About the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies

Introduction

The Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies aims to respond to contemporary challenges of conflict and climate induced displacement. We are driven by a transformative agenda that places social justice and human rights as core aspects of our work that will empower refugee voices and build local capacities. Through a commitment to multidisciplinary scholarship, the Centre is committed to bringing together academia, refugee communities, government, civil society, and the private sector to collaboratively work on meaningful and tangible projects on current and future forced displacement.

Welcome to the February 2022 newsletter from the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS). These newsletters – produced on a quarterly basis – are intended to update partners and supporters on our work, as well as showcase upcoming areas of focus. In addition, the newsletter provides updates on some of the existing research priorities, and other areas in which CAPRS has been involved.

As CAPRS continues to streamline our work and focus over the coming months and years, we look forward to sharing more exciting content and updates with you. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to the CAPRS team at caprs@auckland.ac.nz should you have any queries.
A message from CAPRS Co-Directors

Striving for impact to improve refugee protection in Asia and the Pacific

Over the past six months, CAPRS has continued to expand its areas of engagement, whilst simultaneously bedding down the existing pillars of its work. In both New Zealand and across the region, our team has pushed the envelope to ensure that CAPRS furthers the debate around access to higher education and protection. Through engagements with national, regional and international fora, we continue to ensure that our work is grounded in the needs and direction of refugees and those impacted by displacement.

The work of CAPRS Non-Residential Fellows continues to progress, with our three fellows actively working towards the conversion of their PHDs to impact-oriented policy papers. Covering a range of issues including female refugee inclusion, access to education, and engagement with governments, our Fellows have showcased a desire to take their work beyond academia. We very much look forward to continuing this engagement with our fellows over the coming month as we move into the final stages of the Programme.

Since 2020 a Task Force, which CAPRS lead and which brings together representatives from UNHCR and Times Higher Education (THE) has been working to introduce the terms “forcibly displaced / refugee / asylum seeker / stateless” to be included in the list of underserved groups as part of the social impact ranking assessment SDG 10. We are very excited that the outcome of these efforts will be announced during the upcoming THE Social Impact Summit, in April 2022.

In other updates, it is with great pleasure to announce the promotion of Jay to Professor at the University of Auckland. This achievement speaks volumes of Jay’s commitment to academic excellence, and his ongoing contributions to the field of forced displacement. In addition, Gül will be relocating to the USA in July 2022 after 11 years living in Singapore and teaching 9 years at NTU. She will continue her role as the co-director of CAPRS, while working closely now with universities in the USA for an inclusive higher education and global partnerships across regions.

As always, we wish to extend our thanks to all who continue to contribute to CAPRS work and vision. It is only through collective action, wisdom and partnerships that we are able to make the necessary impacts within the region for refugees and forcibly displaced persons.

Gül İnanç- Jay Marlowe

on behalf of CAPRS Team
Overview

On 20 June 2021, CAPRS announced the launch of our Non-Residential Fellowship programme. This opportunity provides funding for postgraduate researchers to convert their theses into action-orientated policy papers, allowing them to present their findings with key stakeholders, and the opportunity to publish their work with Routledge. CAPRS is thrilled to have brought on board three wonderful and highly-accomplished scholars. They are:

**Dr. Farhana Rahman**

Farhana received her PhD from the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Cambridge. Through feminist ethnographic research, Farhana’s PhD focused on how the mass exodus of the Rohingya to the refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, has transformed Rohingya gender relations and roles in displacement – specifically, how forced migration has affected the gendered subjectivities and lived experiences of Rohingya women. Her peer-reviewed articles and chapters have been published in various journals and edited volumes, including Journal of Refugee Studies, Feminist Review, and Journal of International Women’s Studies.

**Dr. Grant Mitchell**

Grant Mitchell has extensive experience in international refugee and asylum policy, including working with civil society, UN bodies, and governments in Africa, Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East on the development and implementation of alternatives to immigration detention. A social anthropologist, his PhD thesis focused on how civil society can effectively engage governments for rights-based policy change. The model of engagement he developed is “a potentially life-changing contribution” for human rights advocacy.

**Dr. Tracey Donohue**

Tracey is a PhD graduate from the UNSW School of Education. Her doctoral research was a participatory action research project with teachers in Indonesia focused on facilitating language teacher identities for unqualified teachers experiencing urban transitory displacement. Tracey is passionate about the transformative potential of education for people in marginalising situations, both as a means of enhancing their current psycho-social well-being, as well as broadening the range of their future opportunities.

Fellows are expected to have completed their policy paper conversion by mid-April, and attend a virtual Forum. Here fellows will present their findings and recommendations to key stakeholders. This workshop will be announced and publicised at a later date at: [www.auckland.ac.nz/en/education/research/research-centres-and-units/the-centre-for-asia-pacific-refugee-studies/caprnon-residential-fellowship.html](http://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/education/research/research-centres-and-units/the-centre-for-asia-pacific-refugee-studies/caprnon-residential-fellowship.html)
Spotlight Interview – Mr. Lee Han Shih

This issue's Spotlight Interview is with Mr. Lee Han Shih, the founder of the Singapore-based Potato Productions, humanitarian and social entrepreneur

What is Potato Productions, and how did it come about?
Potato, or rather sweet potato, is my nickname as it resembles the sound of my Chinese name, Han Shih. I started Potato Productions as a single magazine publisher in 2006 after nearly three decades as a journalist, and it has grown, somewhat haphazardly, into a group of companies doing a range of very different things.

