



2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT



FACULTY DIRECTOR
PROFESSOR KAREN MUSALO



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS) works to ensure that the United States lives up to its international and domestic legal obligations to protect individuals fleeing persecution. We provide training, expert consultation, and resources to attorneys who represent asylum seekers so that they can obtain the best outcome in individual cases, while we litigate and are engaged in research and policy advocacy to impact the development of the law. CGRS is a nationally and internationally recognized source of expertise and is a frequent reliable source for scholars and journalists writing on refugee issues. This year, CGRS is proud to celebrate 25 years of pursuing justice for those fleeing violence, persecution, and the escalating impacts of climate change around the world.

I founded CGRS after achieving the groundbreaking victory in *Matter of Kasinga*, which was the first precedent decision establishing that women fleeing gender-based persecution could be eligible for asylum in the United States. Although CGRS's initial mission was on behalf of refugee women, we have expanded to protect all those who suffer human rights violations and arrive at our borders seeking the protection guaranteed by U.S. law, and our international obligations.

The global trend by rich industrialized countries—including the United States—has been to turn back asylum seekers, resulting in tragic deaths at the border, and at sea. We work to counter policies that violate the right to *non-refoulement* (non-return) to persecution. We harness our skills as scholars, educators, litigators, and policy experts to restore and reimagine access to asylum, providing refugee communities a fair chance to live in safety and dignity.

As unprecedented attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers intensify, CGRS's work is more critical than ever. We are committed to challenging the unlawful policies that violate the rights of those fleeing persecution, and to advocating for a just and peaceful world where people do not need to flee their home countries in order to save their lives.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Musalo".

PROFESSOR KAREN MUSALO
DIRECTOR

ADVISORY BOARD

DENISE ABRAMS
SIMONA AGNOLUCCI
RICHARD BOSWELL

TANYA BRODER
SARA CAMPOS
BINIAM GHEBREMICHAEL

MINETTE KWOK
JOSEPH NATOLI
GEORGE REHM

LILLI REY
HECTOR RUIZ
SANDRA THOMPSON

LEADERSHIP STAFF

GABRIEL ARELLANO - ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF
TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

BLAINE BOOKEY - LEGAL DIRECTOR & VISITING ASSISTANT
PROFESSOR OF LAW, UC LAW SF

NEELA CHAKRAVARTULA - ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF
LITIGATION

MELISSA CROW - DIRECTOR OF LITIGATION

MOIRA DUVERNAY - DEPUTY DIRECTOR

KATE JASTRAM - DIRECTOR OF POLICY & ADVOCACY

CHRISTINE LIN - DIRECTOR OF TRAINING & TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE

FELIPE NAVARRO - ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF
POLICY & ADVOCACY



SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM

Since the reelection of Donald Trump, protections for refugees and asylum seekers have been under existential threat. All refugee admissions have been suspended, with the exception of the admission of a number of white South Africans, and those fleeing persecution are prohibited from raising asylum claims when they arrive at the U.S. border. CGRS is taking a leading role in challenging these unjust and inhumane policies.

CGRS engages in impact litigation to challenge systemic barriers to asylum as well as intervenes as counsel or *amicus* in select individual asylum cases to set positive precedent. Since Trump took office for his second term, we have filed three separate [lawsuits](#) to halt policies that deny asylum protections and prevent individuals and families from accessing asylum at the U.S. border. In April, we secured a [victory in](#) *Immigrant Defenders Law Center v. Noem*, blocking the government's reimplementing of the "Remain in Mexico" policy, which forced people seeking asylum to await their U.S. immigration court date under perilous conditions in Mexico.

IN THE PAST YEAR:

- We were counsel in **12** major national impact litigation cases.
- We were counsel or *amicus* in **31** individual asylum cases at the Courts of Appeals, the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), immigration courts and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- We filed an [amicus](#) brief with the Supreme Court in *Department of Homeland Security v. D.V.D.* arguing against the removal of asylum seekers to places like South Sudan, Libya, and El Salvador where they face a substantial risk of torture or other ill-treatment without adequate notice and a meaningful opportunity to express their fears.
- We [filed an urgent request](#) with Inter-American Commission on Human Rights demanding immediate action against El Salvador for the unlawful detention of at least 288 individuals, many with pending asylum claims, transferred from the United States to the CECOT mega-prison in March 2025 by the Trump administration without any legal process. To complement U.S. litigation efforts, this request aims to ensure access to asylum and a fair legal process.

CHAMPIONING FAIR AND HUMANE POLICIES

CGRS takes a leading role in national coalitions, submitting in-depth comments on immigration-related rulemaking and providing guidance for organizations and individuals submitting comments to proposed regulations. CGRS also co-leads the [#WelcomeWithDignity](#) campaign for asylum rights, empowering impacted communities nationwide to build collective resistance and momentum against regressive measures.

