Summary report
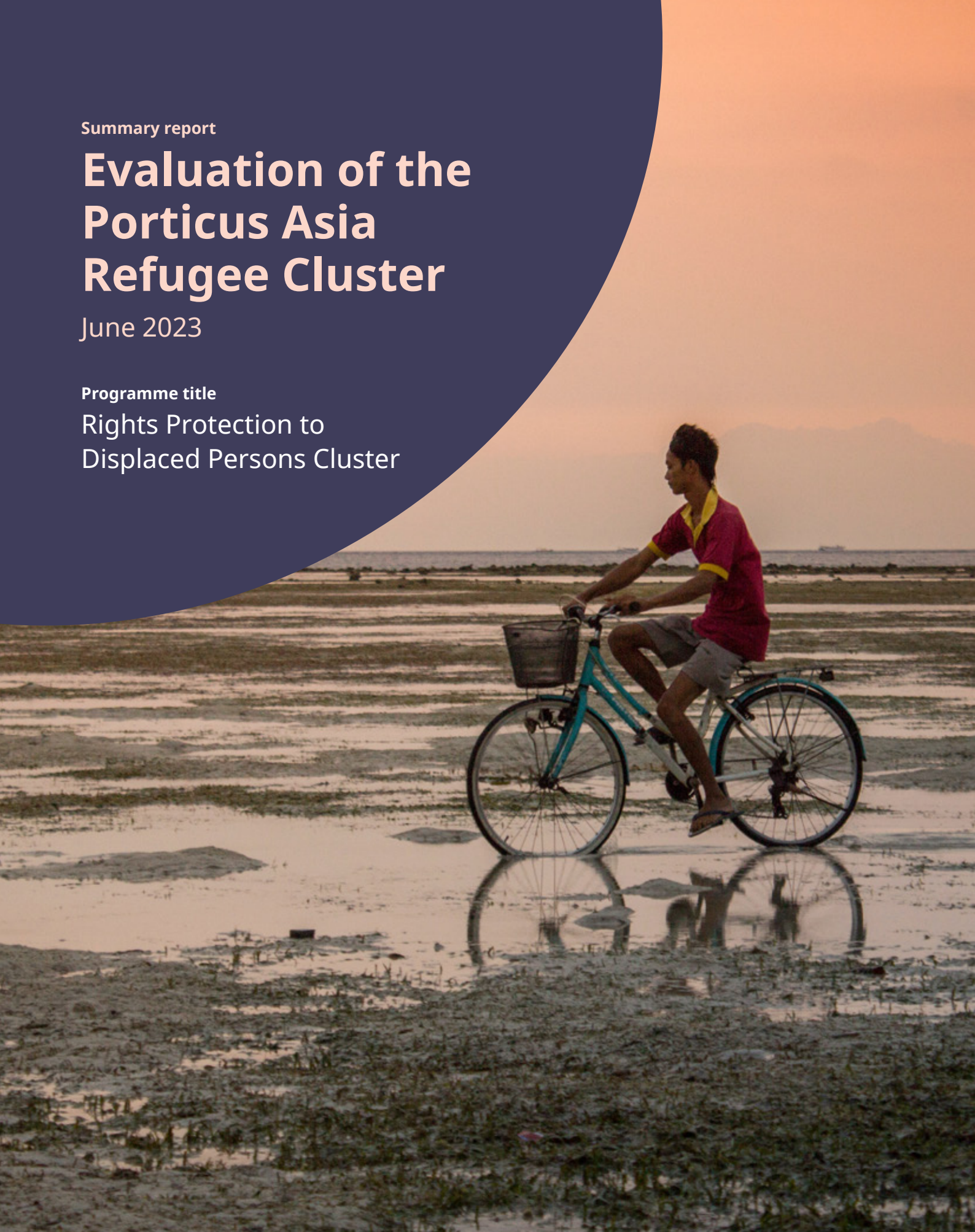
Evaluation of the Porticus Asia Refugee Cluster

June 2023

Programme title

Rights Protection to
Displaced Persons Cluster

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PARTNERSHIPS

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Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

As an Australian-based organisation, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we work, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge that this land, which we benefit from occupying, was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Acknowledgement of evaluation participants

We are deeply grateful to all stakeholders who participated in this evaluation for sharing their time, perspectives, and expertise. In particular, we would like to thank Porticus, partner organisations, and external stakeholders, including people from refugee backgrounds.

About this report

Porticus Asia commissioned this evaluation of the Refugee Cluster. The Cluster funded 10 implementing partners across the region over three years between 2019-2022. This Summary Report provides a short overview of the evaluation design, key findings, and recommendations.

