

REFUGEE SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK

# ANNUAL REPORT 2017



# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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To put it plainly, 2017 was a reality check for individuals and organizations working on a wide range of progressive causes. Refugee issues in particular made big headlines, mostly due to continuing maligning and misunderstanding.

However, despite unfounded attacks and xenophobia, there were many important victories to celebrate and hard-fought efforts to acknowledge. Communities and civil society groups around the world showed their support for inclusion, compassion, and equality by demonstrating in public and by opening their doors in private. We have witnessed more refugee-led organizations participating in advocacy on forced migration issues, and a global community coming together to draw up new global compacts that address issues of migration and international protection.

**RSN has been a part of this global movement. We continue to act in support of refugees, by exploring all the ways we can expand refugees' access to justice.**

We support independent civil society actors in refugee host states, so as to build long-term national capacities and therefore contribute to development efforts, while raising awareness among our network of the refugee experience.

And as always, while we undertake our efforts we reflect on how we can be more effective in standing in solidarity with those forced to leave their homes, land, and their loved ones behind. With your support and contributions we will continue on our path through 2018 and beyond.

**Zaid Hydari**  
Executive Director, Co-Founder

# THE CONTEXT OF OUR WORK

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**22.5 Million**

People displaced worldwide

The vast majority of refugees stay close to their homes. Developing countries hosted 84 percent of the world's refugees - or about 14.5 million people. This means countries like Pakistan, Uganda, Jordan, Lebanon, Iran, Bangladesh are where the most significant numbers of refugees are.

**84%**

Proportion of the world's refugees living in developing countries.

All countries are obligated by international law to provide basic protection to refugees in their territory. Many governments are unwilling to allow refugees to enjoy rights that will allow for them to resume regular lives in their host countries, due to fear of attracting more arrivals and competition over scarce resources.



**3+ Million**

Refugees in Turkey

For the third consecutive year, in 2017 Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees in the world, with over 3 million people seeking protection in the country.

**18,814**

Refugees in Bulgaria

In 2017, Bulgaria hosted 18,814 refugees. About 65% of asylum applications were denied by the government agency in 2017, highlighting the need for legal assistance for those seeking protection.

# CAPACITY BUILDING

A fundamental element of RSN's mission and values is to identify and establish long-term, equitable partnerships with national civil society actors in countries hosting refugees.

**We believe that the most effective way to make a difference in the lives of refugees is to work with local advocates in key host states.**

These individuals and organizations understand the local context and how to work within in it. Since these advocates are national entities, investing in them is an investment in the host community.

In addition to supporting national advocates, our capacity-building facilitates services for refugees. In our first phase, we have focused on the provision of legal assistance.



RSN's partner, Refugee Rights Turkey, provides training for lawyers on refugee law



The RRT team provides training to NGOs

# CAPACITY BUILDING

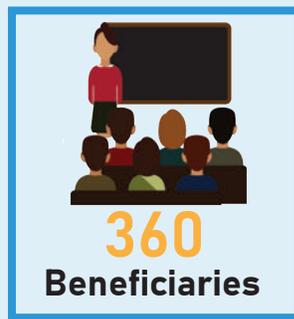
## Turkey

Since RSN's launch in 2014, we have worked to support our sister organization, Refugee Rights Turkey, with their mission to provide direct legal services to refugees and to build capacity of the Turkish legal field. This partnership involves a number of different activities. In 2017, together, we:

Provided individualized direct legal services to



Provided group counseling for



Trained NGO professionals and lawyers on international, regional, and Turkish refugee law



Printed materials reached



Created and disseminated legal information materials



Animated videos reached



## Bulgaria

In 2016 RSN, began a partnership with Sofia-based Center for Legal Aid-Voice in Bulgaria. As part of our partnership, we sponsored a legal fellow to contribute to CLA's work for 5 months.

Violeta contributed to over 50 cases. Her services included filing appeals for asylum-seekers, writing country condition reports to support refugee legal cases, and filing other requests to state institutions on behalf of her clients.

We also released a Field Report outlining our view of the protection space within the country in Spring 2017.



# RAISING AWARENESS

RSN is committed to helping break down misunderstandings about refugees and the refugee context. In the US, like in many parts of the world, refugees are increasingly being maligned in the media and as part of political discourse.



## Social Media Pages

RSN's pages provide a mix of posts that serve to educate, combat misinformation and xenophobia, and help build a community. While journalists try their best to create human interest stories, social media continues to be inundated with xenophobic messages. RSN channels our field experience and expertise in human rights into our unique social media content.

## Public Speaking Engagements

RSN has been active in presenting its unique and thorough understanding of refugee issues in various events held and organized by academic institutions, community organizations, and various NGOs.



Zaid Hydari | Executive Director  
Presenting changes in US refugee policy at Binghamton University.



Kamyar Jarahzadeh | Monitoring, Evaluation,  
Research and Learning Manager  
Contributing to global civil society discussion on  
refugee protection and empowerment.

