



The Global Family Reunification Network

Annual Conference 2025 Report



NOVEMBER 4-6, 2025
NAIROBI, KENYA



2025 FRUN conference participants group photo. Credit: Joel Ngui/RefugePoint

Overview

The 2025 [Global Family Reunification Network \(FRUN\)](#) annual conference was held over three days in Nairobi, Kenya, with around 70 in-person participants and several others participating online. Members of the FRUN community traveled from **25 different countries** to come together in all their diversity: international, national and local NGOs and community-based organizations including refugee-led and diaspora-led organizations, State representatives, private sector attorneys, Red Cross societies, and representatives from UNHCR and IOM.

While the FRUN community grows each year, the support ecosystem it embodies and strives to expand is often fragmented - with information, resources and coordinated support to refugee families limited to specific locations and absent or lacking in many others. A core aim of these convenings is therefore to offer a **forum for government, non-government and private sector actors to meet as potential partners**, and to shine a light on the resources and expertise residing within the network and beyond that can be accessed and leveraged to benefit the ecosystem as a whole.

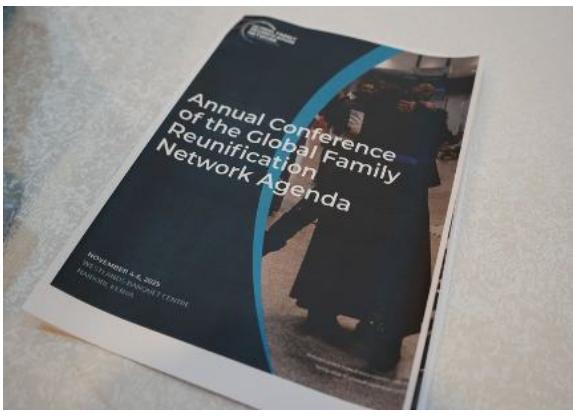
Each year, the annual conference promises valuable multi-stakeholder dialogue on family reunification. This year, **government officials** offered insights on the evolving domestic and political environment in their respective countries, pointing to challenges and opportunities ahead. **Humanitarian organizations**, including legal services providers, Red Cross societies and refugee-led organizations (RLOs), shared perspectives on inter-agency coordination and transnational partnership, and **pro bono law firms** demonstrated their expanding footprint in the family

reunification space, both as legal services providers for refugees as well as legal resources for the organizations that support them.

While family reunification is, at its heart, a rights-based pathway, it is by no means immune to the intense strain facing national asylum systems and third country solutions as a whole (i.e. resettlement and other complementary pathways including labour mobility and education pathways). Acknowledging these dynamics, the conference programme sought to cover a wider field of **safe pathways for restoring family unity**, and explore common principles and priorities that could be leveraged as points of connection and synergy across networks supporting other pathways.

The FRUN Advisory Group (AG) is grateful to all who traveled to Nairobi and others who joined online over the three days. The AG extends its thanks to Nairobi-based FRUN members [RefugePoint](#), [Refugee-Led Organization Network of Kenya \(RELON\)](#), [Youth Voices Community](#) and [UNHCR](#) for opening their offices to site visits on day 1 of the conference. Particular appreciation goes to [RefugePoint](#), which funded the participation of 12 RLO representatives from Africa, Europe and the Americas, and coordinated the overall organization of this year's conference.

This report attempts to capture some of the humanity, energy and commitment that participants brought to the conference, and highlight some key themes that emerged this year.



Conference agenda. Credit: Diana Karua/ RefugePoint

Coordinating support for refugees seeking family reunification

A. Deepening the ecosystem of family reunification support

The right to family unity and family life is enshrined under multiple international legal instruments, and family reunification procedures exist in many domestic immigration systems. All too often, however, this pathway remains out of reach for refugees.

The French and British Red Cross societies presented findings of the **REPAIR** project, which underscored **persistent barriers to family reunification (FR)** facing refugees including (i) poor access to **information** about eligibility, procedural requirements and deadlines, (ii) insufficient availability of legal **assistance** and application support, (iii) financial **costs** inherent in the process and logistical difficulties, including for in-person consular appointments, (iv) restrictive **definitions** of family and (v) **processing times** that can stretch into years.

The FRUN embodies and advocates for a global ecosystem of support to help refugees overcome or navigate around these and other barriers to FR. Throughout the conference, participants and panelists showcased different coordination and partnership models, sharing lessons learned for **optimal collaboration**, like the importance of clarifying expectations and capacities of partners at the outset, ensuring a simple and workable pathway for bi-directional case referral and information sharing, and including RLOs as essential partners.

