile, IOM concerns on providing facilities for refugees in Indonesia and working with local governments (Viartasiswi et al., 2021).

Other national and international organizations work with refugees and asylum seekers. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Church World Service (CWS), Dompot Dhuafa, Human Initiative, and other small organizations at the local level support UNHCR and IOM to provide services for refugees. There are also several refugee-run organizations in Jakarta and West Java areas: Roshan Learning Centre, HELP for Refugees, Refugees



and Asylum Seekers Information Center (RAIC), and Sisterhood, among others. Some organizations concern on advocacy and research, for instance, ASYLUM. Other Indonesian organizations incorporated in the emergency response for the Rohingya in Aceh, such as the Geutanyoe Foundation, the Indonesian Red Cross, the Indonesian Madani Humanitarian Foundation (YKMI), and Muhammadiyah. However, financial assistance for refugees is inadequate. Only UNHCR, IOM, and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) possess programs which offer monthly stipends.

Various empowerment programs for refugees have been organized concerning on developing skills, self-resilience, and community-building programs to prepare refugees the future lives, either in third countries or returning to their home countries. Self-resilience programs are in place for refugee youth to fill the gap of parental figures. In addition to IOM, some organizations provide resilience programs, despite limited reach. They are refugee organizations such as Sisterhood Women's Empowerment Center, Refugee Learning Nest (RLN), Hope Learning Center (HLC) in Bogor Regency, Afghan Innovative Migrants Learning Academy in Kupang, and Skilled Migrant and Refugee Technicians (SMART) in Jakarta (Viartasiswi et al., 2021).

To identify the needs of refugees in Indonesia UNHCR facilitates participatory assessment exercises. The training involved governments, partner agencies, refugees as well as asylum seekers of different ages, genders, countries, cultures and religions. This diversity-based approach is very beneficial for building partnerships between women and men refugees of different ages and backgrounds.

UNHCR launched a program for women's empowerment because of how complicated the challenges affecting women refugees were. One of them entails providing training for refugee women. Discussing topics like gender, women's rights, the role of women in decision-making, freedom of speech, education, and employment is an essential part of this training for empowering refugee women. Refugee women are urged to remove obstacles and open doors. They are also prompted to stand by one another, strengthen one another, and work together to create a better future (Suryono, 2020).

Together with Uniqlo, UNHCR held an "Upcycling Project," which is a form of support for the environment, community, and women's empowerment. This program encompasses Women Refugees producing various accessories by employing the remaining fabric collected at Uniqlo Indonesia stores. The objective is to provide skills and motivate Women Refugees to learn and develop. Uniqlo works jointly with UNHCR and its partner Liberty Society to empower Women Refugees by involving them in creating accessories, bags, and cardholders from recycled materials. Managed by Liberty Society, proceeds from product sales will be reinvested to further benefit women by enhancing their working hours, income, and overall well-being. In addition to establishing skills enhancement, they also provide English classes, Indonesian classes, and psychosocial support such as art to uphold a better quality of life for every woman (Dianawati, 2021). The collaboration between Fast Retailing Co. Ltd., Uniqlo's parent company, and UNHCR began in 2006. Cooperation continued between Uniqlo Indonesia and UNHCR in 2016. Partnership projects continue to be enhanced, both in scope and scale, to assist refugees worldwide (Mutiah, 2021).

Not only UNHCR but some organizations and institutions in the community are also escalating skills for Women Refugees. Some Women Refugees in Medan, with

the assistance of Mapanbumi partners, generate washable face masks to distribute to vulnerable Indonesians and those who work outside the house. The Women Refugees produced 1,000 masks for vulnerable groups such as rickshaw drivers, road cleaners, and the elderly in 18 sub-districts (Suryono, 2020).

Another support was formulated by Indonesian-born fashion entrepreneur Franka Soeria, co-founder of Modest Fashion Week. Franka discovered the Benang Project by facilitating fashion training for refugees. They are trained in designing and producing clothing designs, making patterns, sewing, creating brands, setting up photoshoots and fashion shows. Their works have been presented in four countries: Jakarta, Paris, Turkey, and Dubai (Mutiah, 2021).

