WORKING PAPER

Faith Actors and the Global Compact on Refugees: A Local Role, a Global Norm?

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Abstract

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) named faith-based actors as a relevant stakeholder and in doing so marked the first time that they were explicitly included in an international agreement of this scope. This article sheds light on the role of faith actors in global refugee and asylum governance. More specifically, it unpacks the bottom-up and top-down dynamics involved in the localization and globalization of global norms and standards by looking at (1) the evolution of faith actors' role in global refugee and asylum governance and (2) the inclusion of faith actors in the GCR. The article uses a framework of localization and globalization to analyse how local actors may become global actors and how the actorness of civil society actors in global South countries can have an impact on global refugee and asylum governance. To develop our analysis, we draw from literature on faith actors in humanitarian and refugee response, UNHCR publications, and the empirical data from the Global Asylum Governance Project's (ASILE) country case studies, which were based on 99 semi-structured interviews.

We conclude that within the UN system, faith actors in the 21st century have gained ground in their recognition as legitimate actors in global asylum and refugee governance. Their role was globalized and legitimized as part of a three-step process: justification, formalization and finally normalization. Their incorporation in the GCR has arguably 'formalized' their role. However, this does not mean that the role of faith actors has led to isomorphic tendencies. The recognition of such actors in the international refugee regime is recent and thus, more research is needed to understand how this norm is playing out at a local level. Currently data on the implementation of the GCR offers limited evidence on the role of faith actors. Our fieldwork in six case countries shows that, when asked about the GCR implementation, only actors in two countries specifically highlighted the role of faith actors, and they marginally referred to them when talking about policies in the framework of the GCR. We can thus estimate that the main dynamics that played out at the domestic level, such as the informality that has characterised the role of faith actors in refugee and asylum governance, still persists. This means that the role of faith actors has not led to isomorphic tendencies via the GCR. Instead, their agency has impacted the global level via a bottom-up dynamic.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) cemented a call to the international community: the refugee response needs *everyone.* In 2018, as nearly every country[1] joined in adopting the GCR, they affirmed a commitment to leveraging civil society and partnering with all relevant stakeholders, including faith-based actors and organizations. While faith actors have a long history of involvement with forcibly displaced populations (Ferris 2005; Milner and Klassen 2021), this marked the first time that faith actors were explicitly included in an international agreement comprised of most countries in the world. Faith actors include faith-based organizations (FBOs), local faith communities, and faith leaders (see Box 1 with the definitions). While the GCR uses the terms *faith-based organizations* and *faith-based actors* largely interchangeably, we will use the term *faith actors* from UNHCR's 2014 Partnership Note, as a more precise phrase to encompass the diversity of various actors in faith organizations and traditions who could be and are involved in refugee protection (UNHCR 2014).

There is evidence that faith actors alongside other members of civil society, have for centuries played a leading role in responses to displacement around the world, in extremely different geographic and cultural contexts (Milner and Klassen 2021; Ferris 2011). This leading role takes various forms: from conflict prevention, to immediate aid post crisis, to helping refugees integrate and build self-reliance (Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Communities 2018). Academic studies, together with governance actors, acknowledge that faith actors' ability to play a role in all of these areas makes them a unique and critical partner (Thomson 2015; Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Communities 2018; Sulewski 2020; UNHCR 2014). This key role is particularly relevant in global South countries, where most of the world's refugees are hosted (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019). In many global South countries, faith actors are an accepted part of both public and private life because local communities trust them. They are "widely present in all parts of a country…[and] often remain long after international attention has faded, and funding has declined" (UNHCR 2014, 8; Clarke 2006; Haynes 2013; Wurtz and Wilkinson 2020a). This means that faith actors' key role and legitimacy is based on informal, unwritten, governance processes and structures, which are a recurrent feature of migration governance in global South countries (Gazzotti, Mouthaan, and Natter 2022).

Despite their longstanding involvement in humanitarian work, there has been little academic research on faith actors (Ferris 2011; Ager, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Ager 2015). As Carbonnier (2013), argues,

> the lack of attention to religion and faith in development research and policy […] stands in stark contrast to the paramount role played by religion in the daily lives of individuals and communities, particularly in the most active field of international development cooperation, the developing world (Carbonnier 2013, 16)

Further, there is little to no research on the globalizing tendencies of the GCR's broader call for civil society's participation, and its more specific naming of faith actors (Milner and Klassen 2021; Sulewski 2020). Thus, while faith actors have a long history of engagement in refugee protection and are named as a relevant stakeholder, we know little about the evolution of their role and the ways in which they became legitimized as part of global refugee and asylum governance.

This article seeks to fill that gap by shedding light on the role of faith actors in global refugee and asylum governance by illustrating their role in globalization and localization processes. By globalization we mean a domestic incorporation of norms and standards that leads to isomorphic, standardizing tendencies. Localization refers to the process by which global norms and standards are interpreted, translated and adapted to become consistent with local norms, standards and political and social contexts. To develop our analysis, first, we trace the role of faith actors in refugee protection within multilateral forums and we propose that their role was globalized and legitimized as part of a three-step process: justification (providing reason for the establishing or modifying a norm),

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1   With exceptions from Hungary and the United States opposing it and abstentions from Eritrea, Liberia, and Libya.

formalization (process of giving a structured and official form these norms) and finally normalization (the widespread acceptance and integration of these norms into practices). Then, we specifically look at their inclusion in a key international agreement, the GCR. We briefly assess whether this inclusion has led to isomorphic tendencies by asking whether they are actually considered as part of the plans to implement the GCR. To do this, we look at how the normative processes of globalization and localization were at work: How did a global norm—vis a vis their naming in the GCR —of partnering with faith actors emerge? Is this norm leading to globalizing or isomorphic tendencies? And finally, are faith actors playing a role in the localization of global norms? To develop our argument, we propose a co-constitutive, simultaneous process of how local practice and norms get highlighted, or gain salience (Cortell and Davis 2000), and eventually become formalized and normalized at a global level. The bottom-up and top-down process influencing various levels of governance demonstrates both a globalization and localization of the role of faith actors, which does not necessarily lead to isomorphic tendencies.