Participants further highlighted **communication and transparency** as key foundations both for effective coordination and **accountability to refugees**. To this end, support actors working

with refugees in departure countries requested consular staff, legal services providers and UNHCR to consider holding periodic case update meetings (or correspondence), **to keep families informed** through a lengthy process.

The FRUN Advisory Group (AG) strongly encourages inter-agency partnership and coordination for FR, and was encouraged to note the emergence of new collaborations since last year's conference, notably in the area of referral to legal organizations and pro bono assistance in destination countries.



Conference participants. Credit: Diana Karua/RefugePoint

B. Centering refugee-led and diaspora organizations

People with lived experience of displacement understand the problems of migration pathways for refugees and the solutions needed to overcome them. Embedded in communities, RLOs share information, identify individuals who may be in need of FR and undertake administrative interventions in countries of departure, support refugees and sensitize communities in countries of destination, and are **the main providers of assistance** and information to people on the move.

"Governments will change, policies will change, but local partnerships, coordination mechanisms, people-centred approaches [will stay and grow], even in the face of difficult policies."
- RLO representative

Members of the FRUN **RLO and Diaspora Working Group** presented on several topics during the conference, from their work providing FR information and counseling in communities, to individual case identification and referral activities as well as para-legal interventions carried out in the hosting country to obtain documents, evidence and authorizations for FR. RLOs also shared research, analysis and strategies for community engagement, sensitization and storytelling for social impact (see on page 5: **Connecting with communities and stories for change**). FRUN members are encouraged to regard the RLO and diaspora WG as a resource for information, including on the presence

and profile of RLOs in specific contexts, to help government and non-government organizations identify effective local partnerships for FR.

As the essential role of RLOs and diaspora organizations continues to deepen and diversify, it is incumbent on partners and the system as a whole to **recognize and resource their work equitably**. When RLOs are included in coordination structures, our collective responses are more informed, relevant, and workable.

"Unless you walk that path, even if you have a PhD, you can never understand what it means to be a refugee seeking family reunification."

- RLO representative



Conference participants. Credit: Diana Karua/RefugePoint

C. Leveraging the private sector

Pro bono legal support spans legal education (e.g. training lawyers), client legal advice and representation, strategic litigation, administrative support and legal research. During a session dedicated to pro bono, global law firm DLA Piper presented the free legal assistance intake form developed and maintained by PILnet and explained how to draft a clear and actionable request for pro bono support. In addition, DLA Piper made itself available to receive direct requests for legal assistance and circulated an intake form to participants.

Pro bono lawyers help alleviate critical gaps in legal advice and support for family reunification, and there is a great need to continue expanding access to this resource. With more law firms joining the FRUN community every year, and remote forms of legal assistance made possible through legal tech and digital solutions, the FRUN Advisory Group will continue to mobilize pro bono actors and networks for refugees and the RLOs and NGOs that support them. A FRUN Working Group on pro bono assistance could be established to lead these efforts in 2026.



Conference participants. Credit: Joel Ngui/RefugePoint

Widening the frame for action and dialogue

A. Family reunification and family unity: creativity and connection across pathways

Facilitating access by refugees to family reunification is at the heart of the FRUN's mission. That said, our **capacity to pivot and pursue alternative available pathways to protect family unity** or reunite separated families is increasingly necessary. A more 'pan-pathways' approach seeks to ensure FR support is agile, informed, responsive and connected to partners and information on other pathways that preserve or restore family unity, where rights-based FR is not accessible. Options in this regard will be country-specific and may include named sponsorship, humanitarian pathways and resettlement.

"We will not give up, we must continue to thrive, move forward, advocate, and think of creative ways that we can ensure that families reunite. When families reunite, communities become better. You create better homes and a better society."

- RLO representative

A conference session exploring **named sponsorship pathways** demonstrated Canada's longstanding experience and expertise with this pathway, and highlighted smaller-scale initiatives in other countries. Named sponsorship, which often operates as a pathway to reunite families, was regarded by all speakers to have distinct **advantages for families, communities and government authorities alike**. For refugees, named sponsorship opens the door to a wider definition of family and is therefore capable of restoring relationships outside the scope of family relationships required for rights-based FR. For communities, this pathway was observed to favour stronger integration outcomes and build community support for refugees. Finally, the

sponsorship approach tends to involve a lower financial and administrative burden for government authorities in terms of identification, processing, travel, logistics, reception and integration.

With many FRUN member organizations working across different complementary pathways, we will seek to leverage this crosscutting knowledge in 2026 for the benefit of the whole network.