Written by

L I G H T H ● U S E
PARTNERSHIPS

Lighthouse Partnerships is a not-for-profit organisation that supports other organisations to strengthen the human rights of people in migration situations through participatory approaches to evaluation, strategy, design, and capacity development.

Commissioned by

ᚹ PORTICUS

Porticus is an international organisation that manages the philanthropic endeavours of the Brenninkmeijer family. Porticus collaborates with partners around the globe to build stronger systems and secure just and sustainable futures for all.

Note on terminology

Organisations and projects included in this evaluation use a range of terms to describe the people they work with, like *refugee, asylum seeker*, and *displaced person*. In this evaluation, we generally used the terms that each organisation used to describe their work, and we used *people with lived experience of displacement* as an overarching term.

Introduction
The refugee cluster

The Refugee Cluster was a group of grants (totalling approximately 2.5 million Euros) that Porticus Asia made to 10 non-government organisations (NGOs) in Southeast Asia working to strengthen rights protection for displaced people. The projects conducted by the partner NGOs ran between June 2019 and December 2022 and included advocacy for policy and law reform, legal assistance and legal representation, education, vocational training, and employment support, and capacity building with advocates and organisations from refugee communities.

The evaluation

We focused on evaluating two areas of the Cluster's performance: learning and adaptation; and contribution to systems change. Each focus area had a specific evaluation methodology. We designed the evaluation to produce learning and insights for Porticus and its NGO partners, with participatory data collection and sensemaking activities that aimed to grow evaluation capacity for all evaluation participants.

Contents

NGO partners

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)

International Detention Coalition

Asylum Access (Thailand)

Jesuit Refugee Service (Thailand)

Asylum Access (Malaysia)

PILnet

Fortify Rights

Refugee Rights Litigation Project
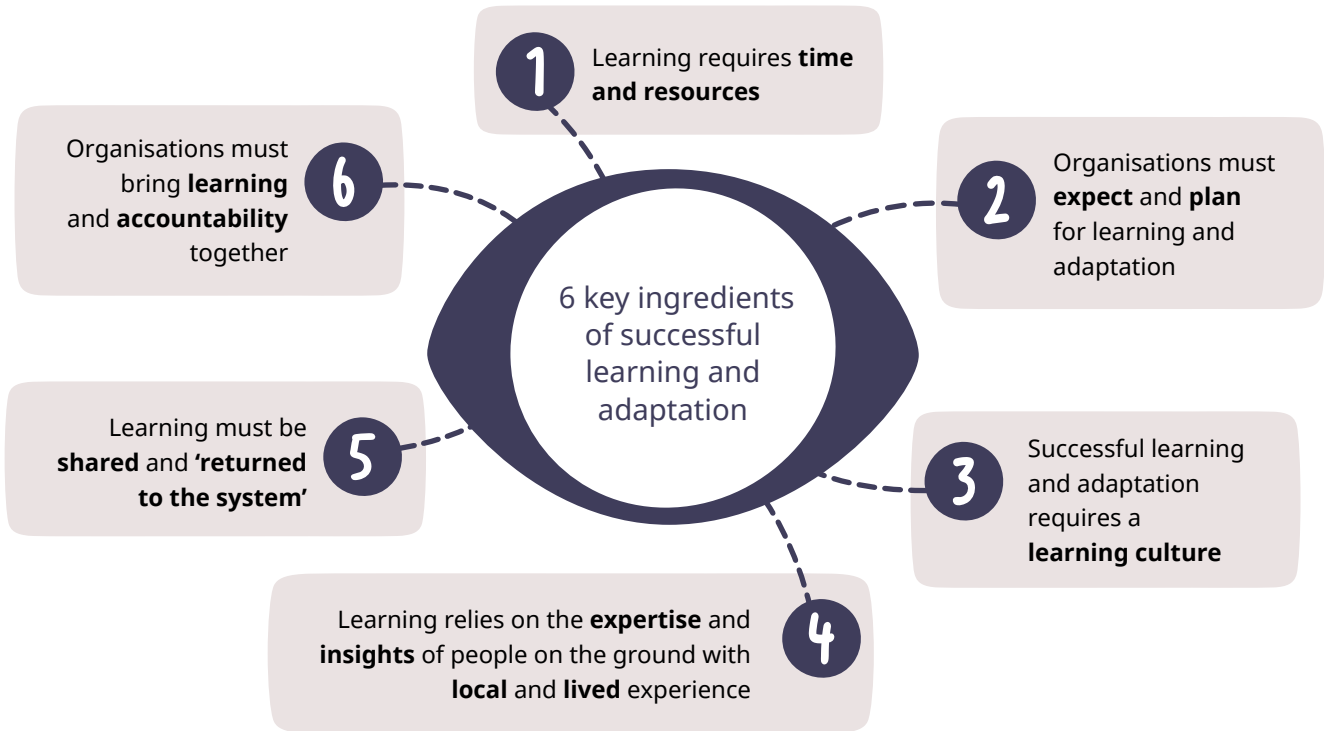
HOST International

RUN (Hong Kong)

Evaluation design

We conducted a rapid literature review that identified six key ingredients for successful learning and adaptation in the NGO and philanthropic sector and used this to develop key evaluation questions (KEQs), evaluation criteria and rubrics.