To develop our argument, we draw from literature on faith actors in humanitarian and refugee response, UNHCR publications and official documents, and the empirical data from the Global Asylum Governance (ASILE) project (99 semi-structured interviews in six case-countries). We first conducted a review of academic literature on the historical role of faith actors broadly in humanitarian response from the end of the 19th century until present day; we then conducted a more focused review of both academic and grey literature on the role of faith actors in refugee response in the 21st century. We pulled all publicly available UNHCR publications on faith, faith-based, or faith actors. Articles were then analyzed thematically in chronological order following content analysis with a discourse analytic approach (Hardy, Phillips, and Harley 2004), noting for quantity of publications and changes in a) how faith actors were described, b) how partnership was described, c) the level of justification given for partnering and d) specificity of the roles that faith actors play. For the second part of our analysis, we took the transcriptions of all 99 semi-structured interviews and deductively analysed for mentions of faith actors or faith-based organizations. For the interviews, we targeted elite actors in five categories i) political leaders; (ii) national government administrations; (iii) international organizations;(iv) civil society organizations; (v) academia/research. We combined purposive and chain referral sampling to identify the key actors. Purposive sampling was executed by checking the organization charts of each organization involved in the implementation of key refugee and asylum policies and of the GCR. The questions focused on the significance of relationships between governance actors to understand more about key implementation issues, such as the meaning of 'protection' in practice and the difference between the categories of 'migrant' and 'refugee' when implementing policies. Between December 2020 and March 2022, we interviewed 99 key asylum and refugee governance actors in the six case countries (Bangladesh n=16, Brazil n=26, Canada n=16, Jordan n=11, South Africa N=12, Turkey n=18). Given the travel restrictions during the COVID pandemic, travelling for fieldwork proved impossible, so we these interviews were held online.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 establishes a framework of globalization and localization of international and domestic norms and their relation with informal migration governance. Section 3 summarizes the historical role of faith actors in refugee protection, showing that this role was based on informal governance processes. In this section, we trace in more detail the evolution of UNHCR initiatives that formalized faith actors' roles on a global scale. Section 4 analyses this evolution and how the globalization and localization of faith actors' roles were at play, evidencing the relevance of bottom-up dynamics in global refugee and asylum governance as part of a three-step process: justification, formalization and finally normalization. Drawing from this historical evolution, we propose a cycle of norm development that an increase in faith actors' legitimacy on a global scale would increase their involvement in refugee governance locally.

To address and illustrate the role of faith actors in localization processes, section 5 analyses the data about the local implementation of the GCR through the ASILE Project's country case studies in Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Jordan, Turkey, and South Africa. The choice for these case countries is due to a number of reasons that include similarities in terms of refugee flows and significant differences in legal frameworks and importantly, in their exposure to international norms and standards. All six case countries share a common experience of significant refugee influxes, although they differ in legal and policy frameworks and their involvement with the international system through signing international agreements or interacting with global/regional organizations. Among the world's top 10 host countries for refugees and asylum-seekers are Turkey, Jordan, and Bangladesh in terms of total numbers (World Bank Group 2022). Brazil is a leading country in refugee governance due to its progressive legislation and unique recognition of Venezuelans as refugees among South American nations, earning it the highest rate of refugee recognition in the region (Jubilut 2006; Acosta and Sartoretto 2020). Canada's main peculiarity are its private sponsorship programs, which are the main policy tool for resettlements (UNHCR 2019). From 2010 to 2019, South Africa was one of the top four major destination countries for new asylum seekers (UNHCR 2019). All of these countries have signed on to the GCR. However, while Brazil, Canada, and South Africa are signatories to both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, Bangladesh and Jordan are not. Turkey has signed both documents but retains a geographical restriction for individuals from Europe. Finally, Brazil and South Africa participate in specific regional regimes for refugee protection: the 1984 Cartagena Declaration and the 1967 Organization of African Unity Convention concerning Specific Aspects of Refugees in Africa, respectively. Importantly, civil society partnerships play a prominent role in the implementation of refugee policies in all six case countries (Jubilut 2006; Pugh 2014; Lewis 2019; Kayali 2022; Fisseha 2018; Cameron 2021; Milner and Klassen 2021). These partnerships are key in the framework of the GCR. For this reason, we decided to inductively look at the role of faith actors in the implementation of the GCR in these case countries.

This article shows that the GCR has given faith actors formal international recognition and that this formal recognition is the consequence of a decade of increased visibility and salience of faith actors' roles and practices within UNHCR's activities and institutions resulting from 'bottom-up' governance promotion processes (Lavenex and Piper 2019). However, we cannot affirm that this formal recognition has isomorphic tendencies. The evidence seems to suggest that their relevant role in domestic contexts, which has emerged from informal governance dynamics, is maintained. This article contributes to the literature on the role of civil society in global migration governance by looking at the understudied case of faith actors. This case is interesting because it shows that the agency of non-state actors based in global South countries can shape global norms. By doing this, we shed light on the ways in which migration and refugee governance dynamics in global South countries can have an impact on global migration governance. We conclude by summarizing our analysis and we propose future lines of research.

WHO ARE FAITH ACTORS?

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (FBOs)

is an overarching term used to describe a broad range of organizations influenced by faith. They include religious and religion-based organizations/groups/networks; communities belonging to a place of religious worship; specialized religious institutions and religious social service agencies; and registered or unregistered non-profit institutions that have a religious character or mission.

LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITIES

consist of people who share common religious beliefs and values, and draw upon these to carry out activities in their respective communities.

FAITH LEADERS

are believers who play influential roles within their faith communities and the broader local community. They have trust and moral authority over members of their local faith community, and shape public opinion in the broader community and even at the national or international level.

Source: Summary from UNHCR's 2014 Partnership Note On Faith-Based Organizations, Local Faith Communities, and Faith Leaders. .

2. Globalization and Localization

There is rich literature and debate on how international and domestic norms influence each other (Acharya 2004; Brumat, Geddes, and Pettrachin 2022). While international organizations (IOs) have historically been regarded as playing a key role in 'disseminating new international norms' and 'teach[ing] states new norms of behavior' (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 401), more contemporary studies have emphasized that there is a constant back and forth occurring between global and local actors (Hellmüller 2020a, 409). The literature identifies two main normative processes: *globalization*, the process by which international norms are incorporated into domestic standards, and *localization,* which assesses how global norms are adapted into domestic contexts. Brumat, Geddes, and Pettrachin (2022) have shown that the specialized literature provides evidence of processes of localization as the prevailing pattern in the domestic incorporation of international norms and standards. Localization has been defined as:

> a complex process and outcome by which norm-takers build congruence between transnational norms including norms previously institutionalized in a region and local beliefs and practices. In this process, foreign norms, which may not initially cohere with the latter, are incorporated into local norms. The success of norm diffusion strategies and processes depends on the extent to which they provide opportunities for localization (Acharya 2004, 241).

From this definition it follows that the 'acceptance' and eventual incorporation of global norms and standards into domestic settings is highly dependent on governance actors who interpret and 'translate' the norms to make them 'fit' with local norms and the wider institutional, political and social context (Brumat, Geddes, and Pettrachin 2022). These governance actors are very varied, and they

can include stakeholders from the public and private sectors as well as from faith communities and organizations. An important implication is that, in this process of 'translation', when international norms 'hit the ground' and are implemented, domestic-level actors can be more important than transnational actors (Acharya 2004, 241). Globalization instead can lead to standardization or isomorphic tendencies, meaning increasing similarities between local and global norms and standards, which are fed through mimesis processes (Massey 2009). These mimesis processes are more likely to happen when a local norm and or/ practice becomes salient at the regional and global levels (Cortell and Davis 2000).

