



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK



# 2015 ANNUAL REPORT



## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This has been an extraordinary year—in which refugee issues made front page global headlines – with shocking images and stories that have saddened many of us. The world has woken up to the plight of the displaced and communities near and far have sprung into action to do their part.

In 2011, when Oktay Durukan and I came up with the idea for RSN, we did not expect the crisis to reach the level it has today, but we did know that Turkey’s importance within global migration was increasing. At that time, Oktay and the team at Helsinki Citizens Assembly-Refugee Program (now Refugee Rights Turkey), where I was a visiting fellow, were giving input to Turkish lawmakers on historic legislation that would later go into effect in 2014.

In creating RSN we were guided by a few key principles: 1) refugees are not only people in need, but individuals with rights, under a range of international and national laws, and entitled to dignified treatment and basic services; 2) in order for the progress contained in the text of new Turkish legislation to be meaningful and the rights for refugees actualized, we would need more legal expertise and participation from local lawyers; and 3) resources, not only financial, but in the form of innovative ideas and energies, exist in the U.S. and around the world that can be leveraged to support rights-based initiatives for refugees in Turkey.

Oktay and I were careful and deliberate about each and every detail in founding RSN – including the name. Solidarity is a heavy term. To be in solidarity with those who have had to flee their homes and leave everything behind is to fight for their fair treatment and empowerment where they need it most: first countries of asylum.

Over the course of our first full fiscal year in operation (Oct 2014–Sept 2015), we were able to make great progress in advancing our mission. With federal funding and in collaboration with our local partner, Refugee Rights Turkey, we launched a program that provides critical legal assistance to refugees while training and creating reference materials for lawyers across Turkey to increase the availability of refugee legal aid. We’ve developed an advocacy agenda and become active in the U.S. forums where many decisions are made about humanitarian assistance overseas. And we have cultivated a community of supporters to comprise our network and to show the solidarity that refugees so desperately need right now.

I am so very proud and humbled at the same time. We could not have achieved what we did without your support. I hope you continue to read this report to learn in detail about all of the hard work we’ve undertaken and the achievements we’ve accomplished. And I look forward to sharing with you many more to come.

Sincerely,

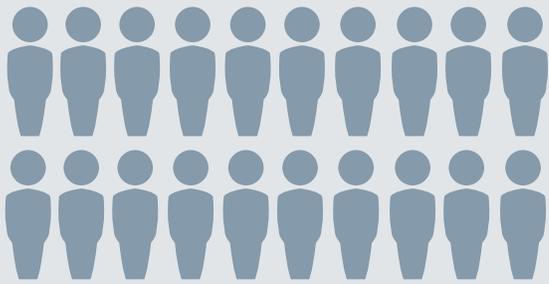
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zaid Hydari'.

Zaid Hydari  
Executive Director, Co-Founder

# OVERVIEW OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN TURKEY

In 2015, the UNHCR announced that Turkey has become the largest host country of refugees in the world. The historic numbers are due mainly to the continuing war and strife in Syria, although stark increases in arrivals of individuals and families coming from Iraq and Afghanistan have also been observed. Turkish law and policy distinguish between Syrian and non-Syrians. Syrians receive "Temporary Protection" while non-Syrians are able to apply for "Conditional Refugee Status." The statuses have different procedures and associated rights, although details are continuously evolving.