1 Learning requires **time and resources**

6 Organisations must bring **learning** and **accountability** together

2 Organisations must **expect** and **plan** for learning and adaptation

6 key ingredients of successful learning and adaptation

5 Learning must be **shared** and **'returned to the system'**

3 Successful learning and adaptation requires a **learning culture**

4 Learning relies on the **expertise** and **insights** of people on the ground with **local** and **lived** experience

KEQ

Key evaluation questions

KEQ1: How well did the Cluster anticipate and plan for uncertainty, change, learning and adaptation?

KEQ2: How well did the Cluster learn, adapt, and respond to change and uncertainty during the Cluster period?

KEQ3: How well did the Cluster 'return learning to the system' and practice strategic accountability while learning and making changes during the Cluster period?

Data collection

Document review: Analysed 84 Cluster documents, including grant applications, progress reports, and evaluation reports (qualitative)

Survey: 25-item online survey distributed to partner organisations, with 8 responses/67% response rate (qualitative and quantitative)

Interviews: 11 semi-structured individual and group interviews with partners and Porticus (qualitative)

Sensemaking and reaching findings

Workshops with around 30 people from partners and Porticus, involving participatory analysis of data and rating using evaluation rubrics

Evaluator synthesis of workshop participant ratings into a final rating for each KEQ

Feedback and consultation on draft findings with Porticus and partners

Focus area 1: Learning and adaptation
Findings

Summary of findings

Overall, we found the performance of the Cluster (including Porticus and grantee partners) was mixed. Areas of strength included flexibility and open lines of communication. However, forward planning and sharing learning were seen as areas for improvement.

Areas of stronger performance

Partners had the flexibility to adjust projects in response to major external events like COVID-19, such as extending deadlines and reallocating funds, and partners frequently described Porticus as understanding.

> *"Porticus was always open for discussions, suggestions and adaptations ... we felt they're very accommodating, understanding."*

Several partners had systematic management and learning processes that they used for learning and adapting, including regular learning journals, progress reviews and debriefings.

> *"... we've got a good flow in terms of reflecting on challenges and discussing them at weekly check ins ..."*

Flexibility and accountability were also fairly well balanced in the Cluster, with partners generally feeling that the Cluster's reporting requirements and logic models were useful tools for staying on track when making changes and that they did not obstruct adaptations.

> *"The logic models are really helpful ... I constantly have mine open ... it was really useful to just constantly remind myself about the overarching goals."*

Performance on each aspect of focus area 1

Developing	Promising	High
KEQ 1 Expecting to learn and adapt		
KEQ 3 Reflecting, sharing, staying accountable	**KEQ 2** Adapting	

Areas of weaker performance

Partners expected that they would need to adapt and change their projects given the complex and dynamic contexts in which they work, but this understanding was rarely acknowledged in project plans, and Porticus' grant application documents did not explicitly encourage planning for change.

> *"... there is that temptation to make very grand statements about the change that will happen ... then there's sort of an arms race of grand objectives between grantees ..."*

Some partners felt that power dynamics between funders and grantees make them reluctant to acknowledge uncertainty, including by needing to 'pitch' projects and creating a risk in acknowledging failure. Although Porticus approved all requests for project changes, some partners felt constrained in their ability to make more strategic or fundamental adaptations or project redesigns that could have made projects more efficient or effective.

> *"... quite a lot of things changed. Instead of offering us to review the program goals, as an entity, they pushed us to just keep extending the grants, renewing the grant ... so that we could meet those goals."*

Many partners reported struggling with documenting and institutionalising lessons learned to make sure they were not lost, and sharing learning between organisations. Partners reported factors contributing to these difficulties as including lack of suitable organisational processes, being busy with implementation, and limited capacity and resources.