Research demonstrates that civil society can act as 'agents of normative change' or 'brokers' (Hönke and Müller 2018) in how norms get adapted and translated into local practice and that faith actors are a part of civil society who are especially influential in this process (Boesenecker and Vinjamuri 2011). Characterized by deeply held conceptions of justice and peace, studies show that in some contexts and particularly in areas of limited statehood (ALS) and in some global South countries, faith actors play a leading role as international norm 'makers' and 'adapters' (Boesenecker and Vinjamuri 2011). For example, their pivotal role in setting and adapting international human rights norms in peacebuilding processes had been documented in the cases of post-apartheid South Africa and and Northern Ireland (Boesenecker & Vinjamuri 2011). Conversely, literature has also demonstrated that civil society can act through policy networks at various levels of governance to influence regional and global norms and institutions, feeding globalization processes (Rother 2023). This role has been labelled as a 'bottom-up' promotion of global governance (Piper and Rother 2022), which has 'democratizing' effects in the functioning of regional and global institutions (Rother and Piper 2014). This means that globalization and localization are not necessarily separate and opposite processes, they can happen simultaneously and they can also feed each other, and the role of civil society actors in global migration governance is illustrative of this (Rother 2023; Lavenex and Piper 2019). However, our knowledge on the bottom-up role of faith actors in globalization and localization processes remains scarce.

Localisation processes are subject to power dynamics between various governance actors and they are also heavily mediated by their ideas, interests as well as local knowledge (Betts and Orchard 2014; Pincock, Betts, and Easton-Calabria 2021). These factors largely explain the enormous degrees of variation in the local incorporation of international norms and standards (Brumat, Geddes, and Pettrachin 2021). Local knowledge can increase the legitimacy of interventions, together with their efficiency and effectiveness (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2017). As we show in this article, the long-term leading role that faith actors have played in refugee and asylum governance has informed local knowledge and has embedded them with trust from local actors, all of which gives them legitimacy to perform their role at the domestic level. As we show below, this relevant role has frequently been the result of informal interactions and governance processes and structures, something that is quite common in migration governance in global South countries (Gazzotti, Mouthaan, and Natter 2022). Informal governance are the 'rules, norms and institutional structures and procedures that are not enshrined in formally constituted organizations or in their constitutions' (Westerwinter, Abbott, and Biersteker 2021, 2). These unwritten rules and accepted forms of behavior are usually exercised on a case-by-case basis by street-level bureaucrats, or by civil society or international organization officials to whom the government may have delegated some governance functions (Risse 2018). These informal governance structures and processes can empower otherwise weak actors who contribute to policymaking and implementation, such as immigrants, and also faith actors (Brumat, Finn, and Freier 2022). This empowerment can happen both at the national and global levels of governance, feeding 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' dynamics in global migration governance, which can lead to faith actors playing a role in the design of global norms and standards (see Lavenex and Piper 2019). The GCR, for the first time, recognizes the role of faith actors in refugee and asylum governance (see section 3.2) and it also acknowledges that the implementation of international norms and standards, heavily relies on various levels of governance, including the regional, sub-regional, national, subnational, and local levels (see sections 2 and 3 of the GCR).

How were the processes of globalization and localization at work in the recognition of and partnerships with faith actors in refugee response? First, we will look at how partnering with faith actors in international refugee governance has evolved.

3. Faith Actors in International Refugee Governance

3.1. Historical and Evolving Role

The modern humanitarian system evolved from religious traditions. It was churches that advocated for the creation of the United Nations (Ferris 2005). Faith actors have played an "important role… in humanitarian responses in all regions of the world [emphasis added]" (Ferris 2011, 607–8) and specifically have had a long, critical, role in refugee response. While religious organizations alongside other members of civil society, have for centuries "led responses to displacement"(Milner and Klassen 2021, 1), the role of and view towards faith actors in refugee protection has evolved and, as we show in this section, was progressively institutionalized. These changes have been well documented (Barnett and Stein 2012; Clarke 2006; Haynes 2013; Sulewski 2020; Wilkinson 2018; Wurtz and Wilkinson 2020a) but they have not been analysed through a lens of globalization/ localization processes by looking at the interaction between governance actors and how their roles shape/ are shaped by global nroms and standards.

Faith actors have played (and do play) multiple roles in refugee protection from conflict prevention, to immediate aid post crisis, to helping refugees integrate and build self-reliance (Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Communities 2018). These roles, while crucial, have largely been de-facto. Wilkson et al., (2019) document the array of ways faith actors are involved: Faith actors honor forced migrants who have died in flight, holding funerals and memorial services (p.14), they have long traditions of using their physical buildings to provide sanctuary and shelter to migrants in flight (p.14); they specifically assisted with children and youth on the move (p.15), they have helped forced migrants access healthcare both by creating partnerships with healthcare organizations but also by serving "as mediators to establish a relationship of trust between refugees or migrants and healthcare providers, and help bridge different understandings of health conditions and healing processes" (p.16); further faith actors play a crucial role in supporting refugees across the entirety of their journey, providing coping and psychosocial support; pastoral care is often offered in "refugee camps, asylum seekers' reception facilities, and immigration detention centres" (p.16); Lastly, faith actors help refugees rebuild their livelihoods—emotionally helping them feel a sense of belonging to a community and practically in helping find jobs and resources through connections that a faith community or network may have (p.16). While sometimes these services occur in coordination with governance actors or through formal partnerships, often they take place informally.

The formalization of faith actors as refugee governance actors was the result of a long process of negotiation where divergent interests, values, and power struggles blocked or slowed the process. Even if faith organizations and IOs—particularly UNHCR—had worked together in some form since its inception, mutual distrust separated their work and prevented greater formal involvement from faith actors. Over the course of the 20th century the humanitarian field became increasingly professionalized. These more formal legal and institutional frameworks began to outpace and replace the more informal leadership of faith organizations and at times even create bias against them (Barnett and Stein 2012); this was true both across the humanitarian sphere and specifically within refugee protection. IOs viewed faith organizations with hesitancy and UN agencies specifically were sceptical of engaging with religious organizations (UNHCR 2014, 20). As a senior UN official described, "there is unease in engaging religion within the United Nations system" (Haynes 2013, 7).