B. Engaging with States on common priorities

The participation of **State representatives** at the conference enabled valuable interactions and revealed common priorities and concerns across all stakeholder groups. Common concerns emerged, for example, in the areas of **(i) system fairness and agility**, e.g. identifying blockers and implementing adjustments, **(ii) communication and collaboration** between authorities in destination and departure country (e.g. awareness of departure country systems, time frames, documentation challenges, mobility restrictions for refugees and exit requirements) and **(iii) centering the needs and best interests of children** (e.g. kindness and compassion, expediting processes, refraining from decisions that lead to separation, and respecting their right to be heard), among other areas.

Common areas of concern represent spaces for dialogue and opportunities for States to tap into the capacities, knowledge and access to communities enjoyed by RLOs, other humanitarian organizations and hosting countries alike, for mutual gain and to strengthen the system as a whole.

State representatives present evoked the complexities of advancing access to family reunification in the current political climate. At the same time, it was acknowledged, notably by the EU Commission, that FR policies and procedures had largely improved for refugees over the last decade, through the normalization of procedural flexibilities, digitization of previously in-person requirements, and better support services upon arrival. In the present context, it was in the interests of all stakeholders to situate policy dialogue with States beyond the numbers, and to collectively reflect on ways to continue improving national systems to more effectively **implement FR procedures for those who are eligible in line with policy objectives**. In this connection, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) invited participants to reflect on how its unique data collection and analysis capability could be leveraged to inform the design of targeted and responsive family reunification programs. UNHCR also cited its ongoing data collection and analysis in key countries on needs, outcomes, and gaps regarding family reunification processes, to inform FR programming and advocacy.

C. Connecting with communities and stories for change

Polling data often reveals a divergence between populist narratives on migration and refugees and attitudes held in the wider community. Refugee and diaspora leaders from Europe and North America shared several reflections on community engagement approaches that tapped into the support they knew existed in their respective communities. They noted the limited impact of simply correcting facts and presenting evidence, and the need to instead focus on the deeper work of building trust and connections that are rooted in shared community concerns - peace, security, family and prosperity - as well as shared individual interests and passions.

"Everyone has a role to play in changing the narrative, not only politicians and the media. It is not easy to change, this narrative has been there for a long time, and it will take time to change"
- RLO representative

One RLO presented recent research on effective storytelling for social change, and shared the following guiding principles:

Storytellers should:

1. Understand their audience and address their concerns
2. Demonstrate and focus on shared values, not numbers
3. Fill knowledge gaps that contribute to misinformation
4. Make narratives local and relevant to communities
5. Portray the existing harms with proposed solutions
6. Propose gradual change in line with the circumstances of the moment
7. Engage a diversity of messengers to tell stories
8. Make small changes to framing and use humanizing language in messages

From an ethical perspective, when elevating personal stories for FR advocacy, organizations should be mindful of the principles of **co-design, accountability and meaningful participation**. Each person must be the narrator of their own experience, and recognized for their personal contributions to positive change via feedback on use and impact of their story.

Looking ahead

Family reunification is based on the fundamental right to family life and family unity, and as such, represents **the only safe option** to reunite for many refugee families separated by conflict and persecution. The FRUN Advisory Group will continue to drive global dialogue and advocacy to advance family reunification and other pathways that preserve or restore family unity for refugees.

In addition, the **FRUN Community of Practice** will increase opportunities for collaboration in 2026, through learning events, the creation of a network listserv platform, and a social media presence (LinkedIn) to lift up our collective efforts and outreach across networks.

As highlighted throughout this summary rapport, there are a number of focus areas that the FRUN Advisory Group will pursue in 2026, including establishing **working groups or other coordination mechanism to further:**

- Expand access to available **pro bono** assistance for refugees seeking family reunification and the organizations that support them.
- Explore **links and synergies** between family reunification, named sponsorship and other pathways.
- Pursue **strategic engagement with States** in the FRUN, grounded whenever possible in better data and evidence for policy development.

As we wrapped up the 2025 FRUN conference, each participant was asked to reflect on what kind of partner (stakeholder type, skills and location) would help their program or pathway thrive, and to reach out to them this year. **The FRUN Secretariat stands ready to facilitate introductions and connections** - whether between departure and destination government authorities or across legal, social, communication and humanitarian service providers - to continue building out the connective tissue underpinning our work and to help foster momentum, energy and synergy to carry us through the year to come.



Conference participants. Credit: Joel Ngui/RefugePoint



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Acknowledgements

The FRUN Advisory Group would like to thank the lead organizers for conference sessions for this year's annual conference. They are:

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