

Urban
Refugees
in
Asia Pacific

Resiliency and Coping Strategies

Pilot study report

March 2013

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APRRN

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) is an open and growing network of over 140 members, consisting of civil society organisations and individuals committed to advancing the rights of refugees in the Asia Pacific Region. They do this through information sharing, mutual capacity building, and joint advocacy. APRRN members are diverse, comprising service providers, human rights advocacy groups, research institutions, law firms providing pro-bono legal aid, refugee community-based organisations and refugees themselves. Almost all APRRN members are civil society groups working in their specific local contexts, lobbying their governments for changes in policies and legislation to protect the rights of refugees.

APRRN was formed at the first Asia Pacific Consultation on Refugee Rights (APCRR) in November 2008, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. APRRN advocates for the rights of refugees in the region in order to ensure that the fundamental rights of refugees, asylum seekers and victims of forced migration are respected and protected. It also highlights good practices in countries of asylum and transit, as well as violations of the rights of refugees. APRRN endeavours to develop mechanisms and strategies to address refugee concerns, and to establish engagement between relevant stakeholders to advance good practices and better protection of refugee rights. It advocates for countries to sign on to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) and/or its 1967 Protocol and the establishment of national legislative and legal mechanisms that enshrine and advance the protection of refugees and forced migrants. APRRN also aims to engender an environment where refugees, asylum seekers and forced migrants are treated with dignity, enjoy fundamental rights and do not face discrimination, exploitation, and uncertainty.

Background

This report summarizes the results of a mixed-methodology study on the living conditions, challenges, and coping strategies of urban refugees and asylum seekers.

APRRN collaborated with its member organizations to reach the urban refugee population and to collect reliable data on urban refugees living in Bangkok, Thailand; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; New Dehli, India; and Kathmandu, Nepal. Researchers in each municipality developed a specialized methodology particular to their research backgrounds and with sensitivities to local contexts to engage in primary and secondary data collection including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and photovoice methodology. Over 90 refugees and asylum seekers of varying ages, gender, and refugee statuses participated, including participants from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma (Rohingya, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karen and Karenni), China (Tibet) Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Vietnam.

Raising awareness of the difficulties faced by refugees and asylum-seekers is crucial; however it is equally important to understand the ways in which these groups, against all odds, provide for and protect themselves and their families in this hostile protection environment. A better understanding of the ways in which refugees and asylum-seekers develop their strengths, resilience, and agency to contend with traumatic events and daily challenges will help civil society groups to better support and strengthen these coping mechanisms through relevant and targeted programming.

Through comprehensive analysis of the individual country reports, APRRN has identified common themes and conclusions and releases this report with confidence that service providers and advocates will have enhanced understanding to more effectively assist urban refugees in coping with the challenges that they face.

This report uses the term refugee to go beyond those who have been recognised as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but also those who are persons of interest to the UNHCR, asylum seekers and in some cases stateless persons.

Despite the harshness of life as a refugee, and the horrors of fleeing war and persecution, leaving behind families and friends, refugees have found ways to survive and protect themselves and their loved ones. We admire their courage and hope to share their stories of struggle and resilience and they have so kindly shared with us.

“We have our dignity and our worth. We are strong”

- A refugee respondent

Country Snapshots

History is replete with examples of an universal tradition of providing sanctuary for those fleeing from danger. This is embodied in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol to the Convention. The convention itself comes into existence in response to the horrors of World War II.

However, none of the countries in the research are signatories to the 1951 convention or the 1967 protocol. Despite international pressure and civil society advocacy, these countries have resisted signing the 1951 convention.

The status of refugees in these countries is not officially recognised. The UNHCR conducts refugee status determination (RSD) for refugees in these countries, often with significant restrictions placed on them.

Refugees are usually covered under a national immigration law that does not differentiate between a person who migrates willingly and has the option to return to his homeland without fear of persecution, and those who have been forced to migrate because of persecution. Refugees in these countries face a precarious existence, where they are considered to be 'illegal' migrants and are under the constant threat of arrest, detention and some times *refoulement*. Even the recognition by UNHCR in many country does not offer protection against arrest and detention.