Reasons for this skepticism include concerns that faith actors will "base their assistance on religious affiliation or the desire to proselytize" (Wilkinson 2018), that they have discriminatory practices toward marginalized groups (e.g. LGBTQI+ individuals) and/or other faith communities, and that they embrace traditional practices that are viewed as harmful (e.g. gender stereotypes or early marriage) (UNHCR 2014). A 2014 study found that there were a "number of barriers" to partnerships between local faith actors and humanitarian organizations (Ager, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Ager 2015, 216). A 2016 study found that staff from non-religious organizations "frequently avoided engagement with local faith actors" and that they did not "sufficiently appreciate the opportunities afforded by engaging" them (Wilkinson 2018, 19). In addition to skepticism from humanitarian organizations, faith actors had their own hesitancies in partnering, fearing they would be "taken advantage of by larger humanitarian organizations" and have to comprise their beliefs (Wilkinson et al. 2019, 19).

This separation and at times scepticism began to dissipate near the end of the century with a resurgence in recognizing faith actors' role in refugee protection. This resurgence is in part attributed to the broader resurgence in recognizing the role of civil society at large, and faith actors as a component of that, which began and steadily increased post the Cold War (Clarke 2006; Haynes 2013; Sulewski 2020; Wurtz and Wilkinson 2020a). Multiple reasons are identified for why this promotion of civil society happened: Some attribute it to U.S. President Ronald Reagan who "in alliance with other right-of-centre governments in Western Europe, promoted radical new economic policies…that linked development aid to reduced government spending, privatisation and market liberalisation. In 'developed' and 'developing' countries alike, FBOs expanded or proliferated as a result" (Clarke 2006, 837). The UN began promoting civil society "as a driving force for peace" and giving it "a central role in establishing a pluralistic society as a counterweight to the state…[and this] increased attention paid to civil society translated in efforts to involve them in peacebuilding" (Hellmüller 2020b, 413).

The resurgence in recognizing faith actors is also attributed to a widespread shift from a secular to post-secular worldview. While the secular worldview that dominated the 20th century expected that religion would be relegated to a private sphere—contributing to the secular bias against faith actors describe above—there has been an increasing recognition in the 21st century that instead we find ourselves in a post-secular world where religion continues to play a prominent and central role in people's lives (Ferris 2005; Sulewski 2020; Wurtz and Wilkinson 2020a). The role of faith/faith actors and forced displacement "received increasing attention in the 2000s" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, 429). It was in the early 2000s when "the term FBO entered into mainstream usage in the US [as]… Republican US President George W. Bush sought to give wider acknowledgement (and funding) to the role of religious organizations in addressing social needs" (Ferris 2011, 607). Over the 2010s as we'll see below, there has been an increasing "institutionalized presence" of faith actors at an international level (Haynes, 2013 p.9). While there "have been organized expressions of faith communities for hundreds of years," the 2000s into the 2010s demonstrate an increasing formalization (Ferris 2005, 607). One way we can understand the role of faith actors in the translation of global norms is through the actions and initiatives of the UN, that is, as a back and forth process of promotion of international norms and local adaptation to them. In this case, we will look specifically at how it occurred in UNHCR.

3.2. The 2010s: UNHCR and Formalizing Partnerships with Faith Actors

Tracing UNHCR publications and events over the course of the 2010s demonstrates an evolution in faith actors' formal incorporation and recognition internationally in refugee protection (See Figure 1 for a timeline). Such documents show the gradual recognition and formal incorporation of faith actors as governance actors and UN partners, globalising their role as part of a three-step process: justification, formalization and finally normalization (see Figure 1). Faith actors' active international recognition arguably began with a process of 'justification'. In 2012 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres focused the annual UNHCR-NGO forum on challenges in refugee response specifically to exploring the role that faith actors could have. The forum, Dialogue on Faith and Protection, convened more than 400 individuals representing UNHCR, UN member states, international NGOs, national NGOs, and various faith organizations (UNHCR 2012).

While the event was hailed as significant at the time, the tenor of the forum was one of cautious intrigue. In the summary note on the event, the convening was described as a "journey of mutual discovery" (p.1) that that demonstrated the "the value of thoughtful collaboration"(p.2), and reflected "UNHCR's commitment…for recognizing the role" (p.2) of faith actors in refugee projection (UNHCR 2013). This echoed the notes of the scepticism described above and demonstrated a newness to the partnerships. 'Thoughtful collaboration' and 'mutual understanding' demonstrate a relationship with differences that requires effort and intentionality. A 'commitment for recognizing' someone's role implies their role is not already recognized. Nonetheless, the Dialogue was an important launching pad.

This justification opened the door for a gradual process of formalization, or legitimation. One important next step that resulted from the Dialogue was a publication Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders (HIAS et al. 2013), a document that shows the increasing role and agency of faith actors in the bottom-up promotion of global governance. Written by faith actors who attended the convening, it was published in 2013 by UNHCR and translated into seven languages. Its purpose was to "inspire leaders of all faiths to 'welcome the stranger'" and to give faith groups a set of affirmations that could be used "as practical tools" to support refugees (HIAS et al. 2013, 9–10). The publication was significant on several fronts: First, it cast a wide vision of having all faith actors across the globe play a role in refugee protection, somehow giving a vague institutionalization to a role that, up to that moment, had been informally recognized. Second, it articulated faith actors' importance in refugee protection on an international level in a UN institution. Third, the affirmations were an indirect way of issuing guidance to faith actors to combat the existing skepticism that humanitarian organizations traditionally had towards them. In emphasizing the importance of treating everyone with dignity, listening and affirming others' faiths, and combatting any sign of hatred or discrimination, the affirmations not only guided faith actors in how to partner with secular organizations, but also, for the first time, defined and defended faith actors as legitimate partners in global refugee governance, globalizing their role.

Another action item from the Dialogue was UNHCR's 2014 Partnership Note on Faith-based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders (UNHCR 2014). The Note codified guidance for the field on the importance of partnerships with faith actors, ways to address barriers in partnerships, and principles to uphold (UNHCR 2014). If Welcoming the Stranger served as guidance for faith actors on the expected norms of interaction, the Partnership Note did the same for UNHCR staff, offices, programs, and its other partners, feeding this back and forth, bottom-up and top-down process of exchange of ideas, values and knowledge between an international actor and faith actors. As official UN guidance, it began to formalize an expectation in partnering with faith actors and in outlining tools to ensure they would be successful.