Over the last year, we published **35** policy resources, including factsheets and rapid response materials, to help inform and guide advocates and policy makers. We also produced select resources in Spanish.

CGRS IN THE NEWS

Journalists frequently turn to CGRS staff for our expertise and insight on the latest developments in immigration and asylum law and policy. This year, we were quoted, featured, or used as a source in **160** [media pieces](#) in national and international press. CGRS faculty published **8** op-eds and other commentary, including in the [Los Angeles Times](#) and [Just Security](#).

RESPONDING TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY



CGRS is a leader in the movement to expand access to protection for those displaced by the impacts of climate change. We develop practical guidance and country conditions documentation to support advocates representing climate-displaced individuals.

Building on our 2023 climate practice advisory, we co-authored a groundbreaking new resource for global partners, [International Protection for People Displaced Across Borders in the Context of Climate Change and Disasters: A Practical Toolkit](#), to help legal practitioners and decision-makers navigate protection claims involving climate factors. With the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law and University of Essex School of Law and Human Rights Centre, and support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), we launched multiple worldwide briefings and webinars on the Practical Toolkit and international protection frameworks.

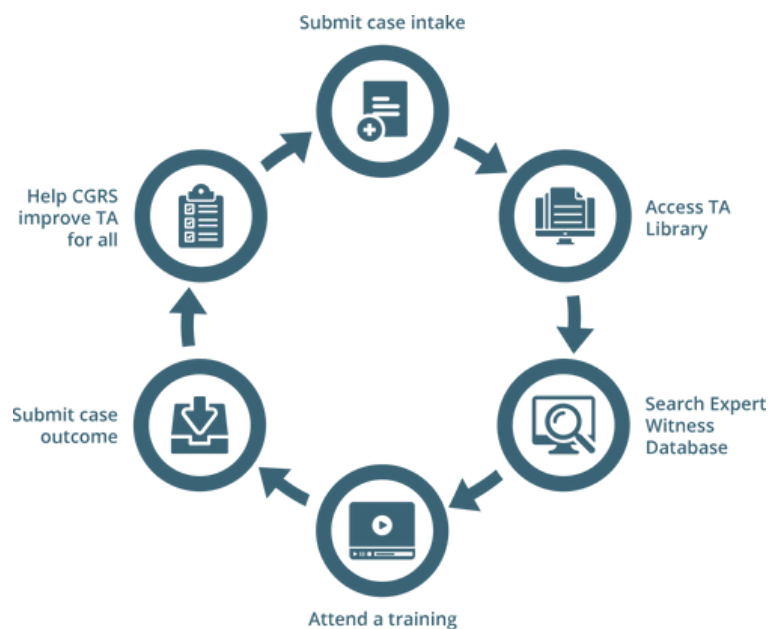
This year we participated in the 40th Anniversary of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, a regional protection agreement. The commemoration provided an opportunity for states and stakeholders to discuss ongoing challenges and new commitments in response to displacement in Latin America and the Caribbean. As part of this process, we submitted [recommendations](#) and coordinated a [webinar](#) to assess emerging trends and regional approaches. When the process culminated in the Chile Declaration and Plan of Action (2024–2034), we [analyzed](#) its potential as a blueprint for addressing climate- and disaster-related displacement in the Americas.

UNPARALLELED ASYLUM LAW EXPERTISE

CGRS is a nationally recognized leader in the field of asylum law, supporting thousands of attorneys annually with the online tools and training they need to successfully litigate asylum cases. We are recognized by the State Bar of California as a primary technical assistance (TA) and training provider for a state-wide network of legal services organizations. In this current climate, we are developing rapid-response resources and trainings to ensure advocates remain informed about policy changes that directly impact their clients.

In 2024-2025 we:

- Provided tailored consultation and technical assistance in more than **8,000** individual asylum cases.
- Conducted over **100** webinars, workshops, and other presentations, reaching an additional **9,000** advocates nationwide.
- Produced and disseminated **49** new CGRS-authored resources, including in-depth practice advisories, country-conditions evidentiary materials, and model briefing.
- Continued to provide attorneys with free, one-of-a-kind access to experts to support their asylum cases through our online expert witness database, which now includes **500** country conditions experts and medical professionals



How our TA Program works

SHINING A LIGHT ON ASYLUM ADJUDICATION

This year, CGRS added a new [Immigration Judge \(IJ\) Dashboard](#) to our innovative [online tools](#). Drawing from CGRS's repository of over **15,500** unpublished immigration decisions, the dashboard offers detailed insights into how specific judges have ruled on asylum cases involving similar fact patterns. This unprecedented level of transparency enables advocates to tailor litigation strategies based on real trends, data which is otherwise not available to the public. CGRS staff published [an article](#) in Bender's Immigration Bulletin outlining the importance of the IJ dashboard in understanding how extrajudicial factors and bias influence immigration judges.

