

Psychosocial Impacts of Prolonged Uncertainty

on the Mental Well-being, Resilience, and Community Engagement of Afghan Refugee Youth in Indonesia



THE INFLUENCE OF MUTED BLUE COLOR IN LEARNING SPACE ON THE ATTENTION-FOCUSING ABILITIES OF CHILDREN WITH ADHD

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PERKULIAHAN INFORMATIKA DAN TEKNOLOGI
JURUSAN TEKNIK INFORMATIKA
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1. Introduction

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that causes difficulties in maintaining attention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

The research aims to investigate the impact of muted blue color on the attention-focusing abilities of children with ADHD.

2. Objective

The research aims to investigate the impact of muted blue color on the attention-focusing abilities of children with ADHD.

Method

The research was conducted using a quasi-experimental design. The research was conducted using a quasi-experimental design.



EMPLACE INITIATIVE | 2026

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Acknowledgements

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AI Disclosure Statement

Emplace utilized AI tools (Google Gemini and Anthropic Claude) solely for post-analytical writing and presentation aids (sentence structuring, language refinement, and diagram rendering). All empirical data, analysis, and recommendations are original work produced by the Emplace research team and reviewed by our partners. No personally identifiable and confidential participant data was inputted into AI platforms.

Photography

Janbaz Salehi

Cover image: An Afghan Hazara refugee girl looking at the university students' final works display during a campus tour in one of Emplace's collaborative projects.

(Source: Emplace's archive)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Protracted displacement remains one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges facing refugees in Indonesia. As a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Indonesia provides temporary protection but no pathway to permanent legal status, leaving refugees in prolonged uncertainty with restricted access to rights and limited prospects for durable solutions. For many Afghan refugee youth, this uncertainty has persisted for over a decade, profoundly shaping their mental well-being, resilience, and ability to participate meaningfully in society.

This qualitative study, conducted by Emplace Initiative with support from the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), draws on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 25 participants, including Afghan refugee youth, refugee leaders, Indonesian stakeholders, and psychosocial practitioners, to examine the psychosocial impacts of prolonged displacement in Indonesia.

THE FINDINGS demonstrate that prolonged uncertainty itself has become a major source of psychological harm. Participants consistently described living in a state of indefinite limbo, characterised by the inability to work legally, limited access to higher education, prolonged family separation, financial dependency, and the absence of a foreseeable future. Limbo is a daily struggle against stagnation. Rather than recovering from a single traumatic event, refugee youth experience continuous and cumulative stress resulting from years of legal insecurity and social exclusion. These directly erode well-being, manifesting in persistent anxiety, chronic sleep issues, and a pervasive emotional numbness. Feelings of hopelessness, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and depression were recurrent throughout the research.

Youth experience a tense duality in which independent milestones (higher education, careers) are suspended, yet adult responsibilities within families and communities accelerate.

The structural absence of formal academic recognition, a transparent resettlement process, or clear futures heavily fractures the motivation to learn. Planning and engaging often feel pointless, leading to severe demotivation and heightened household or community tensions. The responsibilities at home also prevented some youth from participating in community activities.

The study further reveals that refugee mental well-being deteriorates significantly during major humanitarian and geopolitical crises related to them. Events such as the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Iran vs Israel and the US conflict, reductions in humanitarian assistance, and growing uncertainty surrounding resettlement pathways repeatedly intensified psychological distress by reopening unresolved trauma and increasing concerns for family members remaining in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and other diaspora locations. Participants reported that these crises compounded existing vulnerabilities and, in some cases, contributed to severe mental health conditions, self-harm, and suicide within the refugee community.

Beyond legal and economic insecurity, the research highlights the psychosocial impact of social and religious marginalization. While existing literature notes that Shia Hazaras often navigate public ignorance and sectarian stereotypes regarding their faith in Sunni-majority Indonesia, which frequently compels them to avoid public worship, informants in this study primarily highlighted marginalization driven by their status as refugees and foreigners. Their accounts note experiences of being degraded or patronized as “vulnerable” or “lesser” by non-refugees who were aware of their status. Additionally, because of their physical appearance, participants are often mistaken for foreign tourists among those unaware of their refugee status and condition, leading local vendors to charge them inflated prices, severely compound their existing financial limitations and reinforce their sense of alterity.

Despite these significant challenges, the research also documents remarkable resilience among Afghan refugee youth.

Participants identified education, volunteering, peer support, sports, faith, and engagement with refugee-led organizations (RLOs) or other civil society organizations as critical sources of hope, purpose, and psychological strength. Crucially, youth relied on high-volume daily activities such as teaching, managing RLOs, athletic training, creative outlets, workshops, and reading to construct a rigorous “secondary routine”. This self-imposed structure serves as a vital psychological anchor: it provides predictability in times of uncertainty, deliberately keeping their minds preoccupied to distract from looming anxieties about their future.

Beyond distraction, well-being was sustained by a shared growth mindset and strong, aligned support systems. Informants actively engaged in continuous skill-building, such as mastering English and taking on community leadership, using these pursuits as a process of active meaning-making. By framing daily efforts as investments in their personal development, they restored a sense of agency, individual value, and purpose. Surrounding themselves with peers who shared this growth-oriented outlook created a protective community buffer. Operating within these networks, RLOs have emerged as trusted actors offering tailored psychosocial support, informal education, and leadership development, compensating for gaps in formal humanitarian assistance despite severe resource constraints.

However, while grassroots programs and personal motivation successfully convert forced inactivity into periods of strategic skill-building, they exist within a fragile ecosystem. Community programming alone cannot resolve the root trauma of prolonged displacement, nor can individual resilience compensate for structural exclusion.

While refugee-led initiatives strengthen coping capacities and social cohesion, they cannot substitute for formal legal recognition, basic rights, or long-term mobility. Sustainable well-being requires systemic policy reforms that restore dignity and enable refugees to rebuild their lives through expanded access to education, livelihoods, healthcare, legal protections, and long-term solutions, including resettlement and complementary pathways. Achieving this demands concrete commitment and coordination across all key stakeholders, including UNHCR, IOM, international donors, humanitarian organizations, the Indonesian government, local civil society, RLOs, community leaders, and refugee youth themselves. Ultimately, addressing psychosocial health requires dismantling the structural conditions of limbo that perpetuate harm.

Ultimately, improving psychosocial well-being requires addressing not only individual mental health needs but also the structural conditions of prolonged displacement that continue to shape refugees' lives.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTEXT AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As of March 2026, Indonesia hosts 12,238 refugees and asylum seekers, with approximately one-third (4,828) originating from Afghanistan.^[1] Aligning with Indonesia's national regulations, this study uses the term "refugees" to encompass both "refugees" and "asylum seekers." Individually, "refugees" are defined as those who have met eligibility criteria for international protection and whose asylum requests have been officially accepted, while "asylum seekers" are those still in the process of applying for official status.^[2]

As a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Indonesia does not offer a legal pathway to citizenship or permanent residence. Consequently, refugees are excluded from government-funded housing, income, and healthcare, relying instead on international organizations, civil society, and remittances.^[3] Furthermore, global resettlement quotas have remained low or been further reduced post-

pandemic; combined with Australian policy shifts since 1 July 2014 that have effectively blocked resettlement for many registered in Indonesia on and after that date,^[4] Indonesia's lack of a pathway to local integration or permanent residence that allow the refugees to work and obtain formal education, and limited access to complementary pathways.

These interacting factors have created a state of prolonged "limbo" where the average seven-year waiting period severely undermines the refugees' mental health and motivation.^[5] While 3,389 individuals accessed available solution pathways through resettlement, repatriation, or skill-based visas between 2023 and 2025, the total refugee population in Indonesia has remained stable for almost 3.5 years at approximately 12,000.^[6] This "steady" state highlights that current exit pathways are not keeping pace with the scale of displacement globally, effectively trapping the majority in a cycle of prolonged uncertainty.

[1] UNHCR, personal communication, May 12, 2026

[2] UNHCR, n.d.-b; UNHCR, n.d.-c; UNHCR, 2006 in Fadhli et al., 2025

[3] Government of Indonesia, 2016

[4] Australian Department of Home Affairs, 2015

[5] Missbach, 2015; Keegan et al., 2025

[6] UNHCR, personal communication, May 12, 2026

According to UNHCR, as of the end of March 2026...