Faith actors' roles was effectively formalized and legitimized in 2016 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration and Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in response to the UN Secretary General's urging for greater cooperation to address unprecedented levels of migration (UN Secretary-General 2016) (see Figure 1). The Declaration, which would later become the basis for the GCR, outlined shared commitments and responses to refugee protection and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework developed guiding principles to direct global actors' efforts (UN General Assembly 2016). While there are only four mentions of faith actors in the Declaration (three times as a component of civil society, and once as an actor in their own right), what is significant about these mentions is that they are stated plainly, without defense or further explanation, showing that the role of faith actors in global refugee governance was already legitimate. Unlike earlier efforts mentioned above that involved a significant amount of justification and guidance, in the Declaration faith actors just appear as another actor in refugee response and—and at least in terms of the text of the document—on par with other partners in academia and the private sector – an effective incorporation of faith actors in global refugee governance which also showed some first signs of the top-down 'normalization' of their role.
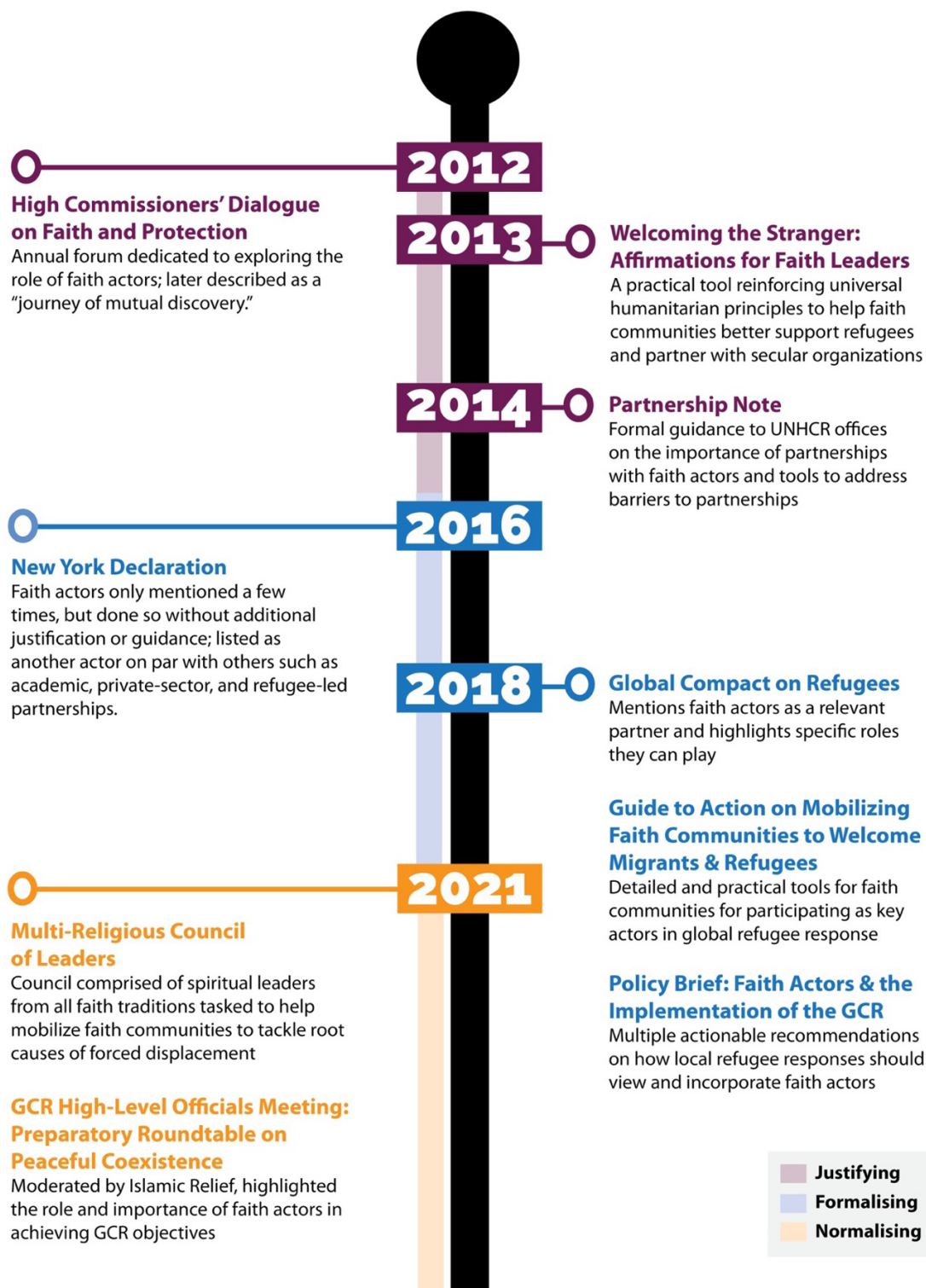
The GCR built on the Declaration's recognition of faith actors. In addition to naming them as a relevant partner in refugee response, the GCR highlighted specific roles that faith actors play, further formalizing and globalizing their role in an international norm. These specific roles include delivering services in host communities (p.8), resolving conflict and peacebuilding (p.16), and expanding resettlement programs and complementary pathways (p.18). It also specified that they could assist refugees "in other relevant areas" (p.19). In the context of historical secular bias and competing room for space on a lengthy document, some argue that just the mention of faith actors was a progress, their inclusion demonstrating that all of the previous efforts, convenings, and consultations mattered (Wurtz and Wilkinson 2020b, 149). However, there was also critique that the GCR did not go far enough in its recognition of faith actors. Its lack of specificity about these 'other relevant areas' faith actors could assist in left them "in an inferior position and a gray area of some, but limited, recognition…and with little information about how to bring local faith actors into…their role in the whole-of-society" approach proposed by the GCR (Wurtz and Wilkinson 2020b, 150). Irrespective, both what the GCR did specify about faith actors and what it left out, informed later actions by UNHCR that continued to advance and globalize the role of faith actors in refugee response.

In 2018, while the GCR was being negotiated, UNHCR collaborated with Religions for Peace, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, and Islamic Relief to encourage more faith actors to participate in refugee protection and to help others better understand faith actors' role in local refugee response. This resulted in two important publications: the Guide to Action on Mobilizing Faith Communities to Welcome Migrants (Wilkinson et al. 2019) and Refugees and Policy Brief: Faith Actors and the Implementation of the Global Compat on Refugees (Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Communities 2018). The Guide was targeted toward increasing faith actors' involvement in refugee protection, giving them everything from the background on displacement, overviews of relevant international structures, frameworks, and policies, justifications of the moral and spiritual underpinnings which should lead them to respond, and specific guidance of how they can and should be involved. If the earlier Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders laid a foundation among faith actors in normalizing "principles of mutual respect, hospitality, and understanding among different faiths" the Guide to Action served as the roadmap for moving forward (Wilkinson et al. 2019, 9). The Guide seamlessly and robustly intertwined faith actors to the global refugee response, communicating to faith actors, you have a place. The Policy Brief while relevant to faith actors was targeted to other stakeholders. It was succinct and specific and made arguably the strongest and clearest advocacy for the importance of faith actors in refugee response. It detailed specific examples of faith actors' existing roles in refugee response and multiple actionable recommendations on how local responses should incorporate faith actors, i.e, it defined some global norms and standards for the performance of faith actors' role in global refugee governance, top-down.