CGRS Director, Professor Karen Musalo, along with co-authors, provided a deeper analysis of immigration judge decision-making in her article, [With Fear, Favor, and Flawed Analysis: Decision-Making in U.S. Immigration Courts](#), in Boston College Law Review. The article identified the way various biases impact the outcomes in asylum cases.

REGIONAL APPROACH TO MIGRATION

CGRS aims to ensure that U.S. policies prioritize human rights and access to meaningful protection. We work with partner organizations in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean to advocate for humane migration policies, address the root causes of forced migration, and contribute to the development of a more just regional system of refugee protection.

This year, in collaboration between the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic and CGRS, Professor Karen Musalo carried out a third fact-finding trip to Honduras to document human rights abuses and displacement caused by climate change and environmental degradation. These trips provide us with the opportunity to work with regional partners to develop country conditions evidence, including expert witness declarations which constitute critical proof in asylum claims.



CGRS and Refugee and Human Rights Clinic fact-finding delegation to Honduras March 2025

HAITI JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP: 2025 DELEGATION TO MEXICO CITY

In March, CGRS Legal Director and Visiting Assistant Professor Blaine Bookey led a delegation of CGRS staff, UC Law SF [Haiti Justice Partnership](#) faculty and students, and other partners including a professor from our sister law school in Haiti, *l'École Supérieure Catholique de Droit de Jérémie* ([ESCDROJ](#)), to Mexico City to document current conditions facing Haitian asylum seekers and provide Know Your Rights (KYRs) trainings in Haitian Creole.

The delegation interviewed dozens of migrants, met with NGOs, UNHCR and Mexico City government officials, and conducted KYRs for Haitian migrants. In coordination with local partners, the delegation surveyed the pressing needs of Haitian and other non-Spanish-speaking asylum seekers in Mexico City.



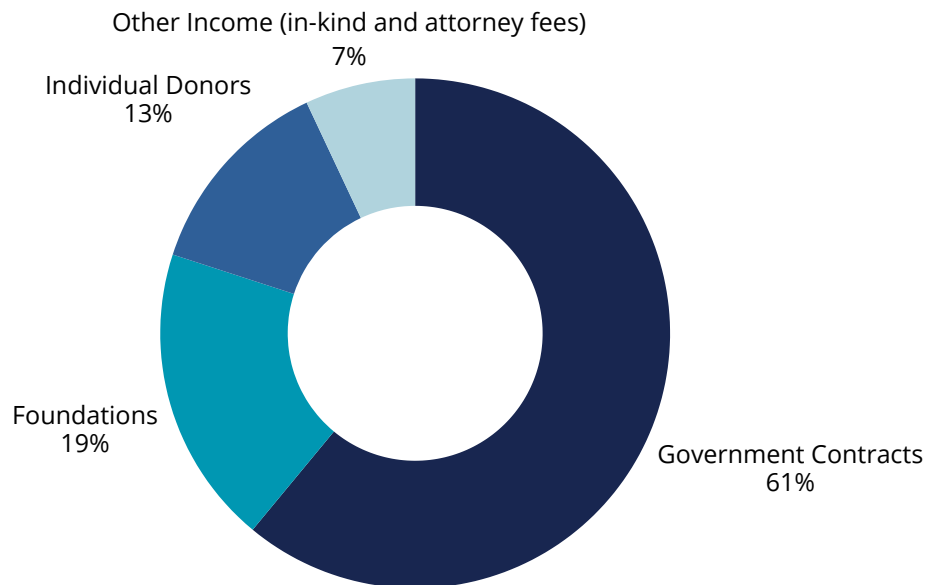
CGRS and Haiti Justice Partnership delegation to Mexico City March 2025

The delegation incorporated its findings into a shadow [report](#) for the UN Human Rights Council's review of the United States, which documents how U.S. policies that deny migrants the right to seek asylum violate international law, and have a disproportionate impact on Haitian and other Black asylum seekers forced to stay in Mexico.

FISCAL YEAR 2025 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Center Operating Budget: \$4,052,852

SOURCES OF REVENUE



Special thanks to: Dean and Chancellor, David Faigman, and the Academic Dean, Morris Ratner, our Advisory Board, and our individual donors who make our work possible.



INSTAGRAM - @CGRSASYLUM



BLUESKY - @CGRSASYLUM.BSKY.SOCIAL



FACEBOOK - CENTER FOR GENDER & REFUGEE STUDIES



EMAIL - CGRS@UCLAWSF.EDU

DONATE TO CGRS