While countries surveyed are supposed to respect the principle of *non-refoulement*, which is considered to be customary international law¹. There are countries which deviate from the principle at intervals. Refugees are often detained for prolonged periods of time with the reason given that they cannot be sent back to their countries of origin (*non-refoulement*) and face possible persecution. There have been reports of refugees being detained in some of the countries for as long as 5 years. In other words, refugees are criminalised for seeking protection from persecution.

Refugees are not allowed to work and therefore are unable to legally provide for themselves and their families. Access to health care and education is limited, if any.

The following pages provides a snapshot of situations in the four countries.

¹Turk, Volker and Nicholson, Frances; Refugee Protection in International Law; pg 9; <http://www.unhcr.org/419c73174.html>

India

“My plight is immeasurable. I had lost my son and I don’t even know whether or not he is alive. Because I am living alone without any family, I have to face a lot of unpleasant things every day. So, in simple words, life is very difficult for me here...”

-Somali Refugee living in India

India	
Registered Refugees	185,118
Asylum Seekers	3,518

Source: www.unhcr.org, data as of January 2012

India’s rich history is filled with periods of complex migration flows. It was home to one of the largest exoduses in the world during the partition of the Indian subcontinent into the states of India and Pakistan. Throughout its history, India has also become a country of asylum for millions of refugees including citizens escaping violence during the creation of Bangladesh, Tibetans fleeing Chinese persecution, and Afghan refugees en route from Pakistan.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was first allowed to work in India in 1969 to provide vocational training for Tibetan refugees and was later permitted to take a limited role in monitoring the repatriation of Tamil refugees to Sri Lanka. Today the UNHCR plays a larger role in supporting refugees in India and as of August, 2011, 16,400 refugees and 5,300 asylum-seekers were registered with the UNHCR, comprised mainly of persons of Afghan, Myanmar, and Somali origin.

The UNHCR collaborated with the Indian legal fraternity and the Indian Supreme Court Bar to develop a draft of the Indian Act on Refugee and Asylum Seeker Protection, but to date, the Indian parliament has not debated on the draft Act or any other legal mechanism that provide recognition or protection to refugees (Nair, 2007; Saxena, 2007). The status of refugees in India is governed mainly through political and administrative decisions, leaving refugees vulnerable without legal protection. UNHCR struggles to deal with an increase in refugees and asylum seekers and has had to find innovative ways to meet the growing needs of refugees living in India, reflected in increased support for strategies towards refugee self-reliance.

A small number of civil society organisations are actively involved in providing support to the refugee communities. Many of these organisations and community based organisations work with little or no international support.

Malaysia

As at October 2012, there are some 99,970 refugees and asylum seekers registered by UNHCR Malaysia. About one-fifth are children under 18. Refugee communities estimate that at least 10,000 remain unregistered. Malaysia, however, does not recognize them as refugees. They are deemed ‘illegal’, and if caught, can be subjected to fines, detention, and/or whipping and the risk of deportation, even if they hold a UNHCR card (Immigration Act 1959/1963). They are not allowed to work or go to school and have trouble accessing safe and affordable medical services. For many, what they thought was a short stay can stretch for years, as they wait for limited resettlement spots.

Research on refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia has centered predominantly on the challenges that they face. These challenges are significant, arising in large part from the lack of a legal or administrative framework to protect and uphold their rights. The Malaysian government has not signed, ratified or acceded to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, nor has it expressed any intention to do so. Notwithstanding the presence of UNHCR, the situation for refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia is extremely precarious, particularly for those who have yet to be registered with, and recognized by the UN agency. Refugees and asylum-seekers are forced to live in squalid, overcrowded apartments.

Many of the pictures in this publication were taken by refugees themselves. The Malaysian research team used the photovoice technique to give the refugee community a unique way to tell their story, literally through their lens.

“Being refugees in Malaysia, sometime we feel discouraged, feel unsafe, and feel hopeless, but we feel better and encouraged when we know UNHCR and local NGOs are standing with us.”

-Chin refugee from Burma living in Malaysia

Malaysia	
Registered Refugees	86,680
Asylum Seekers	10,937
Stateless persons	40,001

Source: www.unhcr.org, data as of January 2012

Thailand

“When I first arrived in Bangkok, a bag of sugar was THB 12 to THB 13. But now, it is THB 25. A bottle of cooking oil, was THB 20 now it is THB 40. But the subsistence allowance remains the same!”