Later, in 2021, UNHCR established the Multi-Religious Council of Leaders in partnership Religions for Peace. The Council is comprised of twenty religious and spiritual leaders representing different faith traditions and regions of the world, which marked a steppingstone in the formalization of faith actors' role in global refugee governance. The Council was tasked to help mobilize "faith leaders and communities in tackling the root causes of forced displacement" (UNHCR 2020). In the press release announcing the Council, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi described faith actors as "key" in refugee protection, representing a significant evolution from the 2012 descriptions of partnerships with faith actors (UNHCR 2020, para.4). The Council represented a further elevating of faith actors in the global response and was a way of institutionalizing their role and tasking them as an integral part of solving the increasing levels of forced migration.

Also in 2021, leading up to GCR's bi-annual stock-taking convening, the High-Level Officials Meeting, UNHCR hosted preparatory roundtables to update stakeholders on the status of each of the GCR's four objectives. The roundtable on peaceful coexistence prominently featured faith actors. It was yet another formal mechanism through which the roles of faith actors were reinforced. As the panel moderator said, the inclusion demonstrates "the value of religion in people's lives…the actual contributions of religious institutions to the wellbeing and welfare of societies nationally, regionally, and globally" and gives "voice and ability to see how much religious communities, and religious institutions specifically, contribute to forced displacement" (UNHCR 2021, sec. 7:35-8:15). These recent developments show that the role of faith actors in global refugee governance has not only been formalized but has also been normalized (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Timeline of Key UNHCR initiatives on partnering with faith actors

2012

High Commissioners' Dialogue on Faith and Protection
Annual forum dedicated to exploring the role of faith actors; later described as a "journey of mutual discovery."

2013

Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders
A practical tool reinforcing universal humanitarian principles to help faith communities better support refugees and partner with secular organizations

2014

Partnership Note
Formal guidance to UNHCR offices on the importance of partnerships with faith actors and tools to address barriers to partnerships

2016

New York Declaration
Faith actors only mentioned a few times, but done so without additional justification or guidance; listed as another actor on par with others such as academic, private-sector, and refugee-led partnerships.

2018

Global Compact on Refugees
Mentions faith actors as a relevant partner and highlights specific roles they can play

Guide to Action on Mobilizing Faith Communities to Welcome Migrants & Refugees
Detailed and practical tools for faith communities for participating as key actors in global refugee response

2021

Multi-Religious Council of Leaders
Council comprised of spiritual leaders from all faith traditions tasked to help mobilize faith communities to tackle root causes of forced displacement

GCR High-Level Officials Meeting: Preparatory Roundtable on Peaceful Coexistence
Moderated by Islamic Relief, highlighted the role and importance of faith actors in achieving GCR objectives

Policy Brief: Faith Actors & the Implementation of the GCR
Multiple actionable recommendations on how local refugee responses should view and incorporate faith actors

Justifying
Formalising
Normalising

Source: Summary of UNHCR publications and initiatives involving faith actors compiled by the authors.

4. A Local-Global Norm Development in Refugee Response

What we see over the past decade is the evolution of the global recognition of faith actors' role in the modern-day refugee response move from a longstanding but largely overlooked role, to one of skepticism, to having (at least nominally) an accepted and recognized place on a global scale. As we have seen, this was the product of a three-step process of justification, formalization and finally, normalization. In just focusing on the actions of UNHCR we can see this development play out. In 2012, partnerships with faith actors were viewed with cautious intrigue—needing both justification and guidance. But, by 2016 and 2018, when the international community affirmed the New York Declaration and the GCR respectively, no specific justification was needed; instead, faith actors appear in the texts seemingly on par with other civil society organizations as 'normal' governance actors. Formal publications by UNHCR after the GCR helped to further elaborate and formalize the roles they could play. Come 2021, almost a decade later, when UNHCR established the Multi-Religious Council of Leaders, they were described by the UN as 'key' in refugee protection (UNHCR 2020, para. 4)). Faith actors' participation in the GCR roundtables demonstrated a normalizing of the inclusion of faith actors: if there is a discussion on refugee response, faith actors will be at the table.
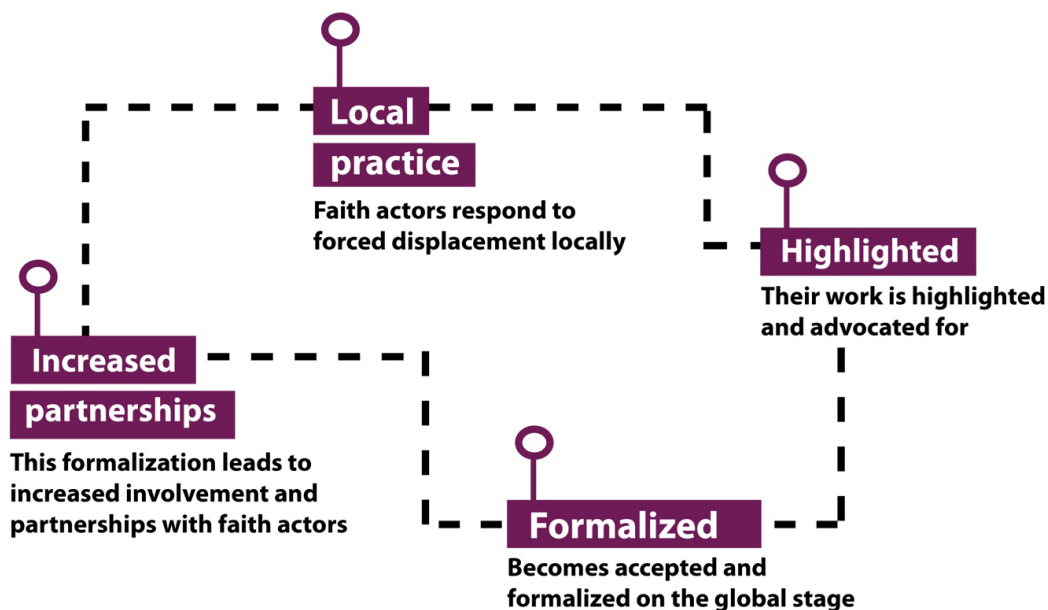
UNHCR initiatives in the 2010s did not create faith actors' involvement in refugee protection; in fact, as previously outlined, faith actors have been the ones in a longstanding way doing the work on the ground. But, while faith actors have played a role in refugee protection for decades, the above demonstrates a fairly recent formalizing and normalizing of their role at an international level. But what has led to this? And what is the impact of it?