# RESEARCH & ADVOCACY

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## Expanding Legal Assistance: Researching Legal Aid Systems and Supporting Pro Bono

RSN has carried out extensive research, in coordination with our project partners, on the availability of legal assistance for refugees in host countries

This has led us to engage in long term efforts to strengthen the national legal aid schemes in our focus countries. Alongside these efforts, we also promote increased pro bono activity from lawyers who are able to sacrifice their time, through structured partnerships with NGOs, according to and in light of the local rules governing the provision of legal services .



RSN published a paper outlining how pro bono partnerships are carried out in the US, to serve as possible models for replication in other refugee host states.



## Global Compact on Migration

Following the signing of the New York Declaration on Refugees in 2016, RSN was also involved with civil Society engagement around the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. As an organization, RSN believes that decision making related to migration often affects refugee protection as well, and that experts in the refugee protection space should also be involved in migration policy when necessary. To this end, RSN delivered a personal statement at the UN Headquarters in New York alongside other organizations that demanded the modalities for the Global Compact on Migration allow for civil society participation and input into this future document.

In part as a result of the advocacy efforts of RSN and our colleagues in this space, the UN General Assembly opened an accreditation process for NGOs to participate in the Preparatory Process for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. RSN received this accreditation and used the opportunity to closely monitor the developments of this compact and to participate in joint advocacy as part of NGO coalitions.

# RESEARCH & ADVOCACY

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## RSN Engagement on Domestic U.S. Policies

RSN has felt the implications of changes in the U.S. refugee resettlement program and limitations to travel for citizens of many significant refugee origin countries that produce refugees. Many of RSN's beneficiaries were personally affected by the various travel bans in 2017 or faced significant emotional distress as a result of these disturbing executive orders.

**We work with our partners to ensure refugees receive accurate and up-to-date counseling on the implications of these bans, and we continue to monitor developments as they affect our clients abroad.**



Such restrictive measures also affect our ability to advocate for improved conditions in refugee host states, as such measures go against the idea of responsibility-sharing and send the message that host countries are on their own. RSN channeled this perspective into a public statement and advocacy, both individually and as part of coalitions, around Executive actions against travel and resettlement.

## RSN Participation in UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs

RSN participated in the 2017 UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs event in Geneva, where we had an opportunity to engage with UNHCR officials about strategies for improving conditions for refugees in our focus countries. The event also gave us an opportunity to participate in joint advocacy initiatives with colleagues working on refugee protection from around the world.

# MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

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With continued global conflict and increasing environmental disasters, the number of displaced persons around the world continues to grow at alarming and record rates. Millions of people, because of circumstances completely beyond their control, are forced to leave their homes, their families, their communities, their jobs and start again. Increased isolationism and propaganda targeting migrants is leading to tighter borders and higher walls blocking entry for vulnerable men, women and children looking for safety.

**The global humanitarian response is still struggling to meet the most primary needs of these individuals and fails to provide necessary legal services. RSN was founded to help fill this gap.**

In 2014, RSN became the first and only US-based organization focused exclusively on supporting refugee legal assistance operations in the world's largest host country, Turkey.

With your help, over the past three years, RSN has grown and expanded its efforts both in Turkey and around the region. We continue to ensure legal services for refugees and asylum seekers by bolstering the efforts of local NGOs in host countries. RSN has and will remain an advocate of those seeking basic rights and dignities. We work to not only increase access to legal services, but ensure refugees and asylum seekers have a voice in the global conversation about them. We are on the forefront of finding workable solutions to the service gap to ensure sustainable solutions that account for the needs of refugees and the host countries. RSN is committed to expanding access to justice and promoting a response to forced displacement that is rights-based and rooted in the local communities.

As members of the Board of RSN, we want to thank you for supporting RSN in its ongoing mission.

## Meet our new team members



**Sierra Kraft**

I'm excited to join RSN after years of experience working in non-profit accreditation, along with an educational background in human rights. I am assisting RSN with grants management and compliance.



**Patricia Talisse**

I am happy to bring my experience as a social worker and my background working with NGOs in Syria and New York to boost RSN's communications and support in its mission.

# FINANCIALS

**Operating** | **\$832,905**



**Income** | **\$821,426**



We would like to acknowledge with special appreciation the **U.S. Department of State Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration, Tent Foundation, White & Case LLP, and Boston University School of Law.**

RSN uses every contribution to fulfill our organization's mission, be it supporting capacity building of local partners in key host countries, advocacy for innovative rights-based refugee assistance policies and programs, or raising awareness of the refugee experience.

We are thankful to all organizations, individuals, and government entities that support our vision of refugee protection.

\* Funds released based on satisfaction of program funding restrictions.



# ABOUT RSN

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Refugee Solidarity Network (RSN) is a U.S.-based, tax-exempt non-governmental organization that seeks to protect the rights afforded to refugees by international law. We do so by partnering with and building capacity of civil society in key host states, advocating for rights-based refugee assistance policies and programs, and raising awareness of the refugee experience.

## Protecting and Expanding Refugee Rights

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