> *"I feel like a lot of the time, and understandably so, all the projects are focused on implementation and then there's not a lot of funding for internal learning ... there's not an importance placed on facilitating that internal knowledge sharing."*
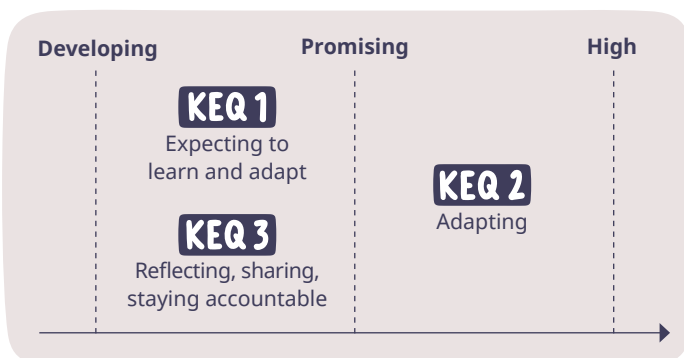
Evaluation design

We used an adapted Outcomes Harvesting process to document the Cluster's key outcomes[*]. We then created a model of the Cluster's target systems change problem (that *'refugees and displaced people in Southeast Asia do not have adequate protection of their rights'*) using The Water of Systems Change framework[†] (below), with input from refugee community members, partners, and Porticus. We evaluated the Cluster's contributions to systems change by comparing Cluster objectives and outcomes to the model using three rubrics.

More observable/easier to change

Structural

Laws and policies
Government and organisational rules that govern priorities, rights, actions etc

Practices
Activities, actions, and behaviours of any person, organisation or institution

Resource flows
Allocation and accessibility of money, people, skills, information, infrastructure

Relational

Relationships and connections
Communication and trust between people, organisations, viewpoints and experiences

Power dynamics
Distribution of authority and influence among people and organisations

Transformative

Mental models
Deeply held beliefs and assumptions that influence how we think, talk and act

Less observable/harder to change

Key evaluation questions

KEQ4: How aligned were the Cluster's objectives to the target systems change problem?

KEQ5: How valuable were the Cluster's actual outcomes for shifting the target systems change problem?

Data collection

Identify objectives and outcomes: Analysed project reports and developed longlists of objectives and outcomes

Describe priority outcomes: Partners chose 3 priority outcomes and evaluators drafted 1-page outcome descriptions

Substantiate: Evaluators surveyed or interviewed 3+ stakeholders proposed by partners to review the outcome descriptions

Revise and finalise: Edited outcome descriptions to incorporate feedback

Sensemaking and reaching findings

Workshops with partners and Porticus to discuss evaluation rubrics on alignment, evidence and impact

Multi-stakeholder rating process using rubrics (self-rating, peer rating, and evaluator rating)

Online focus group with refugee community members

Feedback and consultation on draft findings with Porticus and partners

* Wilson-Grau, R. & Britt, H. (2012).
  Outcome harvesting. Ford Foundation.
† Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018).
  The Water of Systems Change. FSG.
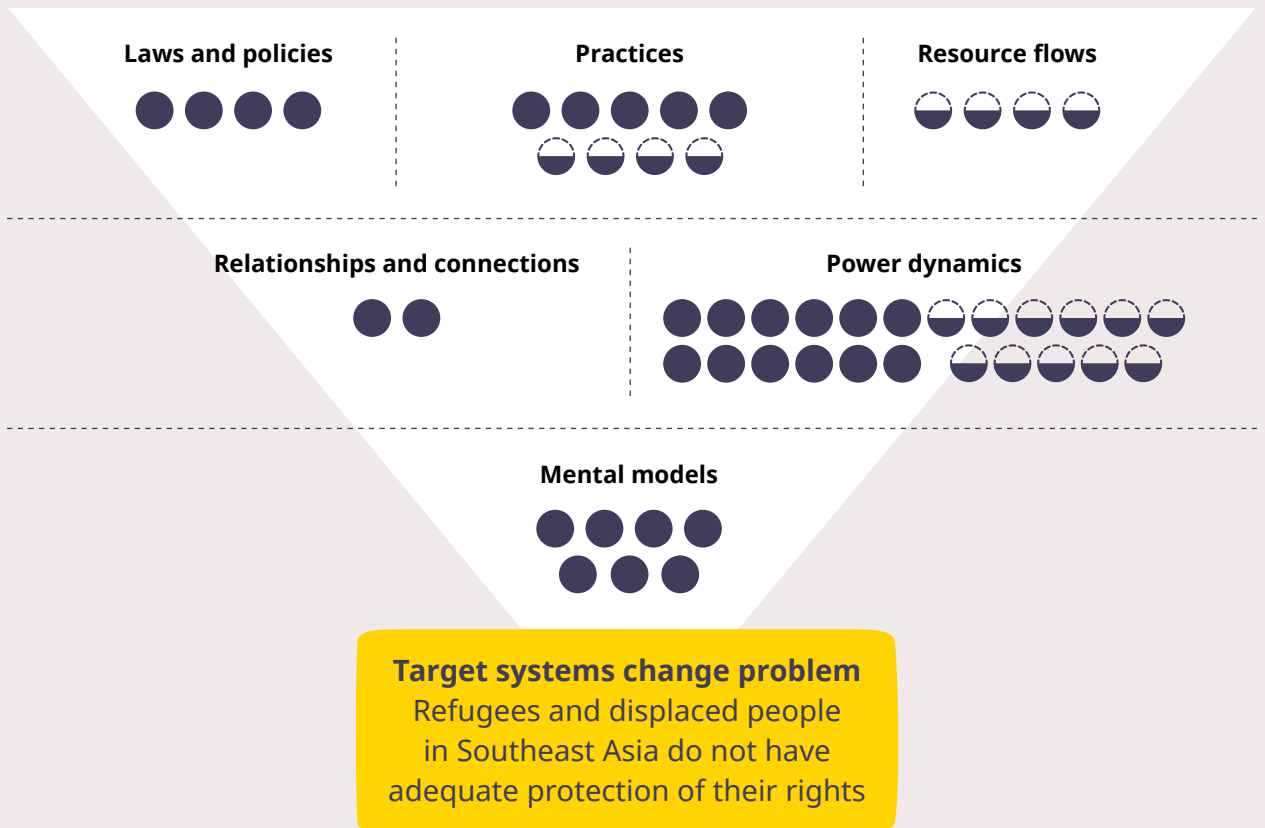
Alignment of objectives to target systems change problem

