

“Fortify Rights has been working tirelessly and continues doing an amazing job to advocate the rights of refugees.”

—Input from government representative

“[Fortify Rights is] consistently at the forefront of research and advocacy efforts around human rights . . . Global attention by media, policy makers, and partners would undoubtedly be lessened without their leadership and collaboration . . .J”

—Input from external stakeholder

Fortify Rights commissioned, Dr. Anita Ramšak, an experienced human rights impact evaluator, to conduct a 16-month comprehensive independent assessment on the effectiveness of Fortify Rights’s theory of change in advancing rights for refugees and at-risk migrants in Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, and Bangladesh.

The evaluation relied on an “Adjusted Outcome Harvesting” methodology, which is a preferred application for analyzing complex situations where the relationship between cause and effect is not entirely transparent and many different actors influence change. This methodology employs a five-step process including harvest design, data gathering, engagement of informants, substantiation of outcomes, and analysis and interpretation of gathered data. The evaluation included an in-depth review of Fortify Rights’s internal documentation and reporting, discussions with Fortify Rights team members, and interviews with 19 external stakeholders, including five current or former government representatives. The key findings and recommendations of this assessment of the evaluation are summarized below.

Key Findings: Impact Results

Fortify Rights has been at the forefront of raising protection concerns and human rights violations, including trafficking crimes, of Rohingya people, consistently providing high-quality investigation and advocacy work while supporting and amplifying voices of Rohingya communities at a local and international level.

—Evaluation report

The evaluation found that between **2018 and 2020** Fortify Rights significantly contributed to:

16
Impacts

Changes to laws, policies, and practices that improved rights and protections for refugees and at-risk migrants

22
Outcomes

Action on recommendations to advance rights and protections for refugees and at-risk migrants

*See Annex 1 of the evaluation for a detailed review of Fortify Rights’s impacts and outcomes.

Key Findings

Fortify Rights is recognized **as an influential leader working on advocacy and investigation work** on the Rohingya crisis, including in supporting and amplifying Rohingya voices at the local and international level.

Fortify Rights **played an important role in influencing the development of Thai migration policy framework** to protect refugees and end the immigration detention of children.

Fortify Rights has been **on the frontlines of mobilization efforts against unsafe, undignified forced returns of refugees** throughout the region.

Fortify Rights has contributed to **strengthening community groups and civil society organizations** working on refugee and migration issues across the region.

“Fortify Rights was possibly one of the first NGOs that raised the concerns regarding the genocide of Rohingya people since 2015 to human rights communities and government stakeholders, which was recognized later in 2017. Their advocacy has been tireless and fearless to address this difficult issue.”

—INGO Substantiator

Effectiveness of the Fortify Rights Strategy

Fortify Rights's theory of change, grounded in the three interlinked activity clusters of investigating, engaging, and strengthening, has been assessed as an effective and logical approach to achieving set goals in the complex sphere of migration and human rights . . . Fortify Rights has extensive resources and skill sets in all three strategy domains that can be deployed to effect the desired change.

—Evaluation Report

To achieve impacts and outcomes, Fortify Rights relies on a three-pronged theory of change, which includes:

- **Investigating** human rights violations;
- **Engaging** people with power on solutions; and
- **Strengthening** human rights defenders and communities affected by violations.



Key Factors Of Success

Fortify Rights is, by its structure, an agile and lean organization, which also allows it to efficiently re-strategize and mobilize responses based on the changing social and political contexts and situations.

—Evaluation Report

Key factors of success that resulted in the achieved impacts and outcomes include Fortify Rights's:



- **High-quality investigative work using credible and revelatory information** based on sound data and first-hand, heavily substantiated sources of information/evidence.



- **An extensive and trusted network of on-the-ground partners** with an emphasis on the protection of human rights defenders.



- **High-level technical expertise on protection issues and the rights of migrants and refugees**, combined with the strong organizational social and political capital of its senior staff and associates, including its international advisory board, which Fortify Rights has used in a strategic and impactful manner.



- **In-depth understanding of the context** and skilled manoeuvring and strategizing around politically sensitive and complex issues, including a strong ability to assess risks and set risk mitigation strategies. This includes strong skills in assessing relevant advocacy and influencing opportunities, as well as mediating and balancing different perspectives while navigating complex challenges.



- **Strong emphasis on working with partners and allies to achieve joint goals** as well as facilitating, mobilizing, and strengthening coalitions and networks to amplify the voices of, minimize the risks to, and deflect pressure from local partner organizations.