What are some of the things that Potato Productions are involved in?
Potato Production companies are engaged in content, publishing, comics, education, quite a variety of digital business, refugee work and fashion design for the disabled.

Potato Productions has recently launched a range of new initiatives including Borderless 360. Can you tell us more about these initiatives?
B360, as it is commonly called, has two initiatives – content, as a voice for refugees; and education. We are working with a partner, Open Door Policy, to source and train suitable candidates for IT work for large tech firms.

Potato Productions provided the seed-funding support to establish CAPRS. Why did you think CAPRS was a needed institution?
Potato has been involved in refugee work for some time, but not directly linked with a body dedicated to it. When Gul (CAPRS Co-Founder and Co-Director) pitched the idea to me, I felt she was the right person for us to invest our funds with her venture, and thus to CAPRS.

What has been your past engagement with refugees and forcibly displaced persons?
We provide mostly tech-related education to various bodies involved in refugees. One of our products is a self-contained school in a box that, once opened up, provides a wide range of education via a small single-chip computer and tablets.

Do you think there is a bigger role for the private sector in strengthening refugee protection?
Certainly. But I tend to look towards situations where the private sector would find it beneficial to do things for refugees. One example is that there are numerous capable people within refugee communities and they can be an asset to the private sector. The key is to locate, train and provide a platform where this can be done.

What suggestions do you have for academia, civil society and the private sector to be able to work better together for social impact?
Look to create situations where it is not one-sided (such as donation) but where both sides can benefit. It is not possible to sustain single-sided efforts.

As a former journalist, what reflections do you have on the role of the media in the Asia Pacific to promote improvements to the lives of refugees?
We all live busy lives. Any move to promote the cause of refugees must be something that can sustain interest among readers. And it must create narratives where the readers will find it beneficial to work with refugees and not see them as a drag on resources.

What is one thing on your 2022 wishlist?
Blockchain. I see this – not necessarily cryptocurrency – as a way to provide a lot of services currently not possible or economical to refugees. Potato is working with various partners to study how blockchain can be used to provide payment, identity and other services.
Civil Society Engagement and Capacity Building

By Evan Jones

From 10-13 December 2021, CAPRS partnered with the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), and the Danish Refugee Council Diaspora Programme to host the Professional Development Short Course in Advocacy for the Afghan Diaspora. This course brought together twenty five participants from across Australia, Europe and the United States of America to share their experience and expertise, as well as build upon their advocacy potentials. In the context of the recent changes in Afghanistan, and the deteriorating humanitarian situation, this course provided a platform for the diaspora to connect and to build the platform of knowledge necessary for effective advocacy.

The multi-disciplinary course was fortunate to draw upon a number of experienced resource persons from the Danish Refugee Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Media Support, Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC), the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, Action for Afghanistan, ADSP, and CAPRS. On behalf of the CAPRS team, Professor Gül İnanç supported the conceptualisation and development of the course, whilst NRF Fellow Dr. Grant Mitchell conducted a session entitled ‘Engaging with governments’.

The four day course commenced with a session on human rights, followed by an introduction to advocacy. These sessions provided a ‘refresher’ for participants, and laid the groundwork for the remainder of the course. The agenda went on to cover a range of topics including how to advocate with the European Union, planning for advocacy, problem tree analysis, mapping stakeholders, engaging with the United Nations, how to conduct successful campaigns, utilising social media, engaging with the media, and finally, developing advocacy strategies.

As a follow-up to the course, the project partners have commenced work towards the development of an Advocacy Toolkit for the Diaspora. This document will serve as a ‘how to guide’ for diaspora groups and individuals to engage in strategic advocacy. It is expected that this toolkit will serve as a useful reference document for members of the Afghan diaspora both in Europe, but also in North America and Australia.

As the situation in Afghanistan continues to unfold, CAPRS looks forward to strengthening engagement with civil society organisations, diaspora organisations, and others. Only through partnerships and building a bridge between academia and other groups can we be better placed to achieve tangible and impactful change.
Recent / Upcoming Publications and Events


Inanc, Gul & Lewis, Themba (co-eds), Forced Displacement, NGOs and Asia Pacific, Routledge, January 2021.

Inanc, Gul & Stulgaitis, Manal (co-authored), “Refugee Protection in Southeast Asia: Complementary Pathways for Refugees through Higher Education Institutions”, Rethinking Refugee Protection in Southeast Asia; Between Responsibility and Sovereignty, co-ed by Reyvi Marinas, Susan Kneebone, Antje Missbach, (publisher and publishing date will be announced later).