The diagram below shows the concentration of partners' objectives and how closely they aligned to aspects of the target systems change problem that '*refugees and displaced people in Southeast Asia do not have adequate protection of their rights*'.

KEQ4: How Cluster's objectives addressed the systems change problem

Total project objectives: 51
● **Directly aligned:** 29 (57%)   ◖ **Indirectly aligned:** 22 (43%)

Target systems change problem
Refugees and displaced people in Southeast Asia do not have adequate protection of their rights

Overall, the Cluster's objectives were well-aligned with the Cluster's target systems change problem. Together, the Cluster's project objectives addressed all six 'conditions' of the systems change problem. There was a clear concentration of partners' efforts towards **power dynamics** and least emphasis on the **relationships and connections** and **laws and policies**.

This highlights that work related to **power dynamics** is a shared strategic priority for many partners and Porticus.

Although the number of objectives related to **relationships and connections** was small, this is not an indication that work under the Cluster did not involve using or strengthening relationships and connections—almost all work under the Cluster involved some kind of partnership or collaboration by partners—rather, this indicates that relationships and connections was not expressed as the primary or ultimate objective of the work, and was more an implicit 'way of working' or approach.

Contribution of outcomes to target systems change problem

The diagram below shows the concentration and value of partners' outcomes and how closely they aligned to aspects of the target systems change problem that '*refugees and displaced people in Southeast Asia do not have adequate protection of their rights*'.

KEQ5: How Cluster's outcomes addressed the systems change problem

Total project outcomes: 29

● **Directly aligned:** 15 (52%)　◖ **Indirectly aligned:** 14 (48%)
● **Extremely valuable:** 6 (21%)　● **Very valuable:** 14 (48%)　● **Valuable:** 9 (31%)