-Sri Lankan refugee living in Thailand

Thailand has a large number of refugees, one of the largest in the region. Refugees residing in the urban setting of the country come from around the world because it has a large tourist industry as well as relatively easy-to-meet visa requirements. According to UNHCR (2012b), there were 1,077 refugees and 966 asylum seekers in urban Thailand (mainly in Bangkok) in August 2012. The top caseloads of refugees by country of origin are Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia, China and Vietnam whereas Sri Lankans, Vietnamese and Pakistanis are the dominant asylum seeker groups in Urban Thailand (UNHCR 2012a).

Thailand is not a signatory party to the 1951 Geneva Convention or the 1967 Protocol, which governs the refugee status determination and safeguards several rights of the refugees. The country has no domestic laws or even administrative mechanisms specifically governing the status or the protection of refugees. Although the Royal Thai government adopted a new Constitution in 2007 which confers people in Thailand certain rights and freedoms including freedom of movement, freedom of abode, freedom of religion, the right to the process of justice, the right to education and the right to receive public health services, the Constitution does not extend to refugees and asylum seekers.

All non-Thai nationals, including refugees and asylum-seekers, entering Thailand without permission are considered illegal aliens and are subject to arrest, detention, and deportation. Those who have registered with the office of UNHCR Thailand are considered to be “persons of concern to UNHCR” by the Royal Thai government and are permitted to stay in Thailand on a discretionary basis until they are resettled elsewhere.

Compared to camp-based refugees in Thai-Burma border, refugees and asylum seekers in urban Thailand receive very little assistance. The UNHCR provides camp-based refugees with food, shelter and other basic necessities whereas urban refugees have to rely on themselves with some basic support provided by UNHCR. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that urban refugees is a serious problem and “law enforcement officers have little flexibility in dealing with it because the legal regime doesn’t allow for urban refugees and essentially treats them as illegal.” (Human Rights Watch 2012:99).

Thailand	
Registered Refugees	89,253
Asylum Seekers	13,357
Stateless persons	506, 197

Source: www.unhcr.org, data as of January 2012

Nepal

Nepal hosted 61,760 refugees and nearly 1,000 asylum seekers at the end of 2012. Altogether 43,920 of them are from Bhutan and about 15,000 are from Tibet. In addition, there are about 300 refugees and asylum seekers from 11 countries in Kathmandu. Situated between the emerging superpowers of India and China, the isolated Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan has generated one of the highest numbers of refugees in the world in proportion to its population. Over 110,000 Bhutanese spent more than 19 years living in refugee camps established in Nepal by the UNHCR.

Since 2008, a resettlement process has seen many thousands of Bhutanese refugees from the camps in Nepal being resettled primarily in the USA but also other countries as well. (Source: www.photovoice.org/bhutan) It is estimated that the process of resettling all who are accepted for resettlement will take between five and seven years. Almost 78,000 have already left for the third country resettlement. Many refugees are happy to be able to leave the camps. Some of the refugee leaders, however, criticize the fact that these solutions only address the humanitarian needs of the refugees, without addressing the root cause of civil and political rights. They argue that resettlement in third countries allows Bhutan amnesty for the ethnic cleansing of one sixth of its population.

An estimated twenty-five thousand Tibetan refugees now live in Nepal, mostly in settlements established after the 1959 exodus from Tibet. For the next thirty years, Nepal welcomed Tibetans, and every Tibetan in the country was issued a refugee identity certificate. However Nepal stopped accepting additional Tibetan refugees in 1989. Since 1998, the Nepalese government has refused to issue refugee identity certificates to Tibetans, including children born in Nepal to refugee parents who've been residing in the country for decades. Without an identity card, these young refugees cannot obtain driver's licenses, apply for jobs, or open bank accounts. It is difficult or impossible for them to attend Nepalese schools, as a Tibetan has no legal right to remain in Nepal and could be deported to China.

“There are still many refugee children who don't get a chance to go to school. The parents of these kids have low wages, so they both have to work. So the older one looks after his brother.”