In tracing the evolution of faith actors' involvement, we suggest that bottom-up and top-down dynamics coexist as part of a co-constitutive, simultaneous process of how local practice and norms get highlighted, or become salient, and eventually become formalized and normalized at a global level. The bottom-up process demonstrates both a globalization and localization of their role. As international norms and institutions gradually incorporated faith actors who were already informally diffused, especially in the Global South, their role became 'localized'—incorporated and adapted into domestic standards (Brumat, Geddes, and Pettrachin, 2021, p.2).

One example of this is the 2018 Policy Brief mentioned above. The Brief aimed to build on the GCR's call for faith actors as relevant partners by providing details about how organizations and local responses should include faith actors (i.e., how to increase faith actors' involvement). To do this, the Brief listed and highlighted local, existing, unwritten and informal practices of how faith actors were involved in refugee protection. The local practices were already in place, but we would argue that being highlighted in an international document served as a way of formalizing and thus globalizing this practice as normative behavior at the international level. Effectively, the Brief advocated that these are local norms of faith actors' roles, and by speaking to a global audience through the institution of UNHCR argued they should become global norms.

The question then is what happens next—does this formalization actually lead to isomorphism? Or does it get adapted and translated—localized—increasingly into domestic contexts? We suggest that as faith actors' salience at a local level increases, their role in global refugee governance is more likely to do so as well. Figure 2 models this process.

Figure 2. Cycle of globalization and localization in local-global norm development Beginning at local practice

Local practice
Faith actors respond to forced displacement locally

Highlighted
Their work is highlighted and advocated for

Increased partnerships
This formalization leads to increased involvement and partnerships with faith actors

Formalized
Becomes accepted and formalized on the global stage

Source: Authors' elaboration

5. The GCR: Signs of Globalization and Localization of Faith Actors

To address out last question and assess our suggested cycle, whether faith actors play a role in the localization of global norms and standards, we look at empirical examples from the ASILE Project. The ASILE Project aimed to understand the current and inform future implementation of the GCR. To do that, ASILE analysed existing policy and governance instruments, for the protection of refugees and other forcibly-displaced populations through case studies in six different countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Jordan, Turkey, and South Africa. We interviewed 99 senior-level officials across the six countries representing IOs, local and national government, civil society, and FBOs. The focus of interviews was on assessing how the GCR was being implemented at a country-level and who key actors were as part of that process.

This fieldwork however shows an uneven picture of how the GCR is being localized and the role of faith actors as translators in those processes. Across all key informant interviews only actors in two of the six countries—Brazil and South Africa—specifically highlighted the role of faith actors. Further, when their roles were highlighted, they were not formally or seemingly meaningfully connected to GCR implementation. In the other four countries—Bangladesh, Canada, Jordan, and Turkey—while faith actors' roles have been documented, they were not highlighted by any of the interviewees. We will discuss examples of both below.

In Brazil, FBOs, in particular Caritas and the Scalabrinian Sisters, play a key role in the process of refugee status determination and this is part of a longer-term, informal governance process. These two organizations do the initial processing of the refugee status request, they assess people to fill in the forms and make their case and by doing this; they are the ones who do an initial selection of who can apply to refugee status—not the Brazilian state (Jubilut and Apolinàrio 2008). This means that it is faith actors the ones who translate and adapt, i.e., they localize, the global and regional asylum and refugee norms and standards in the Brazilian state by interpreting it and making decisions on who is or is not a refugee. In the context of Venezuelan forced displacement, the worst forced

displacement crisis in the history of South America, it was a faith actor that partnered with UNHCR and successfully pushed for the group recognition of Venezuelans as refugees:

> We worked for around a year in the recognition of Venezuelans as refugees. We argued, insisted, we showed the reasons [why we had to do this], we analysed… we insisted so that the government would accept the serious and generalized violation of human rights in Venezuela. For me, it was a conquer, but the government didn't want it. […] now we keep pushing so that this decision is extended to [individuals from] other regions of the world, especially where Boko Haram is acting (interview with faith actor official in Brazil, December 2020).

Similarly, in South Africa faith actors are attributed to having an expansive role in refugee protection:

> there is [a faith organization] who are working at the border between South Africa and Mozambique…with unaccompanied and separated children…and [a] mission… offering pastoral care to migrants and refugees…and it [has] just expanded from this; so in a way… [it] has always meant that there are available links to faith actors…there is also pastoral care actors across the country…[who] first identify or see migrants and refugees and… offer them guidance and assistance…[and there is] great respect for the groundwork done by many kind[s] of small churches in quite rural areas (interview with faith actor official in South Africa, January 2022).

However, in both countries, despite their recognized roles in refugee protection broadly, there was not an equal recognition of their roles specifically in achieving the objectives of the GCR, which can show that, at least in this initial stage, there are no signs of isomorphic tendencies driven by the inclusion of faith actors in the GCR. Some faith actors acknowledged the GCR as 'guidelines' and not really a new norm that is resulting in increased partnerships and activities to improve refugee protection. In the case of Brazil, this is because 'the government presents proposals and data as part of the implementation of the GCR, but many of these things were already implemented in Brazil' (interview with faith actor official in Brazil, December 2020). In South Africa, despite having a 'powerful faith lobby' and 'a clear connection between high-level politicians and faith actors' (interview with faith actor official in South Africa, January 2022), faith actors were not otherwise described as meaningfully involved in the formal country-level initiatives around the GCR.

> One of the powerful things that I saw…with the Global Compact of Refugees, it was the way in which UNHCR really engaged far more than just their implementing partners in country, to try and find ways to make the Global Compact … more real at a country level…Usually previously … UNHCR mainly would only interact with their implementing partners. And so, it was kind of a branching out for them and that was quite exciting to see… it was a something …[to] really bring people together. And so…when the pledges were made… there was a group pledge that was done as well as these individual pledges…. [but] I am actually not sure, whether many of the faith-based actors… signed pledges… it has been more civil society organizations and then the private sector (interview with faith actor official in South Africa, January 2022).

More research is needed to understand and dig into the reasons why faith actors were mentioned specifically in these two countries. We can draw a preliminary hypothesis based on regime type. As these are the only two democratic global South countries in our sample, civil society actors (including faith actors) may have a more legitimised role in refugee protection. Our interview material and specialised literature also suggest that the longer-term traditions in CSO involvement in migration governance and refugee protection, as is the case of Brazil (Jubilut and Apolinàrio 2008), which

reinforces our point on the longer-term persistence of the key role that faith actors had before the GCR was implemented in each country, which is maintained by informal governance practices. This longer-term role is closely related to the capacities of each state to fulfil its functions in the area of refugee protection (Brumat and Geddes 2023).

