

Dr Akino Tahir, Senior Research Fellow, Resilience Development Initiative, Indonesia

Championing representation for asylum seekers and refugees

During a workshop she organised in Makassar, Indonesia, to observe perception, attitude, and interaction between young asylum seekers or refugees (ASRs) and local young people, Akino witnessed a cautious interaction between the two groups. After encouraging 25 of the workshop attendees to spend several hours playing games and conversing, she saw that those barriers quickly broke down. Today, many of the participants keep in touch. This experience marked the first step of Akino's commitment to changing the outlook of host populations across Asia towards refugees.

After realising that there was an inconsistent approach to ASRs across different regions in Indonesia, Akino wanted to make change happen by using her research to inform government policy.

The challenge

In 2021, 30.5 million forcibly displaced people were ASRs, and two-thirds of forcibly displaced people live in urban areas. However, ASRs are often treated unequally and discriminated against, with limited rights in transit countries like Indonesia where the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocols have not been ratified.

Even though refugee participation in relevant decision-making has been highly encouraged, and even mandated, in many countries, several key challenges still occur. Instead of being actively engaged in decision-making, ASRs are often subject to decisions made by others. Insufficient representation, therefore, remains an obstacle for ASRs to achieving meaningful participation in their communities and decision-making processes.

The ambition

Following her first Frontiers Champions project where she organised a conference to identify regional and global issues for refugees, Akino noticed that the issue of representation was recurrent and significant.

Akino wants to connect and engage with ASRs so that they can share their opinions, ideas, and experiences to inspire better, safer environments.

The next phase of her project will expand the existing community of practice on forced displacement and urban management to enable ASRs, both in transit and destination countries, to voice their stories through creative expression. This will be channeled through a Voices of Refugees: Art Exhibition. A mixture of hybrid events, talk shows, and networking will be held to engage ASR representatives and artists, refugee-led organisations, and urban management stakeholders.

The project will also engage local communities, the broader Indonesian public, local government, and international communities to improve widespread understanding of issues affecting ASRs.

Relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11)
- Peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16)
- Reduced inequalities (SDG 10)

Involvement with the Royal Academy of Engineering

Akino attended a Frontiers Symposium on *The urban opportunity for building a resilient future* in Malaysia in July 2019. She found it to be a great platform for uniting people from diverse backgrounds to discuss an interdisciplinary approach to urban management and global issues.

When it came to applying for Frontiers Champions, Akino liked the flexibility of the programme for researchers, and the ability to demonstrate the importance of her work through the Academy by connecting with others. To prospective Frontiers Champions applicants, Akino says, “Apply! Just apply! You never know who you meet in this programme”.

Akino encourages those interested in her work to get in touch.