## AS OF OCTOBER 2015, TURKEY IS HOSTING:

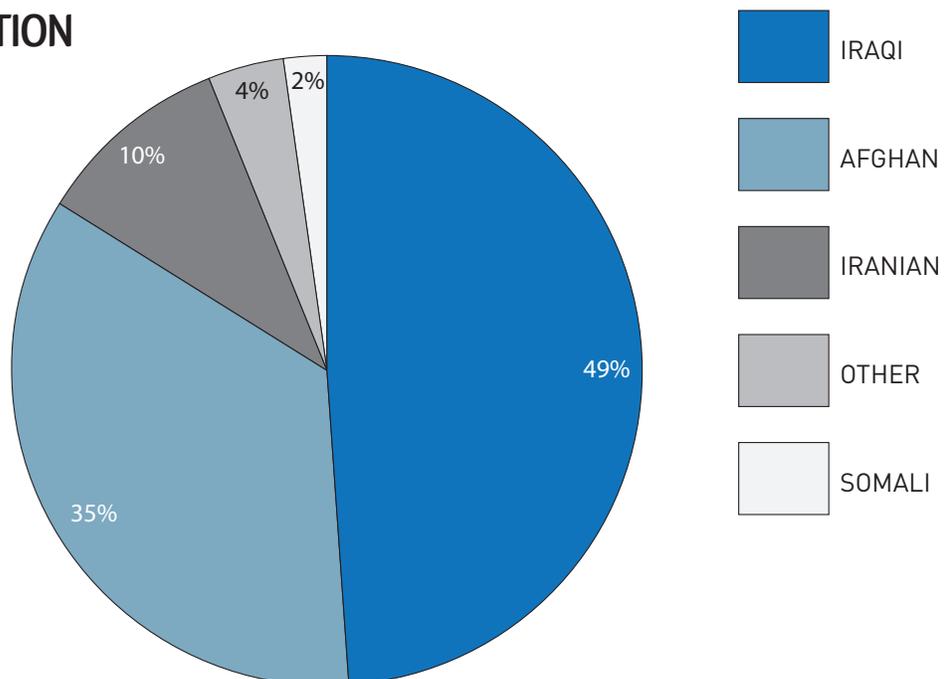


2.18 MILLION  
SYRIANS



236,000  
NON-SYRIANS  
(REGISTERED WITH UNHCR)

## NON-SYRIAN POPULATION





## RAISING AWARENESS

**RSN** is committed to raising the public's consciousness of the refugee experience in Turkey. First and foremost, these efforts are aimed at humanizing refugees, a population too often demonized as a security threat to their host countries or simply stereotyped as a burden or strain on resources. In addition to countering such negative perceptions, RSN actively works to promote rights-based programming as part of a broader humanitarian response to refugee situations. By providing a more comprehensive understanding of the refugee and migration context in the region, and the legal challenges inherently facing refugees in host countries, RSN is creating a dynamic community of individuals that are united in a spirit of compassion and *solidarity*.

RSN's launch event in April 2015 was a perfect opportunity to begin this ongoing effort. A group of over 100 gathered in lower Manhattan, including members of key diaspora communities, resettled refugees, and other concerned individuals, to learn about RSN's work and to foster understanding. The evening featured a musical performance by Syrian artist Kinan Azmeh and the City Band and screenings of our short documentaries (available on our website under "Stories"). Please visit our website for a recap of the night, including pictures and a video created by board member Leila Shifteh.

In addition to this event, RSN staff participated in a number of speaking engagements to raise awareness over the year, including at Fordham University School of Law, NYU Law, Cardozo Law, and the Center for Constitutional Rights.

# BUILDING CAPACITY OF TURKEY'S LEADING REFUGEE LEGAL AID NGO

Launched in March 2015, **Refugee Rights Turkey (RRT)** was formerly Helsinki Citizens Assembly-Refugee Advocacy and Support Program (HCA-RASP). Inheriting HCA-RASP's expertise in the field of migration, RRT's launch came at a time when Turkey was declared the world's largest host country of refugees. In addition to hosting historic numbers of refugees, Turkey is also in the beginning stages of implementing the brand new Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which completely overhauls its asylum system.

RRT is an expert on the new legislative framework in Turkey, having been involved in the drafting of the text and its passage into law. In addition to advocacy at the national-level, RRT is also involved at the regional and international levels. As a member of ECRE (the European Council on Refugees and Exiles) and other key coalitions, RRT closely follows migration developments at the EU-Level and across the Middle East and North Africa.

RSN was founded to build capacity of actors like RRT; to ensure that as policies are debated and deals are struck between governments, independent civil society perspectives are also heard.

In March 2015, RSN and RRT formally began implementation of a U.S. State Department-funded project to assist with Turkey's implementation of the new law. Refugee legal aid ensures that refugees are able to navigate new procedures and enjoy legal safeguards provided by the law.

RSN and RRT's project, *The Legal Center for Refugee Rights in Istanbul*, provides free-of-charge legal assistance to refugees, develops reference materials for and provides training to lawyers across the country, and coordinates with other NGO service providers and the government.

Over the course of the first 9 months of the program, we have:

- Provided over 3,000 instances of legal services to more than 2,500 refugees and their families
- Delivered group "know-your-rights" and counseling sessions for over 100 Syrian refugees in Istanbul
- Made over 70 visits to detention centers and state-run facilities where asylum-seekers and refugees are held or reside, ensuring access to appropriate asylum procedures for over 75% of the refugees encountered

## RSN-RRT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

RSN continues to provide a unique opportunity for American law students and recent grads to contribute first-hand to refugee legal aid efforts. Our joint fellowship with our Turkish partner allows for fellows to gain valuable field experience while also enjoying research and advocacy opportunities with RSN. All fellows receive training and supervision. RSN is pleased to welcome Urooj Rahman, a 2015 graduate of Fordham Law School, as one of RSN's fellows for the coming year.