We are receiving unconditional support [from Fortify Rights] on many issues in terms of information sharing and elevating issues we cannot speak on or getting their advice on specific information.

—Input from external stakeholder



- **Position of combining its international reach with its strong local presence**, which allows Fortify Rights to build bridges between those two spheres of influence, strengthening responses and its advocacy.



- **Strategic use of and strong presence in the media**, which also opens opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue and discussions on solutions with people in positions of power who can effect change.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the complexity of the goals Fortify Rights is pursuing, coupled with the fairly small size of the organization in terms of staff (currently 16 full-time staff members) and resources, the organization's mapped contribution towards securing refugee and migrant rights in the region should be acknowledged and applauded. Their work also importantly demonstrates that the openings for change exist when there is determination (even by just a handful of individuals), coupled with skill and a strategic commitment to long-term work and engagement.

—Evaluation Report

Based on the findings and analysis, the evaluation concluded that **Fortify Rights has clearly contributed to valuable impacts that point towards strengthened rights for the most vulnerable migrant groups** in all four target countries, with a particularly noticeable contribution in Bangladesh and Thailand. Five impacts substantiated by the external substantiators sufficiently indicate the strength of Fortify Rights's approach, including a great appreciation for the organization's work and contributions by their allies, partners, and other contacted stakeholders.

To strengthen the future work of Fortify Rights, the evaluation provided the following seven organizational recommendations, and a further 10 programmatic recommendations. The organizational recommendations included:

- **Invest in following-up on the achieved impacts to ensure sustainable changes in the lives of the most vulnerable refugees and migrants.** Keeping issues in the spotlight at the national and international level is particularly critical and is a role that Fortify Rights has been effectively carrying out in the last couple of years.
- **Continue to frame the work of the organization within the international human rights framework.** The human rights framework strengthens the credibility of the organization, offers solutions and guidance on complex issues, and has a potential to reduce any perception of the organization as pursuing its own interests.
- **Continue to rely on the three-part theory of change (investigate, engage, strengthen), while also re-assessing changing political landscapes to fine-tune responses.** Fortify Rights has extensive resources and skill sets in all three strategy domains and those strategies should be deployed to effect the desired change.
- **Build on the existing monitoring and evaluation framework and share positive stories and achievements.** Fortify Rights has a fairly extensive M&E framework, which already incorporates the outcome harvesting methodology elements and should strengthen Fortify Rights's position among donors to provide fairly unrestricted organizational support. Such support is crucial for the nature of Fortify Rights' work and to fully leverage its political and social influence.
- **Continue to invest in building strategic partnerships and strengthening networks in order to multiply voices, diminish risks, and provide forums and opportunities for community groups and individuals.** Building strong partnerships and working in coalitions is the best way to demonstrate wider support for Fortify Rights's goals.
- **Assess if there is an opportunity to strengthen gender aspects across all programs.** Fortify Rights has demonstrated a prioritization of including gender aspects in its work. Nevertheless, there appears to be an opportunity to re-assess how gender aspects could be strengthened in all aspects of the organization's work, including within its monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

The program specific recommendations included:

Malaysia

- Continue to build and nurture relationships with allies, partners, and other stakeholders relevant to achieving targeted goals.
- Map opportunities to create public pressure and awareness around human trafficking.
- Re-establish connections with [the Malaysian National Human Rights Commission] and other relevant actors within the country and continue supporting them in following-up on mapping new opportunities to reinvent the anti-trafficking agenda in the country.

Bangladesh

- Continuously re-assess the strategy in Bangladesh to reflect the constantly changing circumstances and to identify new entry points for achieving desired changes. This should include anticipating that the recent escalation of the political crisis in Myanmar might additionally stall progress in ensuring the safe and dignified return of Rohingya to Myanmar.

Thailand

- Continue working with and strengthening [Thai civil society organizations working with people on the move].
- Build on and expand activities that appear to be effective in bringing an international spotlight on the Government of Thailand for its treatment of refugees and migrants.
- Explore possible economic arguments that may further desired impacts, including the possibility of using tools such as “Social Return on Investments,” if relevant, to build arguments that might resonate with the government.

Myanmar

- Accelerate the mediation work among the ethnic communities . . . to pursue joint solutions and develop alliances.
- Continue to advance accountability goals.
- Build relationships with organizations pursuing similar goals or with the potential to engage on similar strategic issues.

*See the full report for further details on recommendations.