-Refugee living in Nepal

Nepal	
Registered Refugees	72,654
Asylum Seekers	928
Stateless persons	800,000

Source: www.unhcr.org, data as of January 2012

Challenges

The environment in which the urban refugee populations in the countries surveyed is one where refugees live in the shadows of society. Their means for survival and livelihood curtailed or denied.

The participants identified many areas of concern for urban refugees including access to education and healthcare, lack of employment opportunities, discrimination, inadequate housing, exploitation, crime, violence, and fear of detention and deportation. Enmeshed within the diverse challenges and concerns, two main themes emerged as priority areas for urban refugees: insufficient income and safety.

“I can’t manage food every day. Every night I go to the market and collect waste vegetables. We spend whatever little my children earn on the house rent. Almost every night I go off to bed crying because of hunger and helplessness. So now I think that if this is how my life will be in the future, I prefer to die.”

—Burmese Refugee living in India



INSUFFICIENT INCOME

Anxiety about finances emerged as a common theme throughout the various refugee populations and countries. The lack of sufficient resources inhibited participants from meeting their basic dietary needs and negatively impacted the respondents’ physical and mental health, access to education, and ability to obtain adequate housing. As refugees do not have the right to work in the country of asylum, they must either risk working illegally or being dependent on assistance from the UNHCR or other support organizations.

With the global financial crisis, overstretched budgets, and millions of refugees, UNHCR and other agencies are facing difficulties to provide sufficient financial support to refugees.

LIVELIHOODS

Refugees and asylum seekers in the countries surveyed are not allowed to work.

Earning a living is not possible legally. Therefore, all those who find work are by definition illegal. This is often used as means for exploitation by the employers.

This exacerbates their vulnerability. This vulnerability leaves them open to abuse and exploitation by authorities and employers without legal recourse and access to justice.

This vulnerability is further accentuated in children, women, and refugees with disabilities or health problems. Refugees reported concerns about how the lack of resources was negatively impacting their circumstances.

CHILDREN

At times insufficient income was inhibiting children from attending school. Some refugee

families did not have the funds to supply basic school supplies, while other families relied on older children to watch the younger children while the parents worked, or relied on the income of a child. Many young adult refugees told of their unfulfilled dreams to go to college so that they could provide a better life to their families.

WOMEN

Women experienced difficulties in meeting the minimum requirements to sustain their dietary needs and also expressed that they couldn’t access proper gynecological care. Women were concerned that they had to choose between caring for their children and finding work so that they could provide for their children. Some women felt that they had no choice but to take on jobs where they were being exploited physically, sexually and emotionally.

HEALTH

The refugees with health issues reported that they did not have funds or have access to health care. Some were not able to afford the food they needed to supply nutrients for proper health or the medicine they needed to manage their illness. Other refugees spoke of inadequate public health treatment facilities, but they were not able to afford to seek other healthcare in a private facility. There were also reports of unsanitary living conditions that were perpetuating disease and illness among the refugee population. The stress exacerbated their health and mental health issues.

“Sometimes, I eat only breakfast and the rest of the day remain hungry, and sometimes just drink water before going off to sleep. The money I get from UNHCR is not even enough to pay my house rent.”

-Somali Refugee living in India

“We really don’t want to borrow anymore because we have already borrowed so much money from our families. Also, my wife is a tough woman who really does not want to rely on other people, even her family, so she has a hard feeling now.”

-Sri Lankan Refugee living in Thailand

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Though refugees and asylum seekers have fled their own countries in search of safety from persecution, the countries of asylum are filled with their own set of security risks. Urban refugees expressed concerns about detention, deportation, discrimination, crime, and sexual and gender-based violence.

DETENTION AND DEPORTATION

Many urban refugees and asylum seekers are living or working in their country of asylum illegally and have to cope with the risks of being detained or deported. Some refugees interviewed had spent time in detention centers and spoke of deplorable conditions such as extreme overcrowding, detention of children, and inadequate healthcare. The fear of detention and deportation leaves the refugees open to mistreatment and exploitation.

“Whenever I feel sad, sorry or can’t sleep, I knit. It not only comforts me, but I make scarves and hats and sell them to earn my living. My husband went to work outside. Whenever he went, he met police and had to pay them some amount of cash.... They said refugees are forbidden from working. But when we think logically, how can we survive if we don’t work? Knitting, I can do at home. No need to go outside. No need to worry about police, pickpocket or robbery.”

-Refugee from Burma in Malaysia



CRIME AND DISCRIMINATION

Refugees spoke of being targets for discrimination and also crime. Physical appearance, language, and culture, often made them targets for discrimination and crimes. Their lack of legal status also meant that they could not access legal protection or even report such incidents. They also spoke of concerns with crime such as robbery or pickpockets.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Women, including vulnerable populations like widows and single mothers, reported incidences of sexual and gender-based violence. These incidences occurred both in the home and the work place and were committed by employers and community members.

"It was my dream, to be an architect. But I can't pay the money for university. I hope one day I can continue my studies so I can be an architect and help my mom and dad and sister."

-Iraqi refugee living in Malaysia

"I wondered why she was not moving for a long time, then I tried to lift her, She was not breathing! It was my first time I held a dead body in my hands!"

-Refugee living in Thailand speaking on the death of a woman in a Thai detention center

"Everyone [men from our own community within the compound] stare at us when we come out after taking bath. We feel very uncomfortable and sometimes even cry inside the hut. I am a widow and even younger boys here stare at my body. What to do? I am helpless."

-Rohingya refugee living in India

This place where we are staying now was actually a big drain covered with mud now. When it rains, our small huts made of mud and plastics get filled with water. We (adults) can't come out in the open area, let alone small kids. The whole area is full of flies during the day while mosquitoes bite us at night. Many women and children are falling sick. Malaria and diarrhoea are common. Infants are suffering from pneumonia."

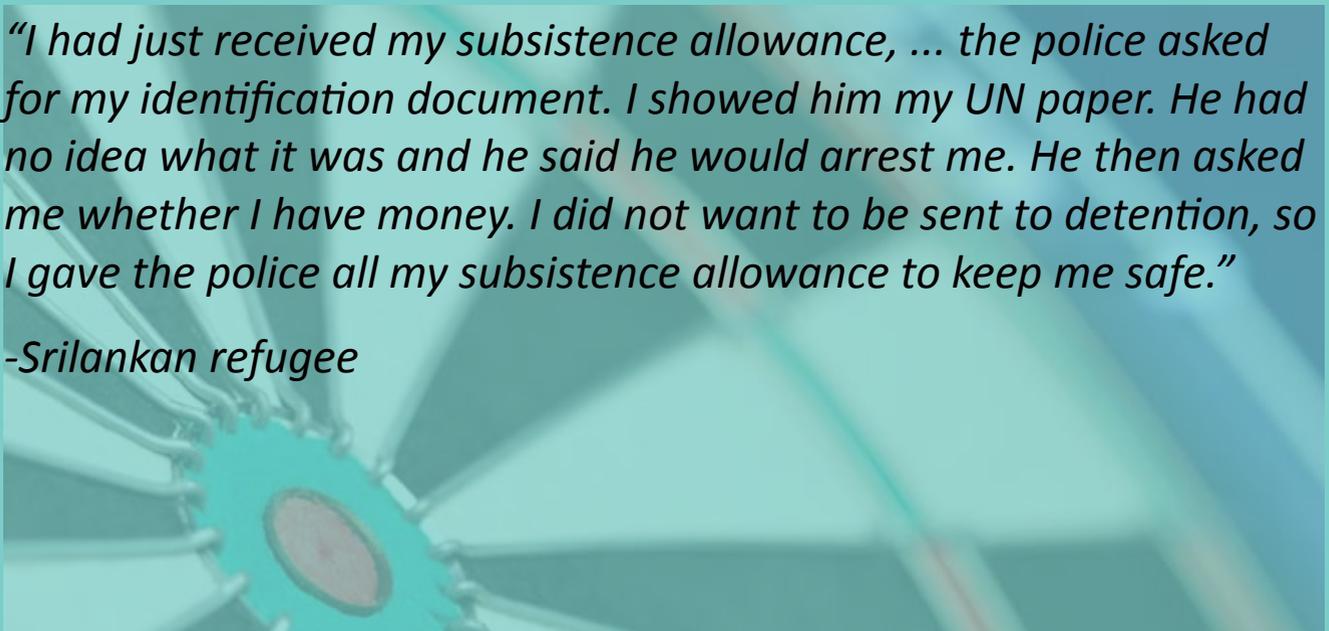
-Rohingya Refugee living in India

"..I can't sleep peacefully because often people come and knock at the door...."

-Burmese refugee widow and survivor of rape speaking on fear for her daughter

"I had just received my subsistence allowance, ... the police asked for my identification document. I showed him my UN paper. He had no idea what it was and he said he would arrest me. He then asked me whether I have money. I did not want to be sent to detention, so I gave the police all my subsistence allowance to keep me safe."

-Srilankan refugee



Coping Strategies

Refugees are resilient in the face of the challenges they face in leaving their homes and finding refuge in a new country. They find ways to cope with these challenges. Many refugees find comfort, and hope in religion and in social networks they develop. Refugees found respite through participation in leisure activities and used technology to keep safe, connected, and entertained. Refugees relied on the support of the refugee community, families back home, NGOs and the UNHCR.

Many refugees spoke of the integral role that religion played in providing comfort and solace, and how it served as a key source of resilience. The refugees frequently visited religious institutions such as mosques, churches, or temples and in addition to the emotional support and spiritual guidance, at times these religious institutions and communities were able to provide financial support or in-kind donations of food or books for the refugees. These religious institutions also served as a channel through which the refugees could develop social networks.

The social networks help refugees share coping strategies with each other. Innovative methods of avoiding detection by the police, early warning systems of possible raids, contacts of NGOs and other organisations that could provide support, employment opportunities and so on.

Refugees were able to find a respite in leisure activities such as reading books, listening to music, and playing games. These activities could be enjoyed individually or with other refugees and provided comfort and a brief escape from the many burdens that the refugees face.

The importance of information technology and being able to communicate with ease with family, friends, and other members of their community was also highlighted as an important source of comfort and resilience for the participants. Being able to go online, or to use their laptops, computers or mobile phones to speak to loved ones, read, listen to music, and play games were things that some participants highlighted as being comforting on days when they felt overwhelmed or distressed. Some participants spoke of how they would go on Facebook to share their feelings and problems with friends both within and outside of their country of asylum.

Many refugees depended on the support of the UNHCR and NGOS to help them to cope with the challenges of being a refugee. The assistance provided by NGOs to the refugees was predominantly in the form of employment, education, training opportunities, access to healthcare, assistance in the event of arrest or harassment by the police, and as a resource where they could seek advice. Some refugees expressed gratitude at the opportunities that they were afforded such as trainings or the chance for women to be self-sufficient through income generation activities.

Refugees often turn to family and friends for support. Some refugees received supplemental income and

There are many strategies which are innovative and responsive to the challenges refugees face, but fall in the ethical twilight zone of legality versus survival.

In keeping with the humanitarian principle of do no harm, these strategies cannot be published.

- APRRN

financial support from family members at home or who have been resettled. Refugees relied heavily on others within the refugee community for emotional, and at times, financial support, sharing in each other's struggles and providing a sense of hope and community.

The refugees shared strategies with each other. Learning and innovating in dealing with new challenges. In some communities, they had a form of early warning system to warn each other of immigration raids.

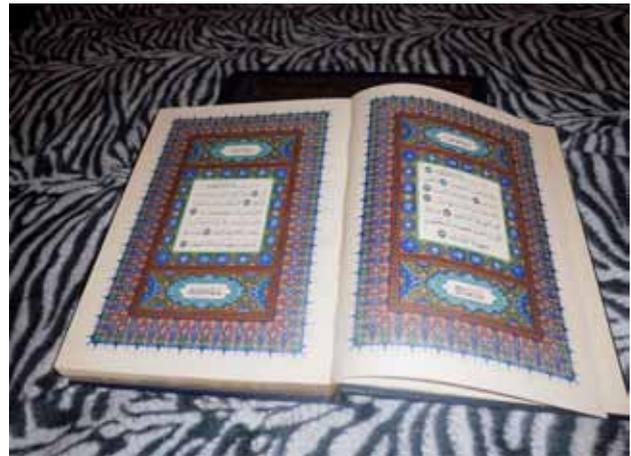
Some others, developed a form of insurance policy which they contributed to every month and could be used when they are arrested towards 'tea-money' for release.

Others informed each other of employment opportunities, and what to expect and so on.

There are many strategies that are innovative and responsive to the challenges they face, but fall within the twilight zone of legality versus survival.

In keeping with the humanitarian principle of do no harm, these strategies will not be mentioned.

There needs to be more exploration and understanding of these coping strategies that could lead to policy advocacy that makes these innovations less risky.



"I read the Quran when I feel down or when I want to feel closer to God. I find that it is the best thing to help me cope or forget the problems that I have."

-Iraqi refugee living in Malaysia



"There is a small green space by the road where children of refugees play. Restless cars and motorbikes pass and they can be hit and crushed anytime in this fenceless space. But the children fear nothing. They enjoy the game in the rain, forget their stresses, forget who they are in this country."

-Burmese refugee



HOPE, DREAM, FUTURE:

"Whenever I see the sunset, I feel very lucky and happy to live here"

- 19 year old Afgahn Refugee



"Education is a human right. There are 18,000 refugee kids in Malaysia. Only 5,000 have access to basic education.

It's always heartening to see a child struggling to learn despite having no resources. Not having resources should'nt be an excuse..."

-Afghan refugee in Malaysia



“In order to be united, the Karenni have this traditional festival every year, called Dee Khu. You can see there are three packs of glutinous rice tied together in the same pack. In whatever situation we are facing, we are united and we help one another.”

-Karenni refugee



“[My fellow refugees] are my neighbours. They help me a lot as they help particularly taking care of our kids when my wife and I are busy. They share everything – they share their food and knowledge and they teach me Malay language. When I look at them, its like I am looking in the mirror and it reflects my own life... I feel like I am not the only one doing odd jobs to survive....I feel like a brother to them. We are not alone and always together...”

-Kachin refugee from Burma living in Malaysia



In our Chin community, we publish three journals called Faiceu, The One Star and Saihnam, which come out every weekend, with world news in brief, sports and UNHCR news.

This boy earns a commission per copy. This journal has no permit from the government and he can be questioned by authorities. It doesn't matter to him – he enjoys selling, earning pocket money and spreading news to our people.”



“This boy's parents cannot send him to school even though he is over 5 years old.

I (the refugee photographer) let him pose like an educated person because I wanted him to know how it feels. In this picture, the book, the style, the sticker tape – are all his creation, including the spectacles. He dreams of going to school one day.”



"At 4pm, they start work at this restaurant. At 5pm, everything must be ready to serve their customers. The man on the right is cooking rice. The man in orange is cooking soup. They are my neighbours. They help me in any way they can – babysitting, sharing food, and telling me how to survive. When I look at them, I feel like I am looking in the mirror. I feel like I am not the only one doing odd jobs to survive."



"He has a wife and a newborn, so he is responsible for his household. He works in construction. In addition, he collects recyclable items to get a regular meal."

Sobering Reminders

Refugees are resilient, this pilot study was an attempt to understand the agency of the refugee. The challenges the refugees face are often recounted, what goes unreflected are the strategies that refugees and asylum seekers use to address these challenges. We must reiterate that this report has only have been able to recount coping mechanisms that do not put refugees and asylum seekers at risk. There are many strategies that refugees employ to eke out a living and survive which are adaptive and responsive to ever changing situations.

Demanding greater protection and increasing protection spaces, however necessarily will have to consider some of these uniquely adaptive coping mechanisms to prevent refugees, asylum seekers and forced migrants from becoming more vulnerable than they already are.

This pilot research has but scratched the surface of understanding the agency of the refugee. It does however provide us with a tantalising perspective that needs to be explored, understood and acted upon. It provides us with a glimpse of the view of the refugee, a lens through we can advocate effectively. Recommendations to and advocacy with states and other stakeholders will have to encompass the demands from the refugees themselves, preferably enabling their voices to be heard. In circumstances that exist, refugees and asylum seekers may put themselves and their families at risk if they raise their voices, civil society plays the role of shielding the refugee communities while ensuring their voices are heard and reflected in policy change. Supporting refugees and refugee communities as agents of change.

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, embodies the ideal that refugees and forced migrants should be the ones that demand their rights. National, regional and international civil society are facilitators and enhancers of these voices and cannot be a substitute for them.

Much more needs to be done.