12,238

Asylum Seekers and
Refugees registered
to UNHCR

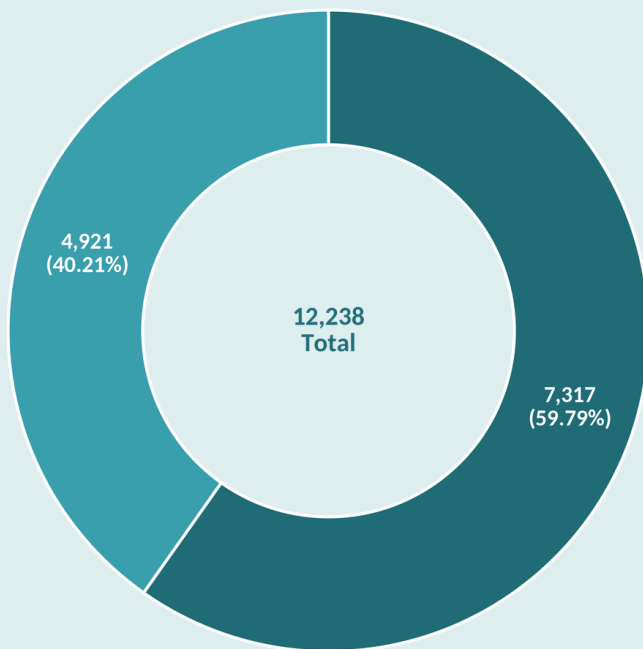
4,828

Afghans registered to
UNHCR Indonesia

Almost

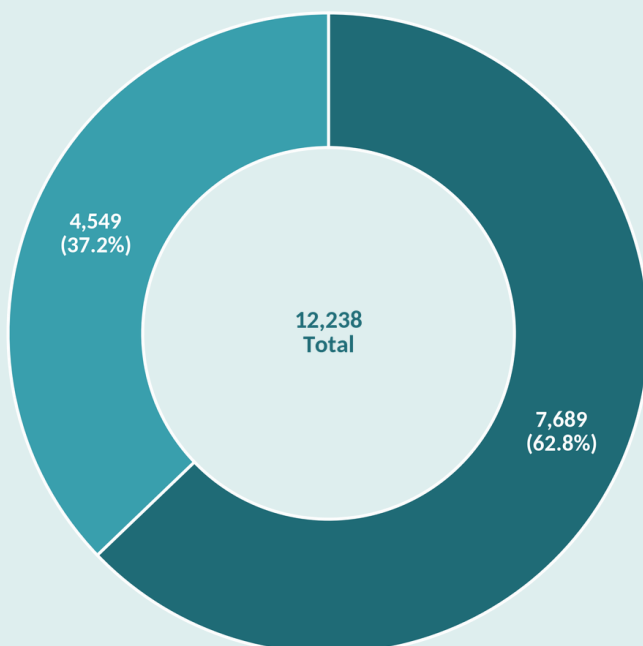
7 YEARS

The average length of stay
of Asylum Seekers and
Refugees in Indonesia



**Diagram 1. Number of
Asylum Seekers and
Refugees registered to
UNHCR in Indonesia
(All Nationalities)**

■ Refugees
■ Asylum Seekers



**Diagram 2. Asylum
Seeker & Refugee
(All Nationalities) –
Gender Split**

■ Male
■ Female

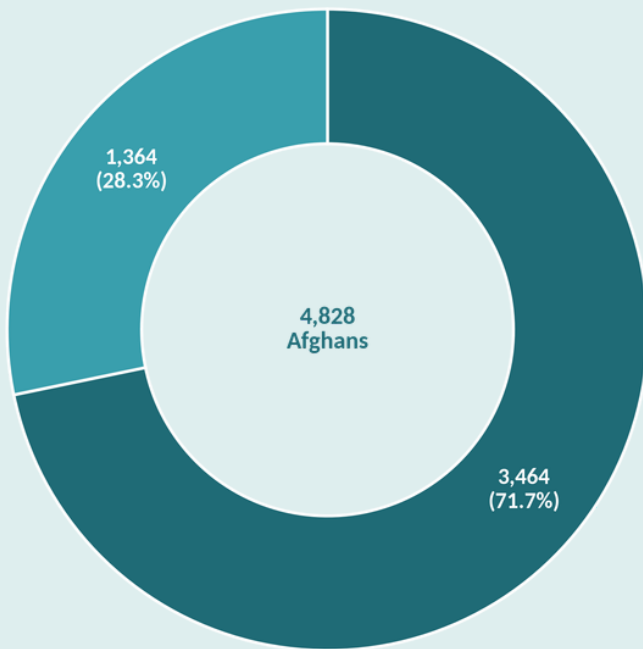
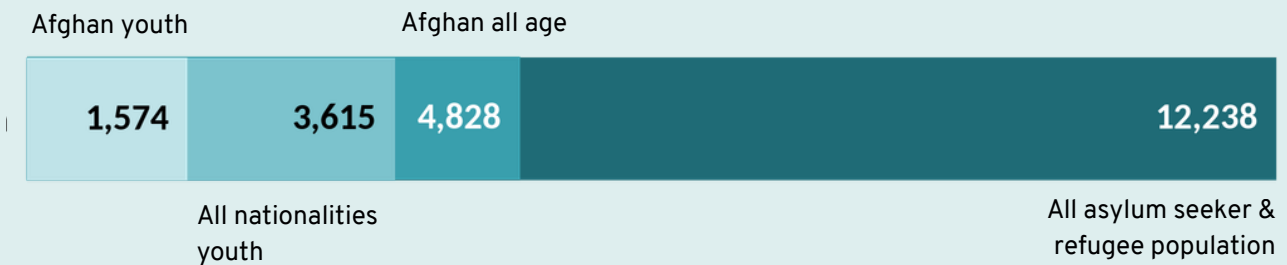


Diagram 3. Asylum Seeker & Refugee (Afghans) – Gender Split



Diagram 4. Population Overview: Total (All Nationalities), Afghan (All Age), Youth 18-30 years old (All Nationalities), Youth 18-30 years old (Afghan)



2023-2025 Departure

3,017

Resettlement
among all
nationalities

1,821

Resettlement
among Afghan
Population

306

Voluntary
Repatriation
among all
nationalities

66

Work / Skill VISAs /
Talent Beyond
Boundaries among
all nationalities

1.2. THE TOLL OF UNCERTAINTY

The absence of legal status, restricted livelihoods, and indefinite waits for durable solutions constitute a profound systemic trauma.^[7] Globally, refugees experience significantly higher rates of anxiety, mood disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than non-displaced populations.^[8] In countries like Indonesia, this psychological toll is exacerbated by the lack of institutional support more common in high-income host countries.^[9] Escalating reports of self-harm and suicide among refugees underscore that a decade of waiting is not merely a “delay”, but a critical health crisis.^[10]

Previous research identified stressors such as family separation, economic insecurity, restricted access to education, health issues, culture shock, and discrimination.^[11] For youth (ages 18-30), this stress is multiplied. As “emerging adults”, they are in what scholars call the “most unstable developmental period”, a time when major life transitions such as finishing secondary education and starting higher education, establishing a career, building relationships, and changing living arrangements are culturally expected to occur.^[12] In Indonesia, there are 1,574 Afghan youth out of 3,615 refugee youth, representing a significant segment of the total refugee population.^[13]

For these youth, the prolonged limbo can suspend or disrupt key transitions into adulthood, creating a distinct psychosocial burden during a formative life stage.

1.3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: “PSYCHOSOCIAL” AND “RESILIENCE”

To understand this experience, this study uses two main concepts: “Psychosocial Well-being” and “Resilience”. Woodward^[14] defines “psychosocial” as the relationship between the psychological (affect and emotion) and the social, political, and cultural forces that surround a person. In this study, we believe that mental well-being, resilience, and youth engagement in the community are influenced by social, political, and cultural factors, and vice versa.

In tandem, resilience is a concept often discussed in relation to trauma-related mental health problems.^[15] Resilience itself has an evolving, complex definition. The American Psychological Association (APA)^[16] defines resilience as “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility, and adjustment to external and internal demands”. Steven

[7] Hyndman & Giles, 2019

[8] Henkelmann et al., 2020

[9] Keegan et al., 2025

[10] Bevione et al., 2024; Jimale, 2026; UNHCR, 2026

[11] Usman & Halidu, 2024; Fadhliia et al., 2025; Keegan et al., 2025

[12] Arnett et al., 2014; Matud et al., 2020

[13] UNHCR, personal communication, May 12, 2026

[14] Woodward, 2015

[15] Siriwardhana et al., 2014; Fadhliia et al., 2025

[16] The American Psychological Association (APA), 2014

Southwick, former Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University, described it as the ability to “bounce back, and perhaps even grow” in the face of adversity, while Rachel Yehuda acknowledged that resilience can co-exist with PTSD.^[17] In the context of refugees, many demonstrate resilience while simultaneously navigating the symptoms of trauma.

In Indonesia, studies by Ali et al.^[18] and Brown^[19] revealed how refugee youth, particularly those in Cisarua, showed remarkable resilience through peer support, community-led initiatives, and informal learning.

Moreover, Keegan et al.^[20] found that engagement in positive community programs helps maintain healthier mental well-being. However, through Emplace’s work as a refugee-led initiative, we have observed that motivation and engagement are not linear. While community participation can support well-being, the cumulative weight of long-term uncertainty can erode concentration, hope, and emotional energy over time.

Finally, this study is unique because it is built from the “insider” perspectives of asylum seekers, refugees, and Indonesian practitioners themselves. It aims to capture the lived experience that outside

researchers might miss. While this study focuses on Afghan refugee youth in Indonesia, some findings may offer insights relevant to other refugee communities experiencing prolonged uncertainty, restricted rights, and limited durable solutions.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

To guide this study, we ask:

- How do young Afghan refugees in Indonesia experience the daily reality of uncertainty or “limbo”?
- How does this long-term uncertainty affect their mental health and well-being?
- How does the prolonged uncertainty affect their motivation to learn and stay engaged in community programs?
- What specific coping strategies do they use, individually and collectively, to cope with the uncertainty?

By answering these questions, the study aims to generate practical recommendations for programming, advocacy, and policy-making that better reflect how Afghan refugee youth experience uncertainty, sustain resilience, and remain engaged in community life.

[17] Southwick et al., 2014

[18] Ali et al., 2016

[19] Brown, 2018

[20] Keegan et al., 2025

2. METHOD

2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND INFORMANTS

This study utilizes a qualitative, community-based participatory framework to capture the in-depth, lived experiences of refugee youth in Indonesia. To explore the relationship between prolonged uncertainty, psychosocial well-being, and community engagement, the study focused on Afghan refugee youth aged 18–30 who are active in community programs or refugee-led learning centers, alongside youth leaders and Indonesian practitioners experienced in working with displaced populations.

The participating youth (aged 18–28 years old) have navigated a state of structural limbo for 9 to 14 years across multiple locations in Indonesia, including Greater Jakarta (Jakarta and Cisarua), Makassar, Batam, and Kupang, with several participants having relocated between cities. At the time of data collection, most lived “independently”—either alone, with peers, or with family—while a few resided in institutional accommodations provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) under strict immigration supervision.

In total, 25 individuals participated in the study (18 women and 7 men), comprising 11 refugee youth, 8 refugee leaders, and 6 Indonesian practitioners. The interviews, online FGD, and in-person FGD were conducted from 13 April to 8 May 2026.

Refugee participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling via Emplace programs, peer networks, and community referrals.

The 6 Indonesian practitioners and stakeholders were drawn from a research project and long-term established refugee-serving organizations. This group included one independent researcher and five organizational professionals whose institutional affiliations remain undisclosed to protect participant confidentiality.

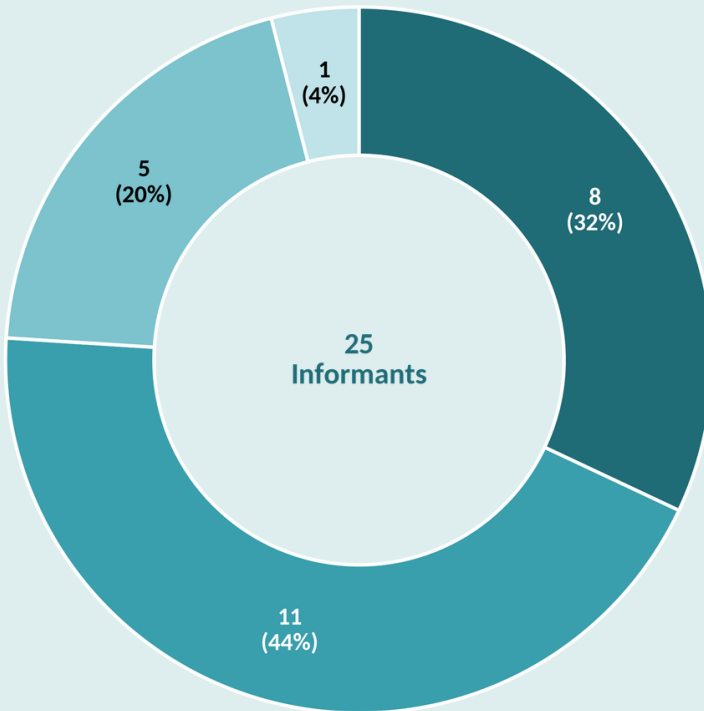


Diagram 5. Research Informant Overview

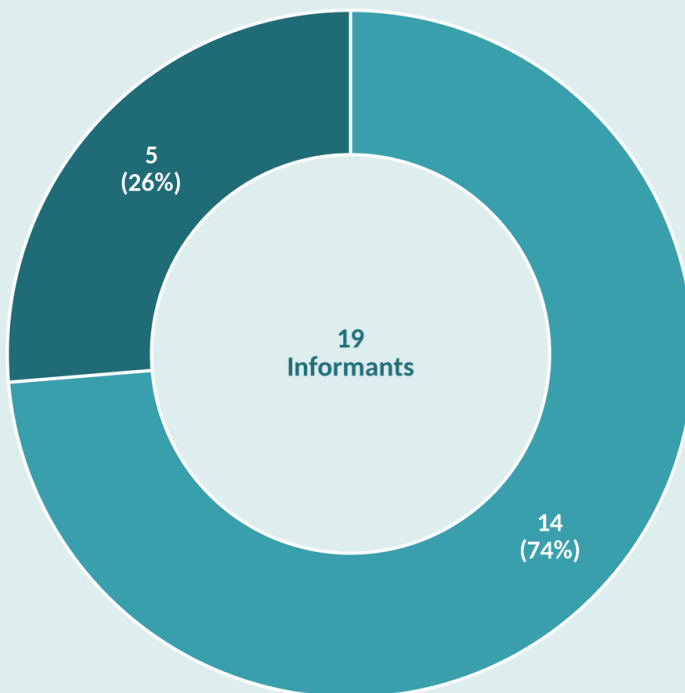
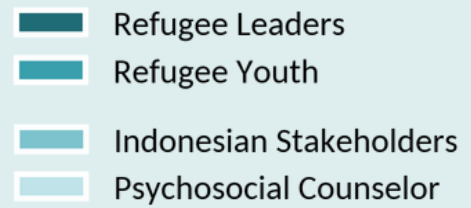


Diagram 6. Refugee Informant – Gender Split



Diagram 7. Refugee Informant – Age Distribution

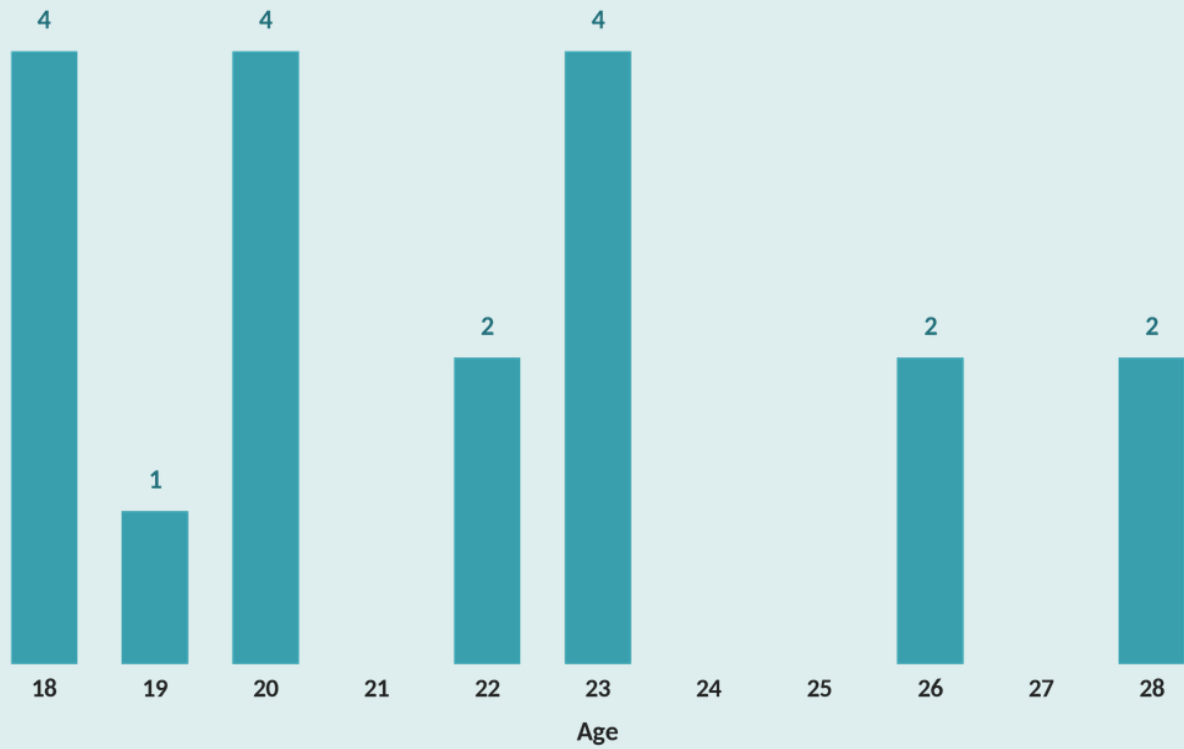
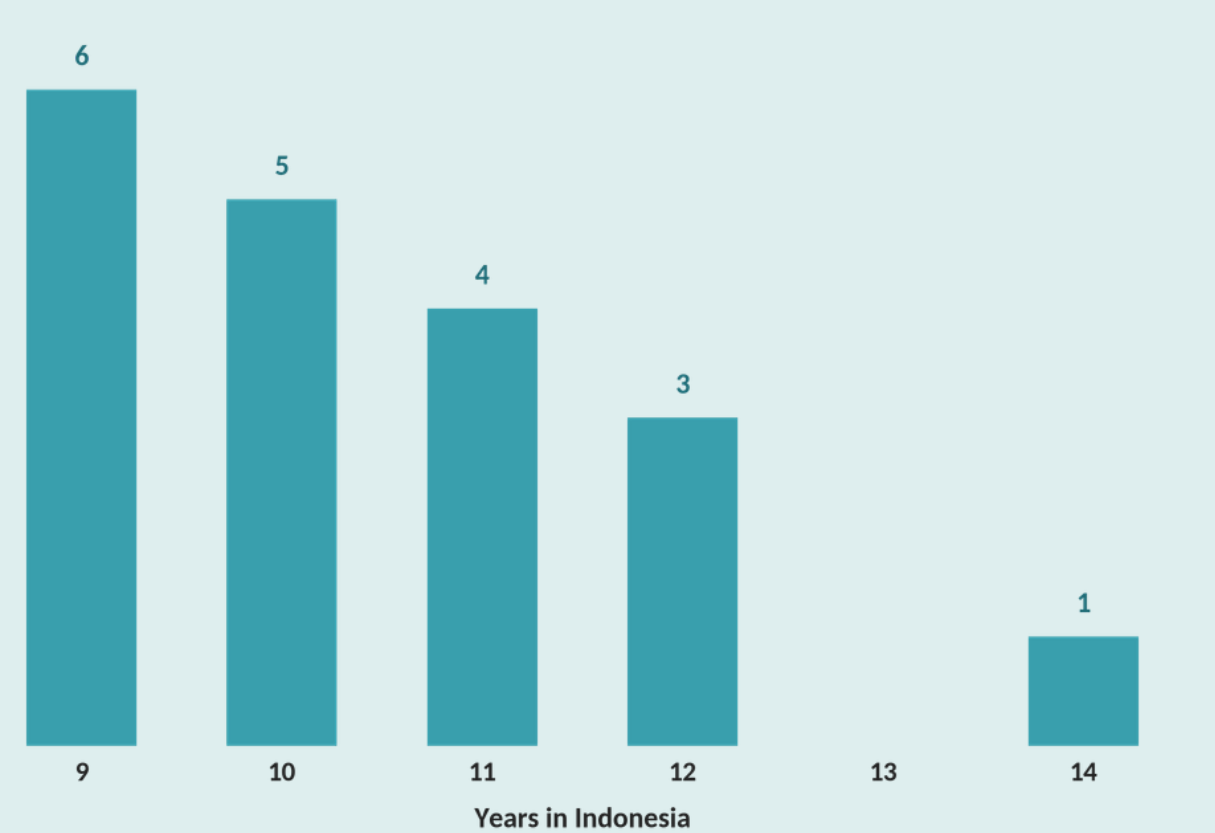


Diagram 8. Refugee Informant – Place of Residence



Diagram 9. Refugee Informant – Years in Indonesia



2.2. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data was gathered through a multi-method approach to ensure findings were accurate and balanced:

- **Reflexive Field Observations:** Conducted by the field researchers who are themselves members of the refugee community.
- **Small Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Four sessions, two online and two in-person. Each FGD included 3-4 participants, allowing for an intimate setting to explore both individual and collective narratives.
- **In-depth Interviews:** Eight sessions were held with refugee leaders, Indonesian practitioners, and Indonesian stakeholders.

Following the data collection, we applied thematic analysis. This involved carefully reviewing transcriptions of recordings to identify common patterns, such as specific stress triggers, coping mechanisms, and the types of support youth actively seek.

2.3. POSITIONALITY AND ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS

A cornerstone of this study is the **insider-researcher position**. This means the researchers are members of the refugee community and the Indonesian host society, allowing for a deeper level of trust, access, and a shared language.

However, we acknowledge the potential challenges of this role, such as subjectivity or a lack of critical distance. Some informants might even hold back on sharing certain details precisely because they share the same background or circumstances with the researchers.

To ensure the research remained fair and safe, we applied the following protocols:

- Informed consent and privacy, with all participation was strictly voluntary, clear data anonymization to protect informant identities, and secure data storage;
- Psychosocial well-being was explored through a social lens rather than a medicalized or clinical one, avoiding the pathologization of displacement;
- Member checking, where data interpretations were shared with informants during writing and analysis phase to ensure the researcher's analysis remained accurate to the participants' intended meanings;
- Safeguarding during interview, where informants were empowered to skip any question without justification, ensuring their comfort and safety throughout the process.

2.4. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

Several methodological limitations impacted this study:

- 1 Since the qualitative design relied on non-probability sampling, the findings capture deeply contextual insights rather than statistically generalizable trends across Indonesia's refugee population. This approach resulted in a distinct selection bias, as all participating youth were already actively engaged in community programs or refugee-led centers. Consequently, the data do not represent the lived experiences of more isolated or marginalized youth who lack these vital social safety nets.
- 2 The sample was geographically concentrated, with most refugee participants residing in Cisarua ^[21] and very few representing other cities. This imbalance occurred because a significant portion of the Afghan refugee population is concentrated in Cisarua, and our local proximity granted us much closer physical and social access to this specific subgroup.
- 3 Conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) online created clear technological disruptions; unstable internet connectivity repeatedly fractured the depth of the dialogue, and competing daily responsibilities caused several participants to join late, which directly restricted their input across all thematic prompts and limited the organic group interactivity necessary for a complete qualitative analysis.

Figure 1. Refugee children and young adults commuting to a refugee-led school in Cisarua, West Java, Indonesia. (Source: Janbaz Salehi)



[21] Cisarua, situated in the highlands of Bogor Regency, serves as a primary hub for refugees and asylum-seekers within the Greater Jakarta area. Its strategic importance stems from a combination of factors: a lower cost of living compared to other Greater Jakarta areas, established refugee community networks, and a temperate climate reminiscent of the home countries of many Afghan arrivals. It remains connected to the capital via Bogor City, where the commuter rail provides a direct transit link to the UNHCR headquarters in South Jakarta.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. PRIMARY GOALS WHEN ARRIVING IN INDONESIA, AND THE EVOLVING FOCUS

Participants commonly described their arrival in Indonesia through the language of survival and immediate safety. When they first arrived, most informants lived under the assumption that they would stay in Indonesia for perhaps six months to three years before being resettled. The gap between these early expectations and the reality of prolonged waiting was central to the psychosocial strain described throughout this report.

In the beginning, some had a specific country in mind, like Australia, while others simply wanted a safe, peaceful place. This was not an unrealistic dream at the time; before 2015, the resettlement process in Indonesia moved much faster, with many individuals waiting only two or three years. Consequently, the community arrived with an “Indonesia as a temporary place” mindset. For those who arrived as children, the concept of “resettlement” was often abstract, as they simply understood that they had moved to a new country. In those early years, many youth experienced what one informant called a “honeymoon phase,” where everything was

new and even exciting. Those living independently in Greater Jakarta spent their time blending into the community—going to the gym, playing games with new friends, and joining various classes—though opportunities were fewer than they later became.

Because they believed their time here would be short, very few made long-term plans for education or career development in Indonesia. However, as time went by, it became clear that the process was getting longer and the future remained deeply uncertain.

While the primary goal remained survival, the strategy shifted: almost all informants focused their energies on honing their language skills and practical abilities. They hoped these would prepare them for life after Indonesia, whether through resettlement or alternative pathways like skill-based or student visas. A few youth even noted they had become “used to the life here”, choosing to make good memories in Indonesia rather than focusing solely on leaving. This shift toward acceptance was likely a vital coping mechanism, given that less than 0.5% of the world’s refugees were ever

resettled.^[22] For refugee leaders, this evolution necessitated growing their community initiatives to serve more people. Yet, while youth became more active in self-improvement due to an increase in local opportunities, this activity coexisted with underlying feelings of frustration, fatigue, and uncertainty about whether their efforts would ever lead to a viable future.

3.2. EVERYDAY OVERALL EMOTIONS

The emotional experiences of refugee youth were characterized by persistent disappointment, anxiety, frustration, and feelings of entrapment. Even when emotions were not strictly negative, they were often described as “numb”, “bored”, “sleepy”, or “purposeless” as a result of living through the same restricted, repetitive routine. For those still in “asylum seeker” status who had been here for as long as recognized refugees, the wait affected their mental well-being significantly since they predicted they would need to wait substantially longer, a strain compounded by the lack of transparency in their process. This aligned with findings by Keegan et al.,^[23] which suggested that a refugee's mental well-being was closely tied to their specific stage the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process.

However, there were moments of light. Many youth and refugee leaders found joy in the company of their family and friends and a profound sense of relief in their physical safety. Several informants living in Cisarua shared that the simple act of walking down the street, knowing they would return home alive, was a blessing they had not possessed in Afghanistan. This sense of ease was further nurtured by the local Indonesian culture, which they described as friendly, warm, and welcoming, and by the fact that many locals in Cisarua had become naturally accustomed to co-existing with the refugee community.

3.3. “GOOD DAY” VS. “DIFFICULT DAY”

For most, a “good day” was defined by activity, especially a high volume of activity. When both youth and refugee leaders were busy with sports, community projects, or learning, their focus was successfully anchored in the present. Positive news, such as securing funding for their community program for the leaders, receiving health assistance, or simply having a productive day according to plan, made a significant difference. Going out of the house, sunny weather, or not feeling physically sick also elevated their days. One informant noted that a “good day” for her could also mean a free day to rest and practice self-care, as the constant pressure to remain productive in informal classes frequently became its own source of burnout.

[22] British Refugee Council, n.d.

[23] Keegan et al., 2025

Conversely, “difficult days” were triggered by inactivity, distressing news, illness, being treated poorly, or witnessing the negative condition of loved ones. One participant depicted how, during non-busy days, they spent their time alone or with friends, usually spiraling into grief about their loved ones, resettlement, health, financial problems, Indonesia's legal limitations, or their future. This often resulted in profound emotional exhaustion despite limited physical activity.

Difficult days also occurred when basic needs met complicated systems. For example, navigating the Indonesian healthcare system with back-to-back bureaucracy, facing the desperation of needing medicine they could not afford, or dealing with treatments that did not seem to work, heavily burdened refugee participants, especially after they had been rejected for financial and health assistance. This adds another layer of anxiety to refugees’ daily lives.

Housing was another battle: one youth conveyed how some landlords treated refugees differently by demanding six months or a full year of rent upfront, while Indonesian locals were allowed to pay month-to-month. For a family living on uncertain sponsorship, coming up with half a year’s rent at once proved nearly impossible. One Indonesian stakeholder indicated that the risk of theft in some neighborhoods and traffic accidents added another layer of anxiety to daily lives.

3.4. CUMULATIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL STRESSORS

The previous sections described how uncertainty affected daily emotions and routines. This section shows that youth distress was cumulative: identity, legal restrictions, family separation, financial precarity, limited opportunities, geographic isolation, and community pressures interacted over time to shape psychosocial well-being. These stressors reflected patterns found in previous research,^[24] but they were sharpened by the unique developmental context of the youth.

3.4.1. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF MARGINALIZATION

Afghan youth navigate three distinct layers of social and religious marginalization:

First, empirical findings demonstrate that their primary identity struggle stems from their status as refugees. Youth shared stories of feeling out of place or looked down upon while participating in activities at local schools and host institutions, where they were consistently viewed through a lens of pity or condescension as “vulnerable” or “lesser” by non-refugees who were aware of their status.

Second, field data highlights a socio-economic friction tied to their perceived identity as foreigners among those unaware of their refugee status. Due to low public awareness about refugees in Indonesia, locals frequently mistake them for foreign

tourists based on physical appearance. Consequently, in everyday spaces like markets, vendors charge them inflated tourist prices—dealing a heavy financial and emotional blow to individuals legally barred from working.

Finally, secondary literature points to a third layer regarding the Hazara ethnic group's religious identity. Having fled Shia-targeted persecution in Afghanistan, Hazaras in Sunni-majority Indonesia must navigate local ignorance and anti-Shia sentiment among certain fundamentalists, which external studies note often compels them to conceal their Shia affiliation and refrain from praying in public. ^[25]

3.4.2. GEOPOLITICS AND THE TRAUMA OF SEPARATION

Separation was a recurring trauma that defined various stages of the refugee journey. Youth were burdened not only by the initial departure from their homeland but also by the ongoing inability to return for major life events. The death of a grandparent in Afghanistan, for example, became a source of deep, unresolved grief because returning for the funeral was impossible.

During their time in Indonesia, they also faced several internal separations. One refugee leader, who arrived in Indonesia as an unaccompanied minor, shared his heartbreak at being separated from his “newfound family” in a children’s shelter as his friends were resettled or moved away one by one.

Beyond initial displacement, shifting international policies, such as those in the US, ^[26] also tore households apart. Another refugee leader recounted the story of a young man and his sibling who were resettled just before an indefinite halt was placed on U.S. asylum processing, leaving their aging parents stranded in Indonesia. This separation induced severe, stress-related illnesses in the parents, while the children faced the heavy psychological burden of being unable to return to provide care. These geopolitical shifts effectively transformed the hope of resettlement into a new source of family fragmentation.

3.4.3. RESTRICTION OF RIGHTS IN INDONESIA

In the years when many youth expected to build their futures through education and employment, Afghan refugee youth in Indonesia remained legally and administratively constrained. While children under 18 could attend local schools, they were often denied the official diplomas necessary to pursue higher education nationally or internationally, leaving some refugee parents to view this opportunity as “useless”—as noted by one Indonesian stakeholder. The inability to own a bank account, a driver’s license, a SIM card, or property made navigating daily life feel suffocating. There was a deep awareness of the disparity in structural rights: While a few refugee informants expressed empathy for the poverty faced by many local Indonesians, they also felt the weight of a legal status that completely denied them basic human participation.

[25] Missbach, 2017b; Susetyo, 2018

[26] Gil et al., 2025

3.4.4. THE GEOGRAPHY OF SUPPORT AND ITS GAPS

In Indonesia, a refugee's daily experience was heavily shaped by their housing type and location, which typically divided them into two groups: those living in supervised community houses managed by the IOM and "independent refugees" who lived on their own, usually supported by remittances from relatives or friends abroad.^[27] While IOM shelters were located across the country—including Jakarta, Tangerang, Batam, Makassar, and Kupang—those living outside Greater Jakarta felt significantly more isolated. They faced severely limited access to programs, as most external organizations operated centrally in Greater Jakarta, leaving those in remote areas to join online only when opportunities arose.

Outside the capital region, the IOM routinely operated as the sole provider of activities in supervised accommodations. This dynamic effectively perpetuated the chronic dependency created by the systemic choices of the refugee regime,^[28] offering residents little to no alternative avenues for engagement. Another recurring theme was that a history of living in closed detention centers run by immigration authorities with strict movement restrictions had created a lasting language barrier;^[29] because interaction with locals was previously limited, many struggled to learn Bahasa Indonesia. Even as restrictions eased following Presidential Regulation No. 125/2016 and refugees were

gradually released from detention centers into supervised IOM accommodations, the psychological impact remained. One refugee leader living in an IOM accommodation noted that some youth felt too demotivated to engage with locals or learn practical skills, overwhelmed by the hopelessness of their uncertainty. This underscored that the first years of arrival represented the most critical, high-motivation window for structural intervention.

In contrast, "independent" refugees, particularly in Jakarta, Tangerang, and Cisarua, generally possessed greater freedom of movement and access to support. Better public transportation in these areas opened pathways to various resources, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) heavily concentrated their operations in these urban centers. Keegan et al.^[30] documented that "independent" refugees often spoke better Bahasa Indonesia and felt more connected to the local community. However, this concentration of services in Greater Jakarta revealed a different structural limitation:

Despite the presence of multiple organizations, the available support remained deeply inadequate to meet the community's actual needs. It was precisely this gap that forced Refugee-Led Initiatives and Organizations (RLI/Os) to grow organically from within the community.

[27] Keegan et al., 2025

[28] Xu, 2024

[29] Missbach, A., 2017a

[30] Keegan et al., 2025:14

Alongside local CSOs, these self-governed initiatives became vital lifelines, providing informal education and community protection despite their perpetual resource scarcity. Nevertheless, while urban settings fostered an environment of self-reliance, these “independent” communities faced distinct financial challenges of their own.

3.4.5. FINANCIAL PRECARITY AND THE BURDEN OF SPONSORSHIP

Life in Indonesia varied significantly based on financial precarity, as financial matters were not merely a material issue; money was explicitly tied to feelings of guilt, shame, pressure, and the fear of abandonment. Participants consistently expressed deep concern over rising costs in the contemporary economy. For “independent” refugees, survival depended heavily on the kindness of relatives or friends abroad. This reliance created a cycle of guilt and pressure; with no clear finish line in sight, some sponsors began to question the long-term viability of their support. As one refugee youth shared during a focus group discussion:

“

Those people are like, “Okay, we're helping you, but the helping turns out to be pointless. You guys are not going anywhere. Will you be able to pay me back?” That's the question (from them). And those people who are

supporting us are feeling less motivated to support us. And my parents are worried that the day might come when they no longer support us. And what are we going to do then?[...] They either say it directly or give signals that they're tired of sending (money). They're like, “Find a solution for yourself.” I mean, at some points, I give them the right (to feel that). Even I'm tired. I mean, who's not tired? [...] They have their own family to support, and they have a family there to support. They cannot only support us. It's very hard for them, especially if there is no work or job in the country where our supporter is.

(Young Woman, FGD)

For those without external networks, the situation was even more precarious. Relying on local organizations for short-term assistance, which often lasted only three months, created a state of constant, high-stakes anxiety regarding basic needs like rent and food. This local scarcity was drastically exacerbated by a global shift in humanitarian aid: the reduction of international funding, specifically following changes in U.S. foreign policy and decreased humanitarian budgets under the Trump administration, led to shrinking programs and services across the board, including those provided by the UNHCR.

Consequently, as systemic support faded, the psychological and financial burden shifted heavily back onto the refugees themselves and their increasingly exhausted social networks.

3.4.6. “THE STOLEN YOUTH” AND THE CYCLE OF EXHAUSTION

The feeling of being “stuck” for years manifested physically in the disrupted eating and sleeping patterns of the youth. One stakeholder shared a heartbreaking story of a refugee who stopped eating entirely for a week, having lost the will to live, and only resumed eating after many days of persuasion. This psychological weight frequently translated into chronic insomnia; haunted by thoughts of the future, many youth remained awake until the early hours of the morning. Even when they did sleep, they did not wake up feeling recovered. In community learning centers, the physical toll was highly visible: a refugee leader observed how students sat with their heads on their tables, their body weight dropped, and dark spots appeared under their eyes.

In the IOM accommodation, another refugee leader noted many youth slept until midday, exhausted by a reality that offered nothing to look forward to. One refugee youth metaphorically described the pressure:



I had both Taliban and ISIS above my head at the same time.

(Young Woman, Interview)

One of the deepest pains expressed by the youth was watching themselves, their children, or their younger siblings grow up in a system that tightly restricted their potential. They felt their “golden years” were being actively wasted, as they were barred from formal education and career building. Most refugee informants described a sense of “stolen youth” or “stolen childhood” where the biological clock kept ticking while they remained unable to answer the developmental demands of time.

Some sought to complete the GED (General Educational Development) test, an alternative higher secondary certificate from the US covering four subjects (Social Studies, Reasoning Through Language Arts, Math, and Science),^[31] or the similar “Elite” program (identified by a refugee youth as the Australian equivalent of the GED) to prove high-school academic knowledge. However, not all refugees could pass the test, and after they graduated, they wondered whether the qualifications were actually beneficial. This lack of continuity—consisting of a massive gap between completing education and being able to use it for work, higher education, or legal mobility—contributed to despair and made learning feel disconnected from a meaningful future.

If there had been a set timeline, even a mandatory five-year wait, they could have planned long-term. Without certainty, the very act of planning and pursuing education felt “pointless”. This was further

[31] GED, n.d.

exacerbated by unpredictable resettlement patterns and constant exposure to social media, where youth routinely compared their lives to those of former refugee peers and other people abroad who were traveling, studying, or launching careers. As one informant lamented:

“

Yeah, my friends are in a third country. We came in the same year, even in the same month. Why, what happened to us that we are still here?

(Refugee Leader, Woman, Interview)

3.4.7. HOUSEHOLD TENSIONS AND THE BURDEN OF THE “SECONDARY PARENT”

Structurally, youth were caught in a profound paradox: they were barred from achieving multiple markers of adult independence, yet some found themselves forced into immediate adult caregiving roles. Because parents were legally prohibited from working, eldest children frequently stepped up as secondary parents. This reality sharply contradicted both traditional Afghan family structures—where fathers shouldered primary structural and financial responsibilities—and the “Western media stereotype” of youth centered on “fun” and “study” that the refugee youth saw from Western films. Instead, these youth managed daily household chores and raised younger

siblings, leaving little time for personal development or community programming. Youth who had become parents themselves experienced this structural strain with particular intensity, especially single parents navigating childcare without extended family networks present in Indonesia.

Simultaneously, the youth had to watch their parents grow older and more fragile. Without the ability to work or stay active, many parents experienced deep frustration that manifested as verbal arguments and intense tension at home. One refugee youth explained how their mother’s emotional state directly dictated their own:

“

When you look at your parents, their tension and everything, that affects you directly. And you just, you're like, I'm done with life. You know, just either finish everything or give us a purpose to, you know, live. [...] Even if I get out of the house and I'm feeling good, but then I come home, and I see my mom not in a good state, that'll affect me, like, insanely. So, if there were activities for my mom to get out of the house rather than me, that would be much better. If my mom's feeling good and happy, I'm good and happy even if I'm staying at home.

Young Woman, FGD

This atmosphere of anxiety was not limited to the immediate family unit. One Indonesian stakeholder observed that in supervised IOM accommodations, the combination of negative thoughts, a lack of structured activities, and restricted movement frequently led to conflict between community members. Whether in the private home or the shared shelter, many youth remained trapped within recurring cycles of psychological fatigue and emotional distress.

3.4.8. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS: RESOURCES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND INFORMATION

Another major issue is related directly to a lack of resources, opportunities, or clear lines of information. Both refugee leaders and the youth conveyed how some youth were highly eager to learn, but they did not know where to start. Others lived in remote cities, where opportunities and information networks were not as vast as those in Greater Jakarta. Many did not possess a proper digital device or internet service to continue their studies or pursue remote work. Their homes were often overcrowded, filled with “negative energy”, and suffered from poor internet connectivity.

Furthermore, some wanted to join physical classes, but there was no transport allowance provided by the organizer, and they could not afford the cost of transportation themselves. In cases where a transport allowance was provided, the amount sometimes failed to completely,

cover the actual cost. Others simply experienced profound burnout after long continuous journeys.

