

Asylum Access Statement at High Level Dialogue on Jobs and Livelihoods

My name is Diana Essex-Lettieri, Vice President and COO of Asylum Access, a refugee human rights and economic empowerment organization. Thank you so much to the speakers, and for this opportunity to share Asylum Access's view.

Decent work can only be achieved when national governance frameworks (national laws, policies, and practices) protects rights, **especially work rights**, AND, when rights can be accessed and defended in practice. This is the only way our efforts can lead to refugees rebuilding their lives.

We know — based on our experiences across diverse legal contexts — that legal empowerment — legal aid services — is an important element in enabling and making practical those rights, especially before formal unions or workers' associations have fully integrated refugees. Legal support ensures that refugees can access safe, lawful work, and helps prevent and address exploitation. But in practice, **most refugees around the world do not have access to legal support. Often they live in countries that do not yet have national governance frameworks that protect their work rights — Ethiopia is a great example that many other countries need to follow.**

When refugees do not have legal protections and legal support related to work, they may be *detained, deported to life-threatening situations, exploited, and worse. We cannot bypass this profound gap. Legal solutions need to sit side by side with humanitarian and development efforts, as a non-negotiable aspect of refugee response.*

Asylum Access therefore pledges to:

- Expand our use of community-based legal models to increase our annual reach of free, high-quality legal services from **14,000 individuals to 20,000 individuals between now and 2023.**
- Continue to advocate for **adequate funding** for refugee legal empowerment initiatives globally in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16, equal access to justice for all, and continue to facilitate the sharing of lessons among these organizations,
- Enable meaningful participation of refugees themselves in the pursuit of realizing decent work, by significantly increasing refugee representation among our leadership,
- Continue to offer collaborative support to governments to build and implement national governance frameworks that protect work rights and work place protections.