For the other four case countries—Turkey, Canada, Bangladesh, and Jordan—the role of faith actors in refugee protection has been documented (Aslıhan Tezel Mccarthy 2017; Barbour, Fan, and Lewa 2021; Bompani 2015; Fiddan-Qasmiyeh 2020; Mencütek 2020; Mulholland 2017), and their role was mentioned in some of the interviews, officials did not highlight faith actors in any further way to draw conclusions about how the GCR was impacting the partnership and thus the role of faith actors, which could potentially lead to the standardization (isomorphism) of their role at a global scale. In the case of Canada, for example, while it is documented that in fact faith actors play a prominent role in Canada's private sponsorship program (Cameron 2021), beyond being mentioned, interviewees in Canada did not specifically expand on the role of faith actors in the framework of the GCR, mainly because the GCR was addressed as general guidelines for action and much of that action was already in place before the GCR was approved. In Turkey, it is argued that Islamic religious beliefs about hospitality are the reference point for the state's protection of refugees (Carpi and Pınar Şenoğuz 2019). Thus, if state and religion are already closely intertwined, this informal governance dynamic prevails in the way in which faith actors display their roles in national refugee governance.

Thus, a preliminary observation that we can draw from our evidence is that the relatively marginal role that faith actors have in our interviews shows that there are not local signs of faith actors' formalization at a global level, so their roles are not being standardized, leading to isomorphic tendencies. Faith actors largely continue to play the informal role that they played before, but within a more institutionalized global framework. We surmise one reason for this has to do with the overarching interplay between the GCR and governments. Other ASILE findings demonstrate that there is a strong interdependency between actors in each local, national and regional context (Brumat, Geddes, and Pettrachin 2022). As seen in our research, the GCR is often used by governments as a framework to legitimize and 'visibilize' some policies and actions that were already being implemented. This means that whatever role faith actors were playing in each context before the GCR was implemented is very likely to persist. In other words, the GCR did not fundamentally change how local faith actors and local government actors are partnering together, and the role played by faith actors at the local level persists. As these findings were based on key informant interviews and the interviewees' identification of relevant partners and not on a scan of who and what organizations are doing refugee protection work, it is also possible that faith actors do have significant roles locally but that they are not formally tied to governmental initiatives.

6. Conclusion: Does it Matter that the GCR Calls for Partnering with Faith Actors?

This article shed light on the role of faith actors in global refugee and asylum governance. More specifically, it unpacks the bottom-up and top-down dynamics involved in the localization and globalization of global norms and standards by looking at (1) the evolution of faith actors' role in global refugee and asylum governance and (2) the inclusion of faith actors in the GCR. Through a framework of localization and globalization, we analyzed the ways in which local actors became legitimized as global actors. . We have shown how and why faith actors have historically played a leading role in refugee governance, especially in global South countries. This leading role was enshrined in informal governance practices and structures which gained salience at the national and then global level, and which were sustained by trust and legitimacy.

Through a lens of globalization and localization of international and domestic norms, we traced the evolution of faith actors' increasingly formalized role on the global stage until their formal institutionalization within the GCR through a three-step process: justification, formalization and finally normalization. Building on this, we propose a co-constitutive, simultaneous cycle of local-global norm development which states how local practices and actors gain salience and become part of global norms (globalization) and then this leads to these local actors 'translating' these global norms to their local context (localization). Afterwards, we studied the implementation of the role given to them in the GCR in local refugee protection. Our empirical evidence has shown that faith actors continue to play a relevant role in domestic refugee protection but this role is not necessarily linked to the GCR implementation, i.e., the localization of the GCR. This role is likely the continuation of longer-term persistence of the presence of faith actors in the territory of each state and their activity in the area of migration and refugee protection in the context of informal governance processes.

Literature suggests that faith actors have historically have been involved in refugee protection, yet their role has often been overlooked. We can see that, at least within the UN system, faith actors in the 21st century have gained ground in their formal recognition and that their incorporation in the GCR has arguably 'globalized' and even normalized their role, as a result of a longer-term bottom-up and top-down three-step process, in which their role was first justified, then formalized and finally normalized (see also Figure 1). However, this recognition in the international refugee regime is recent and thus, more research is needed to understand how this norm is playing out at a local level. Currently very limited empirical data on the role of faith actors in the implementation of the GCR exists (Appleby 2020; Milner and Klassen 2021; Sulewski 2020)). Further in the six ASILE country case studies with interviews of close to 100 actors in local refugee response, only actors in two countries—Brazil and South Africa—specifically highlighted the role of faith actors, and when they did it was not formally or seemingly meaningfully connected to GCR implementation, suggesting that this role was the continuation of what these faith actors were previously doing and that the standardization of their role at a global scale (isomorphism) is at least limited.

To explain why faith actors seemed to be more relevant in two out of six countries, we can draw a preliminary hypothesis based on regime type. As these are the only two democratic global South countries in our sample, civil society actors (including faith actors) may have a more legitimized role in refugee protection. Our interview material and specialized literature also suggest that the longer-term traditions in CSO involvement in migration governance and refugee protection, as is the case of Brazil (Jubilut and Apolinàrio 2008), which reinforces our point on the longer-term persistence of the key role that faith actors had before the GCR was implemented in each country, which is maintained by informal governance practices. This longer-term role is closely related to the capacities of each state to fulfil its functions in the area of refugee protection (Brumat and Geddes 2023). One further hypothesis is on the role of religion and welfare, which needs further study.

We surmise that faith actors' roles in refugee protection are not less relevant but that they are still less visible and more informal. We cannot conclude that GCR's naming of faith actors is increasing their role in refugee protection or in adapting global norms into local contexts. As Wurtz and Wilkinson (2020b) also argue, to better understand the legitimacy of faith actors in international refugee governance, there are dynamics to unpack between the global North, who is viewed as the influencer or norm-maker of norms such as the GCR, and the global South, where most of the world's refugees live and where faith actors are ubiquitous. It is plausible that what we see in the implementation of the GCR is illustrative of the dynamics surrounding changing flows of power in the localization of international norms for refugee protection (see Brumat, Geddes, and Pettrachin 2021).

For now, we know that the GCR names faith actors as relevant and that this has arguably formalized their role as actors in international refugee governance, and that this has emerged as part of a longer-term process of increased salience at various levels of governance. As faith actors play a leading role in global South, this formalization shows that civil society actors in global South countries can have an impact on global refugee and asylum governance. While we have evidence of their historic relevance in refugee response, further research about their relevance and power position in the implementation of the GCR and the localization or local adaptation of the GCR principles is needed. Future studies on faith actors' relevance and power position in the local adaptation of international norms and standards would constitute an important contribution to the literature on the diffusion of international norms and standards, on the relations between global North and global South countries, and on the everyday implementation of refugee protection policies.

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