



CGRS | Center for Gender & Refugee Studies

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



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 to ensure 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.

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.



Professor Karen Musalo
Director



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Responding to the climate emergency

CGRS is taking a leading role in the movement to expand access to protection for those displaced by the impacts of climate change. We are developing practical guidance and country conditions documentation to support advocates representing climate-displaced people. To complement our [climate practice advisory](#), we are now developing an evidentiary toolkit to support advocates representing a group of recently arrived Indigenous Miskito asylum seekers displaced from their homes in Honduras and Nicaragua due to in part the impacts of climate change.

Because the existing law of protection is limited, we are advocating for new legal frameworks that provide broader protections for those impacted by climate change. Towards that end, this year, we led the drafting and filing of a historic [amicus curiae brief](#) with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights arguing for a protection agenda for climate-displaced individuals. At the request of the Court, CGRS's Felipe Navarro [testified](#) in Barbados in April 2024 at one of the three public hearings the Court is holding in order to hear arguments prior to issuing a formal Advisory Opinion on the Climate Emergency and Human Rights.

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 develop practice advisories explaining key areas of the law and provide country conditions evidence critical to building strong asylum cases. Our online library generates curated litigation support materials, pulling from more than **900** country- and issue-specific resources. Because credible expert testimony is vital to winning asylum claims, CGRS developed a free searchable online expert witness database that allows attorneys to identify and easily connect with over **400** vetted country specialists and health professionals.

In 2023-2024:



We provided technical assistance in more than **7,000** cases.



We connected advocates with experts through the database **3,159** times.



Staff conducted **84** webinars, workshops, and other presentations, reaching an additional **5,900** advocates nationwide.



We disseminated **53** new CGRS-authored resources, including in-depth practice advisories, country-condition toolkits, and model briefings.

Championing fair and humane policies for asylum seekers

Officials from the White House, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Justice seek out CGRS's expertise on asylum, inviting us to participate in stakeholder meetings. We take a leading role in national coalitions and submit in-depth comments on immigration-related rulemaking. We also provide guidance for organizations and individuals submitting comments to proposed regulations. We published **20** policy resources, including factsheets, rapid response materials, comments to the Executive Branch, and submissions to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. We also produced select resources in Spanish, French, and Haitian Creole.

Impact Litigation: Holding the United States accountable to international norms

CGRS takes on high stakes impact cases to ensure that the United States complies with its international and domestic legal obligations to protect refugees. We do this through systemic challenges as well as intervening as counsel, co-counsel, or *amicus* in select individual asylum cases. This year, we filed three legal challenges in federal courts to the Biden administration's asylum ban—a rule that blocks access to asylum for the majority of individuals seeking refuge at our southwest border. We also filed a [federal complaint](#) against the Department of Homeland Security Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties for violating its own custody standards by detaining asylum seekers in open-air detention sites along the California-Mexico border without access to basic needs. Additionally, we took the lead in select individual asylum cases which will determine the scope of protection for those fleeing gender-based and gang violence.

2023 Litigation

- We were co-counsel in **9** major national impact litigation matters.
- We were counsel or co-counsel in **14** individual asylum cases at the Circuit Courts of Appeals, the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), immigration courts and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- We filed **3** *amicus* briefs in the Ninth Circuit Courts of Appeals.

Sought-out experts: 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 **168** [media](#) pieces in national and international press. CGRS faculty published op-eds, letters to the editor, and other commentary in the [Los Angeles Times](#), [New York Times](#), and [The Progressive Magazine](#).

Regional approach to migration

We aim to ensure that U.S. migration policies prioritize human rights and access to meaningful protection. CGRS works 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.

CGRS has expertise in human rights conditions in the countries from which many asylum seekers flee, including Mexico, Haiti, and northern Central America. We regularly engage in fact-finding trips to deepen our knowledge of these regions. This year, in collaboration with the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic, CGRS carried out a second fact-finding trip to Honduras (the first being in Fall 2022). The trip dove-tailed with our climate work, as its focus was on climate-related displacement.



CGRS and Refugee and Human Rights Clinic fact-finding delegation to Honduras March 2024.

Trips such as these, and other initiatives, provide us with the opportunity to work with partners in the region in order to develop country conditions evidence, including expert witness declarations on particular countries and issues which provide critical evidence to support asylum claims.

Haiti Justice Partnership

In March, CGRS Legal Director and Adjunct Professor Blaine Bookey led a delegation of CGRS staff and UC Law SF [Haiti Justice Partnership](#) students to Mexico City and Tapachula in Mexico to document current conditions for Haitian asylum seekers and provide Know-Your-Rights information in Haitian Creole. We produced a [report](#) detailing the barriers to protection faced in Mexico in their pursuit of safety and provided recommendations to the U.S. and Mexican governments to ensure the basic rights and dignity of Haitian asylum seekers are upheld.

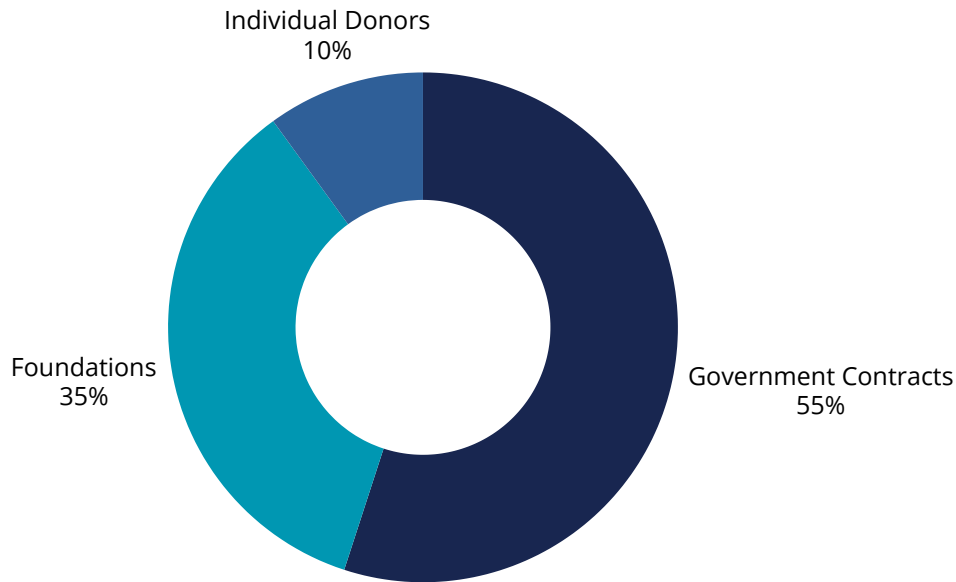


CGRS and Haiti Justice Partnership delegation with Haitian Bridge Alliance colleagues in Mexico March 2024.

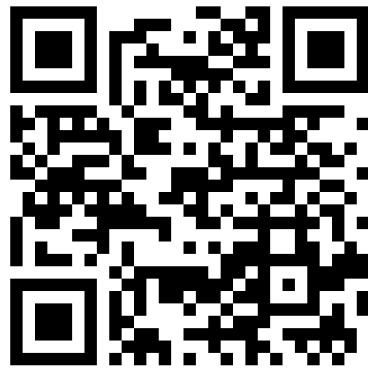
Fiscal Year 2024 Financial Overview

Center Operating Budget: \$3,732,307

Sources of Revenue



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Center for Gender
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