Entrepreneurs in Jakarta, such as restaurant chain Gourmand Group and non-profit organizations such as Art for Refuge, Indonesia for Refugees, and The Learning Farm also establish training for refugees. They cultivate the skills of cooking, art, soap making, sewing and organic farming cultivation (Caroline, 2019). One of which is the Sisterhood Community Center in South Jakarta. The establishment of the Sisterhood Community is fascinating. In the Greater Jakarta area, several training centers for refugees are established. However, none of them were built to fulfill the needs of women. Victoria Forsgate, a Scotsman who has worked with refugees, possessed an idea of developing a special project for women. She then visited Kalsoom, a Pakistani refugee and discussed what could be performed for the Women Refugees. Particularly since there is no center which specifically addresses the needs of women. Kalsoom owns a network among the refugees, thus, she invited a few friends to discuss the project. Fortunately, the project received support because there were residents who lent the building for the offices and activities. The majority of project participants are women. In principle, this organization are eagerly to facilitate women the opportunity to lead projects generated by themselves and for themselves (Wardhani, 2019).

Sisterhood Community offers skill classes such as cooking, makeup, and English classes. Several Women Refugees from countries abandoned in Indonesia are learning numerous skills such as gardening, cosmetology, sewing, embroidery, making jewelry, and recycling plastic. A female refugee named Yalda from Afghanistan recounted her experience: "I am pleased to be able to learn the language and skills here. This place is tremendous for women, particularly mothers like me who experience boredom just at home. We are able to chat, exchange ideas with other women". Delnaz Zarbalizadeh, a refugee woman from Iran, asserted: "I can still experience how we are struggling. My daughter was sick at the time, and she had to take a medicine. However, the condition (of living) affected my daughter to stop treatment. Women and children are vulnerable in migration situations. They also require to be happy and free from stress and bad memories. Therefore, I am involved in Sisterhood to assist myself enhancing my feelings and mood" (Dianti, 2021).

The empowerment of women refugees is also conducted by establishing women's awareness and capacity. UN Women and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation) organized a talk show to commemorate International Women's Day 2018. This commemoration invited people to work together and perform a more active role in women's empowerment. The event collaborated with senior entrepreneurs, novelists and women activists. They

exchanged their stories and encouraged women to obtain an education, possess an independent spirit, and enhance their quality of life (Kurniasari, 2018).

Efforts to empower female refugees are also performed in the form of art. Inter-Sastra's House of the Unsilenced urges refugees to express themselves through art. In collaboration with JRS, House of the Unsilenced offers classes to empower refugee women in the Greater Jakarta area by enhancing their voices and capacities for self-expression, building a network of artists and activists, and escalating their confidence. One of them is the dance class "Love Your Body", "Love Yourself" organized at Tebet Education Center (Magdalena, 2019).

The most impressive effort was in Cisarua, West Java. There are refugee-led organizations which concern on women's empowerment and sports. Refugee Women Support Group Indonesia (RWSGI) is a group authorized by a Hazara female refugee who previously worked as an NGO activist in Pakistan. The organization concerns on the manufacture of textiles and jewelry. The group also conducted workshops on women's issues, reproductive health, sexual violence and family issues. They also established Indonesian classes for women and children (RWSGI, 2017). Another refugee-led organization is the Cisarua Refugee Shotokan Karate Club (CRSKC), which was discovered by a young Hazara woman who was a professional karate athlete in Afghanistan. The club provides regular karate classes for both adults and children. This initiative contributes to enhancing the social and mental health of refugees (Brown, 2018).

#### 4.4 The Challenges

There are still some fundamental issues that need to be resolved despite the fact that UNHCR and partners have launched numerous programs for the empowerment of women refugees. The first concern is how to educate female refugees on their gender-specific rights. These initiatives are closely associated with the importance of educating female refugees so that they are aware of their rights. Female refugees in Indonesia frequently fall victim to sexual assault, forced marriage, and human trafficking. Countless female refugees do not have family members or partners with them. Despite experiencing violence, they would rather remain silent because speaking about their issues would make them humiliated. Due to their high rate of illiteracy and ignorance of their rights as human beings, these issues are exacerbated. They do not possess any access to education, health and are prone to mental illness. Many single mothers come seeking asylum from Somalia, Afghanistan and other conflicting places to discover peace for their children. However, most of them are not able to read or write. Access to education is one of the prior problems encountering refugees. They experience imprisonment due to lack of education (Weedhsan, 2020).