Target systems change problem
Refugees and displaced people in Southeast Asia do not have adequate protection of their rights
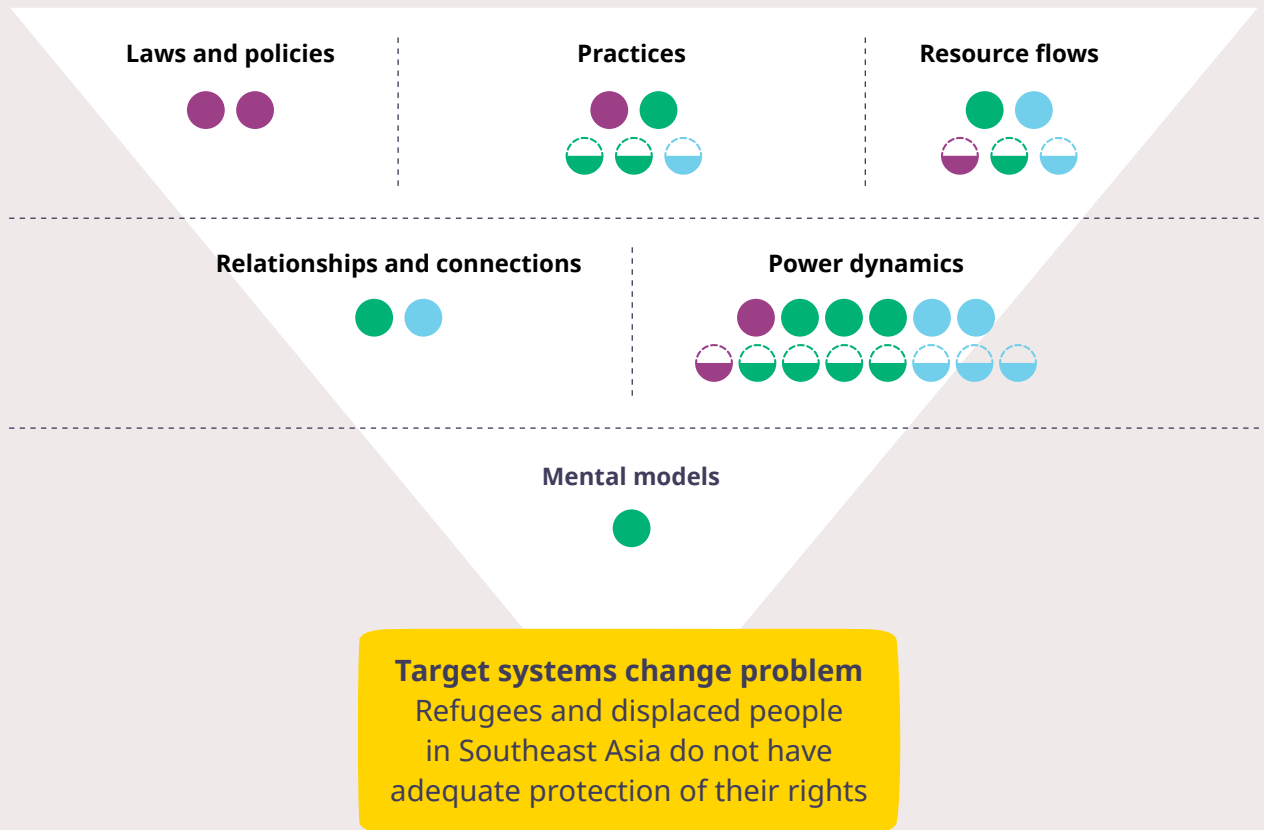
The Cluster achieved valuable outcomes across all six conditions of the target systems change problem, including a notable number of **directly aligned** outcomes in the deeper, more implicit (and more difficult) categories of systems change (**power dynamics** and **mental models**).

This indicates that partners are aware of and are proactively seeking to address less explicit aspects of systems change.

The highest value outcomes contributed to shifting **laws and policies, practices, resource flows**, and **power dynamics.** Fewer outcomes addressed **relationships and connections** or **mental models**.

As we found with project objectives in KEQ4, the comparatively large number of outcomes in **power dynamics** reflects that this type of work is a shared strategic priority for many partners and Porticus.

'Extremely valuable' outcomes

❋ The Malaysian Cabinet has approved a pilot of alternatives to detention (ATD pilot) for unaccompanied and separated children in immigration detention.

What changed?

In April 2021, the Malaysian Cabinet approved a pilot of alternatives to detention (the ATD Pilot). The Cabinet White Paper was submitted jointly by two key ministries that have previously opposed alternatives to detention — the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. The ATD pilot programme aims to enable the release of unaccompanied and separated children from immigration detention into temporary shelters run by NGOs. This is the first initiative of its kind which acknowledges the serious harms that children face in immigration detention and provides for a systematic release of children from detention into alternative care arrangements.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has since publicly announced the ATD Pilot and Malaysian its decision and government representatives referred to the ATD pilot in their bid to join at the UN Human Rights Council.

What contributed?

Since 2013, the International Detention Coalition (IDC) and several other civil society organisations have been engaging with the Malaysian government about the problem of immigration detention of children and the benefits of community-based alternatives to detention.

Over several years, civil society networks and working groups, including a government-civil society working group and the End Child Detention network (EDCN), worked to develop a model for ATD in Malaysia and continuously engaged with government representatives and MPs to keep the problem of child immigration detention on the policy agenda.

Key stakeholders involved in these efforts included SUKA Society, Yayasan Chow Kit, SUHAKAM, representatives in the Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, people with lived experience of detention in Malaysia, Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration, UNICEF, and other members of the ECDN.

IDC has provided leadership and support to these networks and organisations to develop political engagement strategies, and supported a community placement and case management program by SUKA Society. IDC also supported government representatives to learn about successful ATD models from other countries, including Thailand.

In addition to these efforts, the Malaysian Government's goal of obtaining a seat on the Human Rights Council provided significant political will for the ATD Pilot.

Evidence sources and substantiation

- Administrative records and verbal advice by International Detention Coalition
- Media reports of Malaysian government commitments
- Reviewed and substantiated by representatives from HOST International and Yayasan Chow Kit.

❋ Organisations advocating for ending immigration detention for children in Southeast Asia have increased organisational and advocacy capacity.