Marlowe, J. & Allen, J. (in press) Relationality and online interpersonal research: ethical, methodological and pragmatic extensions, Qualitative Social Work.


CAPRS will host panels and/or be represented at the following events as part of our inclusive higher education program:

- Times Higher Education Social Impact Summit, April 2022
- Times Higher Education Digital Universities Week UK, March 2022
- Times Higher Education Digital Universities Week US, May 2022
- UNESCO World Higher Education Conference, May 2022

Research Updates

**Professor Jay Marlowe**

Amongst a range of different research projects currently being pursued by Dr Marlowe, his two primary studies are:

- **Social Network Analysis**: This project is currently live with just over 100 organisations who work with people from refugee backgrounds invited to participate.

- **Settlement Outcomes: Integrated Data Infrastructure**: Working in partnership with Dr Arezoo Malihi, the project aims to assess the settlement outcomes of more than 9000 refugees over the past ten years. Utilising the vast amounts of data from New Zealand's Integrated Data Infrastructure, the research will help to help map refugee experiences in New Zealand across employment, welfare, health, and education to establish protective and risk factors for positive settlement outcomes.

**Arezoo Malihi – CAPRS Research Fellow**

CAPRS Research Fellow Arezoo Malihi has recently been successful in securing an Auckland Medical Research Foundation (AMRF) Postdoctoral Fellowship. Commencing in January 2022, the fellowship will build upon Arezoo's existing research entitled "Zarintai Arezoo Malihi," which explores mental health service access of refugees to New Zealand from their arrival in the country. It also seeks to understand their journey after receiving / not receiving these services in terms of employment, income and education.

International literature shows that refugees are at a higher risk than the general population for developing mental health issues that could potentially affect their social and physical wellbeing, employment, and general life satisfaction. Despite the government's commitment to increasing the refugee quota intake to 1,500 persons a year, and family reunification to 300 a year, there is no solid evidence about how NZ refugees are supported and looked after by our health system for mental health issues along their settlement journey. As such, Arezoo's research aims to create impact and inform the policies and practices that improve refugees' mental wellbeing and mental health, which will eventually improve settlement outcomes in this growing, understudied, and marginalised population.

Results of this research will be published in research articles by the end of 2022 and 2023.

**Policy Equality Advocacy for refugees in New Zealand**

In February 2022, the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies and the Asylum Seeker Support Trust (ASST) released the *Safe Start, Fair Future Report*. Aotearoa New Zealand's recent humanitarian responses to forced migration have included significant policy successes. These included increasing the annual Refugee Quota for the first time in three decades, removing discriminatory restrictions on African and Middle Eastern refugees, providing Critical Purpose Visas in response to the Afghanistan crisis, and allocating funds to ensure the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC) is more accessible. However, one group of humanitarian migrants is often ignored i.e. Convention Refugees and people seeking asylum. When they are considered, the focus is often on preventing their arrival rather than ensuring their safety and connection to the community.
As such, the report addresses the key gaps in the current policy settings that discriminate against Convention Refugees and people seeking asylum. The Safe Start, Fair Future report calls for equal access to support for Convention Refugees – regardless of how they have come to arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, the report calls for the assurance of appropriate support for people seeking asylum during the refugee status determination process.

The SAFE and FAIR recommendations are aimed at ensuring people have the opportunity for the best possible start to rebuilding their new lives in Aotearoa New Zealand. The full report can be found on our website at https://bit.ly/34slnp9

This project would not have been possible without the collective efforts and expertise of the Asylum Seeker Support Trust and the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies teams. In particular, we would like to recognise the invaluable contributions of Murdoch Stephens for leading the drafting of the report, Bernard Sama for contributing his research and expertise, and Sue Osborne for copyediting. Special thanks as well to Michelle Ferns for her support in the conceptualisation, drafting and engagement throughout the process.

We would like to express our gratitude to Mahsheed Mahjor from New Zealand Red Cross and Sue Elliott for her guidance and feedback on the development of this report. We would also like to acknowledge the work of the Asylum Seeker Equality Project and the team at MakeReady.

Podcasts

In September 2021, CAPRS Co-Founder Rêz Gardî launched the CAPRS ‘Unfiltered’ Podcast Series. This podcast was created as a platform for unfiltered honest discussions about issues that impact the lives of those forcibly displaced and possible solutions from a range of perspectives. In addition, the podcast both empowers and amplifies refugee voices around the globe, contributing to increasing awareness about the situations for forcible displaced people. Future podcasts will engage voices from the field, researchers, academics, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

The first episode features acclaimed writer, author, and activist Behrouz Boochani. The second episode explores the issues of freedom of religion and women’s rights, with renowned Syrian activist Rana Ahmed. Finally, the most recent podcast is with UNSW Professor Jane McAdam. Discussing issues of climate, disasters and displacement, the episode explored Professor McAdam’s remarkable contribution to the field.

All podcasts are available on the CAPRS website, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Whooshkaa, and other podcast platforms.