Indonesian stakeholders also admitted that the number of participants permitted in community programs was usually limited due to the available budget, meaning only a few individuals could join. Moreover, severe financial instability frequently forced families to relocate mid-program to find cheaper rent (such as moving from Jakarta to Cisarua), forcing youth to abandon their ongoing studies. Sometimes, the core issue was simply the unavailability of safe, affordable physical space to open a new community initiative.

3.4.9. DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY: FEELING LIMITED, UNMOTIVATED, AND LONELY

While digital spaces were often framed by outsiders as a solution to physical restrictions, refugee youth found these opportunities fraught with isolation, boredom, and technical difficulties. Many informants reported that online learning, while available, was experienced as a lonely, isolating process. Without the social accountability and peer support found in offline classrooms, the self-driven discipline required for digital courses became a major source of mental fatigue.

Beyond education, digital opportunities were frequently locked away by rigid legal requirements. Youth who attempted to open online marketplace accounts, such as on Shopee or Tokopedia, were forced to

abandon the idea because they lacked the Indonesian National ID (KTP) or a verified bank account required for registration. While some circumvented these barriers by using digital e-wallets like DANA or OVO, they remained unable to access premium features because they could not verify their identities without a KTP. This left them entirely reliant on the goodwill of Indonesian acquaintances to facilitate basic economic transactions, further reinforcing a painful cycle of dependency and expanding their vulnerability to exploitation, fraud, or forced financial trade-offs.

3.4.10. THE FEELING OF BEING UNHEARD AND UNVALUED

This study also observed a distinct case study involving generational tension: when a group of youth attempted to launch a creative art program, they felt unvalued and unheard because older community leaders did not see the tangible value in creative outlets. This friction was heavily exacerbated by the drastic reduction in international funding in 2026, which left RLI/Os struggling simply to survive and forced them to strictly prioritize essential services over creative projects. As proposals for new programs went unanswered or were rejected by donors, youth were left with the sense that they possessed zero agency or control over their own community's future.

Moreover, field observations indicated that, even within informal learning or working environments, the social atmosphere was not always cooperative. Some refugee youth and leaders reported facing jealousy or disrespect from family and peers regarding their personal growth. One youth, now a single mother, recounted how her ex-husband scolded her for studying, reacting with anger whenever he saw her reading or writing. This created a double layer of harassment: individuals faced systemic deprivation from the state alongside personal deprivation within their own homes and immediate communities.

3.4.11. INTERNAL COMMUNITY STRUGGLES AND THE INFORMANTS' RESPONSE

Social pressure from within the refugee community stood out as another striking finding of this research. As documented by Bayani et al.,^[32] many community leaders reported facing pushback, harassment, and even cyberbullying for pursuing personal “success” or establishing initiatives such as learning centers. This internal resistance was deeply rooted in the fear that by appearing “too self-sufficient”, the community might be viewed by the UNHCR or third countries as less vulnerable, thereby reducing resettlement quotas for the entire group in Indonesia. This total lack of transparency^[33] regarding resettlement criteria led the community to create its own “certainties” through rumors—especially since the UNHCR primarily stated that

[32] Bayani et al., 2023

[33] Refugee Council of Australia, 2022

“vulnerability and protection needs” operated as the main criteria for resettlement.^[34]

As Keegan et al.^[35] suggested, “In the absence of information, refugees lose trust in the structures and authorities that are designed to support them.” Consequently, some RLOs suffer from a lack of volunteers, as many youth fear that being active will attract harassment or negatively impact their resettlement prospects. Nevertheless, field data suggest otherwise, as many active refugees have been successfully resettled. One refugee leader even took the initiative to seek direct clarification from UNHCR Indonesia, receiving confirmation that participation in refugee-led initiatives and learning opportunities does not negatively affect one’s resettlement status.

3.4.12. THE TRANSNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, CARE, AND “HOME”

For many, the initial decision to flee was driven by the hope of achieving the financial stability necessary to support both the family members who stayed behind and those who migrated. However, in the Indonesian context, this ambition remained almost impossible to fulfill. One informant articulated the resulting despair:



There are people living here (Indonesia) who have families in Afghanistan, their wives, their children, or maybe they are someone who has their parents to support. But because they cannot work here, they cannot support them. [...] And it puts more mental pressure on them. They thought to themselves, “I was in danger. So, I decided to leave, to find a place where I can support myself and my family, so that we can all live comfortably. But now I’m stuck here. They are stuck there, in a situation worse than when I left, and I can do nothing about it.”

Refugee Leader, Man, Interview

This distress was further exacerbated by the shifting nature of “home”, as the Afghan refugee community was characterized by a complex, multi-generational history of displacement. Many informants were born and raised in secondary host countries like Pakistan and Iran, while other family members had been resettled in Europe, the United States, Australia, or Canada. While all informants confirmed that the ongoing instability in Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban severely impacted their and their families’ mental well-being and behaviors, the intensity of this distress sometimes

[34] UNHCR, n.d.-a.

[35] Keegan et al., 2025:23

depended on the specific location of their loved ones or the specific identity they felt related to.

Furthermore, the escalating conflict in the region, particularly the 2026 U.S. and Israel military actions against Iran and the Pakistan-Taliban “Open War”,^[36] triggered fresh waves of acute anxiety and a profound shake in identity. One informant stated:

“

I was born in Pakistan. I was raised there. I was like, no, Pakistan is better... but not like this. [...] I've changed my mind, 180°. No, Pakistan (now) is not the way I think.

(Young Woman, FGD)

Interview findings further suggested that informants expressed a deep, localized grief regarding the treatment of women and girls under the Taliban, highlighting the sharp disparity between their own limited freedom in Indonesia and the total erasure of rights for their sisters back in their home country.

[36] Fong, 2026

3.5. INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: COPING STRATEGIES

3.5.1. REGAINING AGENCY AND NURTURING THE GROWTH MINDSET

Despite immense external pressures, the youth in this study actively reclaimed their agency by reframing their time in Indonesia as a period of preparation. Rather than succumbing to the pressure of the role of “passive victims”, most informants maintained their commitment and participation in initiatives because they believed it was the “right thing” to do. Some argued that by becoming more educated and resilient during transit, refugees were not sabotaging their future; instead, they were helping and benefiting themselves and their potential host countries.

Indeed, as resettlement opportunities remained strictly limited, Indonesian stakeholders also noted that complementary pathways—including labor mobility and education—could create opportunities for some skilled or English-proficient refugees, opening more pathways to third countries.

All informants demonstrated or explicitly described that they adopted a certain level of “growth mindset” as a vital survival strategy. Carol Dweck ^[37] defined a growth mindset as the belief that “one’s basic qualities can be cultivated through effort, strategy, and support from others”.

For these refugees, this meant viewing a “stuck” life as a situation that did not necessarily require the person to remain stagnant. One informant passionately explained how this perspective transformed her experience, and how having continuous opportunities helped foster this mindset:



All of us who are “stuck” in Indonesia, we need to go through this to understand some things... [...] You know, I always think to myself, if I were not in Indonesia, I would not be as experienced in certain things as I am now. I would not meet so many different people, and I would not understand so many different characters and personalities. I would not be able to, you know, I would not listen or hear a lot of stories about people. I would not understand what they're saying because I wouldn't be going through all that. [...] I think it gave me a lot more experience about how to feel, overall, about “living”. And in my opinion, if you keep saying, “Oh, I'm stuck, oh, life has stopped, it's not moving forward”, then the more stuck you will feel. [...] I have been fortunate to have all these opportunities. [...] If there were a possibility that these opportunities do not exist, and I would just be doing nothing, it would make

[37] Dweck, 2016

things so hard and so meaningless for me. My whole life right now revolves around the workshops, the opportunities for the refugees. Being a teacher, that's a good opportunity for me to teach other refugees. If none of these existed, I think I wouldn't be who I am today.

(Refugee Leader, Woman, FGD)



By seeking out education, volunteering, and positive social circles, these youth worked to change their internal condition despite pervasive legal restrictions. They operated on the belief that they would not “start from zero” once they left the country. As one informant conveyed:



At least we know something [...] we know how to write or speak in English.

(Young Woman, FGD)

And another informant noted:



The more educated you are... the more we can change.

(Young Woman, FGD)

Crucially, the data suggested that without this mindset, even practical skills frequently went to waste. One refugee leader observed that some acquaintances who were fluent in English remained entirely inactive because they viewed their skills as “meaningless” within a highly restrictive environment. In contrast, proactive youth saw that same proficiency as a potential bridge to a student visa or a head start in a future career. This suggested that while skills were necessary, it was the belief in the ultimate utility of those skills that drove the youth to engage with the world. However, this internal drive was not a constant state; it remained a fluctuating daily struggle.