What changed?

Civil society organisations in Thailand and Malaysia involved in advocating for ending immigration detention for children have clear, overarching, and shared national strategies to guide and structure their activities.

These national strategies help to prevent duplication and increase coordination and efficacy, which were problems in the past. Organisations in Thailand have greater knowledge and confidence about monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), which led the Thai government to develop a MEL framework to evaluate the implementation of the national ATD programme, while advancing towards ending immigration detention.

Organisations in Malaysia that provide case management support to children affected by

'Extremely valuable' outcomes

immigration detention have stronger capacity. At a regional level, there are stronger links between advocacy organisations for sharing effective practices and lessons learned.

What contributed?

In both Thailand and Malaysia, IDC has continuously supported networks of organisations working together on refugee rights to develop, monitor and review their strategies. This included IDC convening national strategy workshops in 2020 and 2022 for the Thai and Malaysia networks for reviewing progress and achievements, and developing and updating strategies, work plans, and monitoring mechanisms.

In addition, in Thailand, IDC supported the network to build their capacity in MEL by learning from other organisations and technical advisors. In Malaysia, IDC engaged external advisors to support the network to use systems theory to reflect on past achievements and determine future priority areas. IDC has also supported the Malaysia network members to build their capacity and knowledge on engaging MPs and the parliamentary process, and to better understand the Malaysian public's perception of refugees through focus group discussions in partnership with the Asia School of Business.

At a regional level, IDC convened several Community of Practice meetings with CSOs from Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia to discuss strategies to build an effective NGO coalition for advocacy and ways to facilitate inter-sectoral learning between social justice sectors.

Many other stakeholders contributed to these outcomes, including:

- In Thailand: CRSP members, including Refugee Rights Litigation Project, HOST International, Jesuit Refugee Service Thailand, Asylum Access Thailand, Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, Step Ahead, Fortify Rights, Center for Asylum Protection, Caritas Bangkok, Equal Asia Foundation, Ummatee; Migrant Working Group; Space Bangkok; Canada Embassy.
- In Malaysia: Katrina Maliamauv; HOST International; Asylum Access Malaysia; SUKA Society; Asia School of Business.

Evidence sources and substantiation

- Administrative records and verbal advice by IDC
- Reviewed and substantiated by four civil society representatives

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✳ More children of refugees and asylum seekers can obtain Thai civil registration documents.

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What changed?

Twenty-six refugee and asylum seeker children born in Thailand were issued with an identity card under the Thai Civil Registration Act between March 2020 and September 2022. An identity card is a pathway into access to social services and greater protection, as it provides access to free medical care for refugee students at public hospitals and prevents immigration detention and deportation. The card holder should be able to apply for a work permit, open a bank account, and to use the card to register in some service systems that request the 13-digit number, for example, buying a sky train top-up card.

What contributed?

The Refugee Rights Litigation Project (RRLP) conducted community outreach with refugee and asylum seeker communities to identify children needing identity cards, and began providing legal assistance to those children. During 2022, RRLP assisted 164 children. RRLP worked with at least 10 local district offices and almost 20 schools to apply for identity cards for refugee children. Most schools and district offices are not very familiar with the process, so RRLP plays an important role in providing information about the card and initiating the process, including developing an information sheet to share with schools. RRLP has been documenting problems and challenges involved in this work and sharing information with other relevant agencies.

Other stakeholders who have contributed to this outcome include Fortify Rights, the Migrant Working Group network, the National Human Rights Commission, the Department of Provincial Administration, and local schools that refugee children attend.

'Extremely valuable' outcomes

Evidence sources and substantiation

- Administrative records and verbal advice by RRLP
- Reviewed and substantiated by one refugee client, a representative of HOST International, and one RRLP board member

✳ Refugees and asylum seekers are assisted to successfully access justice under Malaysia law across a wide range of legal issues including employment, immigration, tenancy, and healthcare.

What changed?

Refugees were able to seek redress for a wide range of legal issues. For example, over approximately 2 years, 517 people received assistance from Asylum Access (Malaysia) about employment disputes (such as unfair dismissal, unpaid wages, and unfair working conditions) and 59.7% of cases reached a successful outcome. Approximately 70% (10/14) of Asylum Access (Malaysia)'s refugee clients surveyed said they experienced increased safety because of their legal services.

What contributed?

Asylum Access (Malaysia) conducted a variety of legal empowerment programs, including legal workshops, information sessions, individual advice and representation, a helpline, training for community leaders and advocates, and sharing legal information through social media and videos in refugee community languages.

Other stakeholders who also played important roles in helping refugees to seek redress were community leaders and advocates, other civil society organisations, lawyers, UNHCR, government departments and agencies, employers, and landlords.