These challenges are associated with Indonesia's response to refugees. Indonesia have to treat refugees as guests and fulfill their basic rights. However, at the same time, Indonesia considers them a threat, that is when their rights are not limited, it will supplant the jobs of local people and cause horizontal tensions. It is reflected in Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016. On the one hand, the regulations welcome refugees and provide accommodation during their stay. Meanwhile, the regulation seems to treat them as intruders who endanger the safety of the local community. The following conundrum concerns Indonesia's efforts to safeguard and uphold the rights of refugees as stipulated

by the ICCPR and ICESCR. The country's willingness to protect refugees as part of its obligation to the international community has been clearly explained by the Presidential Regulation on refugee handling. However, this mechanism falls short of the requirements of the ICCPR and ICESCR to uphold human dignity (Princess, 2020). Despite having UNHCR identification cards, Indonesia does not consistently protect the rights of refugees. The majority of refugees still encounter prejudice, marginalization, and discrimination. According to an immigration officer in Pekanbaru City, many Indonesian officials are still enslaved by the past and view the issue of foreign refugees as one that affects the entire world rather than just Indonesia (Pek, 2021). Data from Amnesty International's 2016 Welcome Refugee Index ranked Indonesia 26th out of 27 countries surveyed, with a score of 32 (on a scale of 0–100, with 100 being the highest score). These results display the country's reluctance to absorb refugees (Inside Indonesia, May 13, 2022).

While this sentiment is undeniable, there are fascinating stories narrated by asylum seekers and refugees in Cisarua, West Java. Skills training and problem solving collectively receive benefits for refugees living in Cisarua. They are encouraged to overcome difficulties by collaborating to discover their own solutions. Refugees in Indonesia encounter obstacles politically, economically, socially and from their status as outsiders. Inspiringly, however, the establishment of the Cisarua Refugee Learning Center reveals how a community-based approach can foster a human spirit to encounter structural limitations and establish robust community connections, both within internal communities and at the national level (Ali, Briskman & Fiske, 2016).

The second challenge is capacity building, particularly in supporting the women refugees who run the organization. The majority of them have never possessed an experience of establishing an organization. UNHCR has performed capacity building and advocacy activities with the Government of Indonesia in Jakarta and other cities. Unfortunately, current capacity building efforts are being conducted at the level of government officials and refugee observers. Meanwhile, women refugees also require to escalate their capacity, hence, they are able to live more dignifiedly and manage the organization better.

Capacity building efforts, as the matter of fact, have already produced embryos. In Cisarua, refugees receive the freedom and capacity to self-regulate while providing education to refugee children in their communities. This effort is expected to be developed in other refugee camps. Freedom, high capacity and robust motivation are necessary prerequisites for the occurrence of refugee-led initiatives. Social capital is an essential factor in enabling refugee communities to uncover common problems and mobilize people to collaborate in overcoming the difficulties experienced (Brown, 2018).

## 5 Conclusion

The synergy between UNHCR, the Indonesian government and non-governmental organizations to empower women refugees in Indonesia possesses a positive impact on women's empowerment. However, the success of empowering women refugees depends on the initiative and commitment of the refugees themselves. Unfortunately, merely a little percentage of female refugees possess the initiative and courage to change their lives. The majority of female refugees still require encouragement to extend their horizons that they can perform something to change their destiny.

In Indonesia, the majority of programs for the empowerment of women who have fled persecution are economic in nature. However in order to speak up for their rights as women, they also need “personal politics” to be strengthened. Additionally, they must develop their own feminine leadership skills, particularly in leading organizations that support other women. Several institutions, both government and non-government, must uphold this effort.

The findings of this study provide a foundation for further investigation into how programs for women’s empowerment conducted by various actors are received by the women who are refugees. Due to their diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, places of origin, ages, levels of education, and occupations, women refugees will receive a range of responses to programs designed to assist them.

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