For many, motivation was deeply fragile and easily collapsed under the weight of even minor external pressures. Yet, many informants expressed that while they often felt scared to join new activities, the eventual psychological benefits reinforced their resolve. Interestingly, for a small number of informants, the very state of being “stuck” acted as a direct catalyst for growth, where structural limitations were viewed as a personal challenge to stay busy and find meaning. This highlighted how youth constructed meaning and filled their time became vital strategies for protecting their dignity and self-worth.

3.5.2. HAVING A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM AND FAITH

Informants emphasized that surrounding themselves with positive friends, family, and colleagues who shared a growth mindset was a deliberate and necessary choice. A strong support system provided both a material and emotional safety net: Offering constant encouragement, sharing information about new opportunities, or simply providing solidarity among those facing the same structural struggles. As one participant noted:



If they can wait, we can also wait.

(Young Woman, FGD)

These social bonds served as a vital reminder that they were not alone in their displacement. While some informants, particularly those without extended family networks in Indonesia, expressed a habit of intentional self-reliance to protect themselves, they still acknowledged that social interaction remained essential for temporary emotional relief.

For many, this social support was also deeply anchored by spiritual faith. Belief in a higher plan allowed youth to derive purpose from their daily activities rather than seeing them as pointless circles. Prayer and Du'a served as essential tools for the heart during moments of acute

anxiety, helping youth to let go of what they could not control and find the structural strength to focus on what they could alter.



“Leave everything to Allah, maybe it’s for the good”, (that’s) a sentence we use a lot.

(Young Woman, FGD)

3.5.3. FEELING NEEDED AND APPRECIATED

The feeling of being needed and appreciated by their families and the broader community acted as a powerful motivator. By taking on structural roles as teachers or community leaders, youth experienced a sense of shared responsibility and a renewed belief in their ability to succeed and protect others, which resulted in greater psychological well-being and heightened self-efficacy.^[38]

For refugee teachers, the responsibility of preparing for difficult lessons or motivating uninspired students forced them to actively maintain their own enthusiasm. One refugee leader noted that continuously upskilling themselves felt like the only viable way to support their loved ones. Ultimately, seeing the tangible, positive impact of their work on other people provided a sense of accomplishment that directly counteracted the deep uselessness one typically felt during prolonged limbo.

[38] Keegan et al., 2025

3.5.4. KEEPING ROUTINES AND POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

Finally, the maintenance of a rigorous daily routine acted as a strong protective shield for mental well-being. The youth filled their days with high-volume activity, such as going to the gym, listening to music, dancing, playing sports together, joining workshops, and reading motivational books. Several studies have shown that a “secondary routine”, such as a self-imposed schedule with specific, measurable targets, ^[39] creates a vital sense of predictability. This structure effectively removed the overwhelming burden of daily decision-making and provided a necessary psychological anchor during times of extreme geopolitical uncertainty.

Figure 2. From left to right: Yemeni, Sudanese, and Afghan Hazara refugee participants tour the Institute of Technology Bandung campus alongside Indonesian peers during a two-day joint training organized by Emplace. (Source: Emplace’s archive)



[39] Arlinghaus & Johnston, 2018; Hou et al., 2020

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1. CONCLUSION

For refugee youth in Indonesia, the experience of uncertainty or “limbo” was a complex, daily struggle to preserve dignity, particularly during the critical developmental stage of emerging adulthood. This study sought to understand how young Afghan refugees experienced this daily reality, revealing that limbo was felt as a profoundly repetitive, restricted routine where youth were structurally caught between a suspension of personal independence and a forced acceleration into adult roles. This **long-term uncertainty directly degraded their mental health and well-being**, manifesting in persistent anxiety, feelings of entrapment, chronic insomnia, and a heavy emotional numbness born from prolonged waiting.

Furthermore, this endless waiting heavily **fractured their motivation to learn and stay engaged**; without a predictable timeline, transparent resettlement process, or official recognition of their education, the act of planning often felt entirely pointless, causing demotivation, emotional fatigue, and tension within refugee-led spaces.

Despite these severe systemic weights, **youth actively deployed specific individual and collective coping strategies to protect their self-worth**. Individually, they reframed their transit as a period of strategic preparation by nurturing a growth mindset, anchoring themselves in rigid daily routines, and turning to deep spiritual faith. Collectively, they built resilience by stepping into roles as teachers and community leaders, relying on peer support networks, and organically growing refugee-led initiatives to create their own opportunities.

Ultimately, while these purposeful activities transformed forced inactivity into a period of mindful distraction and skill-building, these community efforts existed within a highly fragile ecosystem. As this research demonstrated, no amount of creative, educational, or grassroots programming could fully mitigate the systemic trauma of displacement. The fundamental psychological burden, deeply rooted in legal restrictions and the structural absence of a clear future, continued to loom over every activity, reminding the youth of their precarious standing.

4.2. RECOMMENDATION

To truly honor the resilience and meaning-making efforts of refugee youth, stakeholders must recognize that while community initiatives significantly improve quality of life during limbo, they cannot fully resolve the psychological burden of legal invisibility. Grassroots programs act as vital daily anchors, but the systemic weight of displacement will only be lifted through meaningful policy shifts and structural transparency. Programming recommendations must, therefore, be paired with high-level advocacy to address the root causes of refugee distress, moving the international community beyond temporary relief toward pathways of self-reliance—such as expanded resettlement, labor mobility, student visas, and local rights to work and education.

Achieving true progress requires cross-sector collaboration and meaningful refugee participation to overcome structural incapacities.

To this end, the following targeted recommendations are proposed:

4.2.1. FOR UNHCR, IOM, AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN AND INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Expand access to safe physical spaces, learning and capacity-development opportunities, digital devices, and reliable internet services for youth living outside Greater Jakarta or in remote accommodations. Securing equitable access to these resources is essential to fostering a growth mindset and sustaining personal development across the entire demographic.
- Actively counter community rumors suggesting that active participation or community leadership jeopardizes resettlement prospects. Facilitate transparent, institutional dialogues directly with refugees to protect active youth from internal harassment and peer pushback.
- Invest in initiatives that provide immediate mental relief while simultaneously building vocational and language readiness tailored to third-country labor mobility demands. Where possible, integrate small stipends or skill-based allowances to incentivize participation among youth currently immobilized by hopelessness.
- Minimize drastic cuts to youth-centered programs and organizational funding, ensuring that learning pathways remain continuous, predictable, and structurally supported.
- Prioritize meaningful participation where refugees remain the center of decision-making actors, especially in matters that affect the refugees' lives.

4.2.2. FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF INDONESIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY

- Building on the 2026 advocacy efforts led by the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) to revise Presidential Regulation No. 125/2016 on Refugees,^[40] the government is recommended formalize the right to engage in informal sector work and significantly broaden access to formal state education.
- Consider the possibility of allowing refugees access to essential daily infrastructure, including the ability to open basic bank accounts, register SIM cards, and obtain driver's licenses. Easing these administrative friction points would drastically reduce the mental pressure of total dependency and minimize vulnerability to financial exploitation.

4.2.3. FOR RLOS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

- Structure community volunteer positions as formal professional experiences. Framing internal roles (e.g., community teachers or project coordinators) as professional CV entries directly supports youth seeking alternative pathways like labor mobility, where practical experience is highly valued, as noted by stakeholders.
- Promote and integrate regular physical activity and sports engagement into refugee-led programming.

- Create dedicated spaces for young people to design project visions and exercise decision-making autonomy, pairing these opportunities with structured mentorship and leadership coaching from older community advocates.
- Design community initiatives that intentionally include older adults and parents alongside youth. Decreasing the isolation of parents can lower overall household arguments, reduce cumulative tension at home, and stabilize the family unit as a whole.

4.2.4. FOR REFUGEE YOUTH

- Actively frame daily tasks, hobbies, and learning centers as purposeful endeavors to combat feelings of uselessness or stagnation during limbo. Documenting and tracking small, incremental milestones of personal progress can serve as a vital psychological buffer.
- Intentionally build structured daily schedules, actively seek out informal learning opportunities, and surround oneself with a growth-oriented social circle to insulate personal mental well-being against the chronic stresses of displacement.

[40] Pudjiastuti et al., 2026

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