Evidence sources and substantiation

- Administrative records, written reports and verbal advice by Asylum Access (Malaysia)
- Reviewed and substantiated by three refugee community representatives or clients.

✳ Refugee community members involved in a new refugee-led social enterprise in Thailand (REFresh Farm) have acquired new knowledge and skills in urban farming and entrepreneurship, an additional source of income, and increased engagement with the local Thai community.

What changed?

Twelve refugee community members in Bangkok were engaged as business leaders of a new social enterprise producing chemical-free mushrooms, called REFresh Farm. The business leaders received training and support to manage production, resources, suppliers, sales and marketing of the enterprise.

The business leaders have reported that, as a result of this training and experience, they have increased motivation and confidence in managing the enterprise independently, increased income, improved access to food, improved connections with the local Thai community, and improved support networks and sense of belonging.

What contributed?

HOST International organised the training workshops and supplied all the relevant equipment for the enterprise. HOST International jointly manages the REFresh Farm with the business leaders.

Other key stakeholders who contributed to the outcome included external trainers, local suppliers, a consultant on agricultural production planning, markets and restaurants, customers and other local NGOs.

Evidence sources and substantiation

- Administrative records, workshop surveys, and verbal advice by HOST International
- Reviewed and substantiated by two refugee community representatives and one enterprise customer.

'Extremely valuable' outcomes

Thailand established the National Screening Mechanism, a new domestic framework to screen and provide legal recognition to refugees.

What changed?

In December 2019, Thailand established the National Screening Mechanism (NSM), a new domestic framework to screen and provide legal recognition to refugees. The NSM represented a significant shift in the Thai government's policy and practice regarding refugees. Previously, the Thai Government had refused to screen or recognise refugees and had not recognised the validity of UNHCR's screening and recognition processes.

What contributed?

Several Thai civil society organisations contributed to the advocacy efforts that led to this policy change, including Fortify Rights, Asylum Access (Thailand), International Detention Coalition (IDC), RRLP, APPRN, and other members of the Coalition for Refugees and Stateless People (CRSP).

For example, Fortify Rights coordinating civil society input to a draft regulation consistent with international human rights obligations, and organised two forums with government officials, representatives of the diplomatic community, and civil society organisations to provide recommendations on the regulation and discuss progress and challenges. Fortify Rights also provided technical support to Thai officials involved in drafting the regulation.

Other key stakeholders who contributed included UNHCR, IOM and some government representatives.

Evidence sources and substantiation

- Administrative records and verbal advice by Fortify Rights
- Evaluation of Fortify Rights "Safeguarding Rights and Improving Protection for Refugees and At-Risk Migrants in Four Southeast Asian Countries" project
- Reviewed and substantiated by four external stakeholders in the evaluation above.

Reflections and limitations on the evaluation process

Partners were deeply engaged in the activities for assessing the Cluster's performance using The Water of Systems Change framework.

Some partners had difficulty seeing the connection between individual-level outcomes (like education and resettlement) and "systems change".

Many partners struggled with clearly articulating and evidencing their project outcomes.

Evidence for the partners' contribution to Cluster outcomes varied across outcomes.

The evaluation's engagement with people directly affected by Cluster projects was limited to external substantiation of outcomes and two online focus groups.

Recommendations

The evaluation recommended that Porticus and partners:

- Identify and plan for uncertainty and learning opportunities in grant application processes

- Contribute to a stronger learning culture in their organisations and in the sector

- Experiment with ways to document and embed the lessons learned in their organisations

- Experiment with ways to share learning beyond their organisations, including with people with lived experience of displacement

- Use systems thinking processes to identify, analyse and communicate the complexity and interconnectedness of target problems and outcomes

- Strengthen their capabilities to articulate and evidence their outcomes

- Strengthen and better articulate the contribution their work makes to systems change

Ideas for Porticus

Offer funding dedicated to learning, for example development or testing phase grants, additional organisational development grants, or "project plus" funding structures

Focus grant reporting processes on **documenting project learnings** and planning how to implement those lessons going forward

Emphasise learning as the most important goal of monitoring and reporting, and invite fundamental project redesigns or rethinking during project implementation

Use **systems thinking tools** in programme design to set realistic internal expectations about what outcomes partners are likely to achieve

Ideas for partners

Develop learning plans as part of a project design, including plans for applying learning, sharing learning, and resources for implementing the plan

Build leadership that **supports and prioritises experimentation, learning, and open discussion** about things that have worked and not worked

Try out learning tools like reflection meetings, group debriefs, After Action Reviews, learning logs, emergent learning tables, staff surveys

Use systems thinking tools in project design to highlight the complex and multiple factors at play, and analyse how those factors might affect the project

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