*RSN Board Chair Lauren Pérez and Executive Director Zaid Hydari with Refugee Rights Turkey staff.*

- Held meetings with government officials and international and local NGO's providing various services to refugees
- Developed a Refugee Law Handbook for Lawyers covering international norms, domestic legislation, and sample documents and decisions
- Delivered refugee law training sessions for over 100 lawyers in collaboration with local bar associations

Looking ahead to 2016, the project will continue to directly serve refugees and build capacity of the legal field in Turkey through a number of innovative activities.

## A CROSSROADS: WHERE OUR CLIENTS COME FROM



The majority of clients (89%) served by RSN-RRT came from 5 countries: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Beneficiaries from 28 other countries also received services, including Bangladesh, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Georgia, Guinea, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, and Yemen.



**OVER THE COURSE** of 2015, RSN closely followed the international humanitarian response to the refugee crisis in the region and identified a number of priority areas in which it has and will continue to engage.

RSN lent support to calls by a wide variety of groups for increased U.S. resettlement of refugees, particularly from Syria. Since the war broke out there in 2011 until late 2015, the U.S. has resettled less than 2,000 Syrian refugees. RSN supported the September 2015 White House announcement to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees in FY2016, and was concerned that that figure was too low, given the levels of displacement in the region. But in the wake of the Paris tragedy, we have seen an unfortunate backlash that has put the whole refugee admissions program in jeopardy.

RSN has and continues to actively take part in the #AmericaWelcomes campaign on social media, joining partners in countering xenophobic rhetoric and fear-mongering by elected officials. RSN submitted statements to committees of the Senate and House of Representatives in response to hearings on the subject of resettlement and has signed on to various letters of support by key coalitions.

RSN will continue to take part in coordinated efforts to counter anti-refugee sentiment over the course of the next year, while promoting continued U.S. support for overseas programming in first countries of asylum, where the vast majority of refugees live and the greatest needs exist. RSN will research how more rights-based programming can advance long-term development goals and how displaced populations can be better integrated into the broader development agenda.

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD

It's a pleasure and honor to address you as RSN's Board of Directors following completion of our first full fiscal year in operation--which has been critical to our growth and development.

In addition to all of the important programming that RSN has been involved in over the last year, we have also made a number of adjustments to our governance and administrative structures, welcoming Ali Khreis and Mo Mansour to the RSN Board of Directors. Mo, a senior sales manager with HSBC, brings a strong finance background to help with financial management, and has taken over as RSN's Treasurer. Ali also brings experience in oversight and compliance as a tax lawyer. Both now sit on our Audit and Finance Committee.

It has been very exciting to watch RSN grow. Launching our program on the ground in March was an especially major achievement. As we look forward to the coming year, we thank all of our supporters, all of whom have been essential to helping RSN come this far. With your help we can continue to grow and serve more refugees in need.

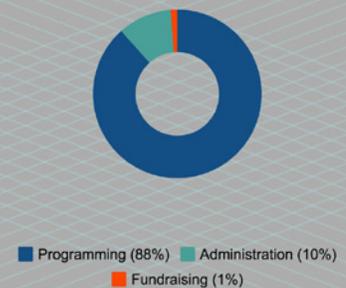


RSN Board members Laura Garr, Mo Mansour, and Deniz Inal with Executive Director Zaid Hydari.

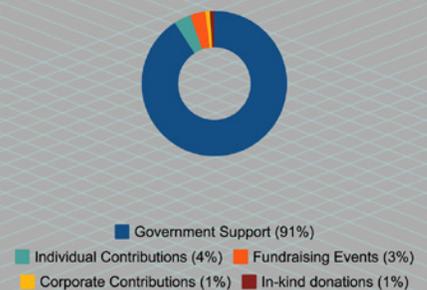
# FINANCIALS

RSN's fiscal year 2015 ran from October 2014 to September 2015. The following charts show our income and expenses for 2015. Surplus funds from the previous fiscal year were carried over and allocated to cover the deficit shown below.

## FY 2015 Expenses (\$247,070)



## FY 2015 Income (\$236,497)



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

RSN expresses its gratitude to all the individual volunteers that assisted us over the course of our first full year.

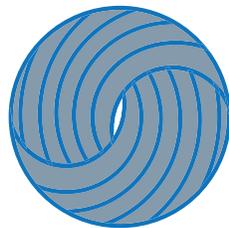
We are also grateful for the support of:

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, Migration

White & Case LLP

Leitner Center for International Law and Justice

Fordham University School of Law



**REFUGEE SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK**