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ANNUAL REPORT



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY
NETWORK

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Message from Senior Management

"The world was transformed by COVID19. Refugees were affected just like everyone else, unfortunately in more stark and adverse ways."

-Zaid Hydari, Executive Director, RSN

A YEAR TO REMEMBER

2020 will always be remembered as the year in which a global pandemic brought the world to a halt. Many of us made changes to our living situations and took measures to protect ourselves and our loved ones. In some ways, more of us experienced just a fraction of what refugees and asylum-seekers face on a regular basis.



Photo: Ebi Zandi

We are proud to say that our staff, board of directors, and our supporters were quick to adapt and remained committed to helping some of the world's most vulnerable. We are also humbled by the efforts of our partners and most significantly by the people on the move and the communities hosting them. Despite the threat of the pandemic, many stepped up to support refugees. We embrace that spirit and continue our work, with your help and solidarity.

COVID

The world was transformed by COVID19. Refugees were affected just like everyone else, unfortunately in more stark and adverse ways. This included refugees in different circumstances: 1) those already in host countries with status; 2) those in host countries pending a determination on their applications for asylum; 3) those embarking on journeys and arriving in host countries after the pandemic restrictions went into place. All three categories faced special challenges alongside common ones. Our work adapted for the circumstances: we continued support for partners in the field, mobilized resources to advocate for continued compliance with refugee rights even while managing an emergency, and engaged in research and awareness-raising—despite being physically distant from the contexts on which we focus, we remained engaged.



NUMBERS IN TURKEY AND BANGLADESH

Despite a reduction in the number of people able to seek asylum in other countries, Turkey remained the world's largest host country for refugees in 2020 with a diverse population of about four million. Bangladesh was a significant host, with almost one million, mostly Rohingya, refugees on its territory.



4 million



1 million



Awareness-Raising

ROHINGYA PANEL AT NYU

In February, RSN was honored to join an enlightening panel, “Beyond the Crisis Narrative: Entangled Pasts and Possible Futures of Rohingya in Bangladesh and Burma” at New York University with representatives from Naripokkho, Restless Beings, and NYU. The panelists discussed the myths and narratives around Rohingya identity, the implications of Bangladesh hosting one of the world’s largest refugee populations, and the potential possibilities to address these issues in the region and beyond. The event allowed RSN to present on the international law elements of refugee protection and global trends, and on how Bangladesh can improve conditions for Rohingya through improvements to law and policy.

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY WEBINAR SERIES

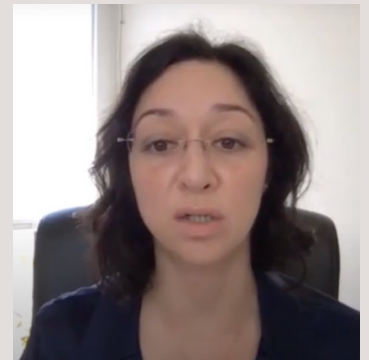
RSN participated in Northwestern University’s webinar series exploring the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities around the world. RSN Executive Director, Zaid Hydari, spoke about the evolution of the refugee and migration management framework in Turkey from 2010 onwards.



Zaid Hydari



Yasemin Ozer



Deniz Duruiz

Advocacy

COVID ADVOCACY VIDEO SERIES

As part of RSN's response to COVID19, we developed a series of videos that captured important lessons for policy-makers around the world to consider when navigating the pandemic. The videos highlighted important international legal principles that, even in times of crisis, must be adhered to or taken into consideration.



Advocacy (cont.)

GLOBAL LEGAL COMMUNITY PLEDGE

RSN was a key player in formulating an important pledge at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, as part of a core group of refugee rights organizations from around the world. The pledge mobilized the legal community, including NGOs and law firms, who committed 127,000 hours of pro bono service toward refugee rights. Throughout 2020, RSN engaged with the core group, led by partner PILNet, to help actualize the pledge, beginning with pilot projects in Asia.



Research

NATIONAL CONSULTATION SERIES

Throughout the summer of 2020, RSN with partners Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), and Naripokkho, engaged in national consultations with experts in Bangladesh to inform the ongoing research initiative that resulted in a 2021 publication, *Beyond Refuge*. The virtual consultation series allowed for RSN to understand more about the situation and challenges on the ground for Rohingya despite not being able to travel to the region.



REGIONAL CONSULTATION SERIES

RSN partnered with OSJI and Nationality for All (NFA) for an informative consultation series with local NGOs and international organizations working on the ground in various South and Southeast Asian countries. The series helped inform a research report highlighting positive practices to improve legal status for refugees in the region.

Capacity Development

CENTER FOR REFUGEE RIGHTS IN TURKEY

Throughout the year, even despite the pandemic, RSN continued to support the operation of a comprehensive legal services and capacity-building program in Turkey with long-standing partner, Refugee Rights Turkey.

Refugee
Rights
Turkey

REMOTE/VIRTUAL SERVICES & LEGAL SEMINARS

1. The Center's Helpdesk services for asylum seekers and migrants, as well as legal counseling interviews and litigation support interventions, remained operational and continued over telephone and other distant communication tools.
2. The Center continued their refugee law specialization seminars, which they had already been conducting for many years for legal professionals in Turkey—this time the seminars were adapted to reach trainees using online tools.



Meet Our Newest RSN Team Members

STAFF & INTERNS

RSN was excited to welcome two new staff members in 2020. Leila Shifteh (pictured left) joined RSN as Global Manager of Programs. Benil Mostafa joined as RSN's Sustainability & Donor Relations Manager.

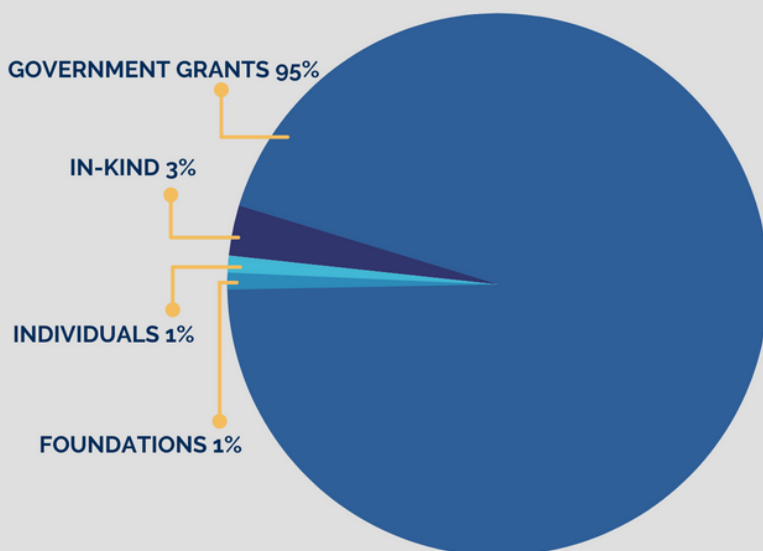
RSN was thrilled to host Iva Petkova as a remote summer intern. Iva helped carry out critical research that fed into RSN's internal capacity-building and Rohingya response.



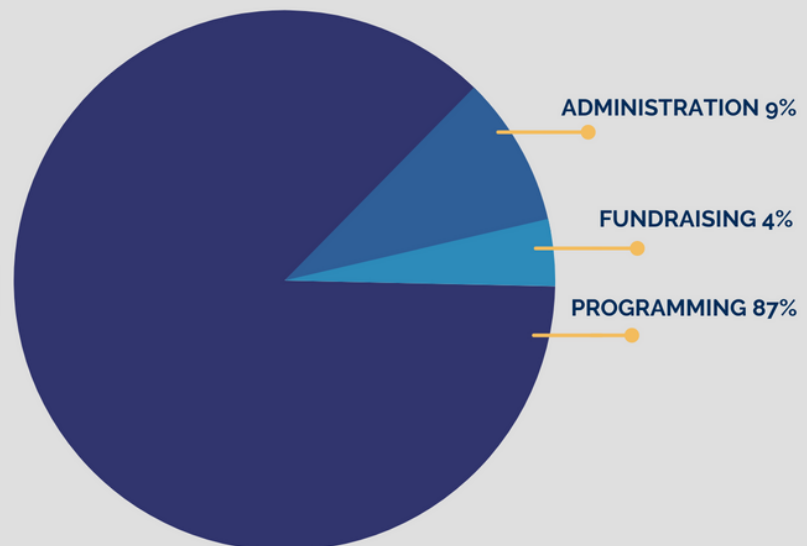
Financials and Support

We would like to extend a special thank you to our institutional donors: US Department of State, Open Society Justice Initiative, Baker McKenzie, and White & Case.

INCOME



EXPENSES



Message from the Board

Dear Friends and Supporters,

In a year of unprecedented change, RSN's commitment to the world's most vulnerable people remained steadfast. The pandemic at once demonstrated the fragility and interconnectedness of modern human life. The human urge to seek safety for our loved ones reverberated through lockdowns and forced migration. As 2020 demanded flexibility, RSN's management and employees adapted to provide on the ground support to our community partners while continuing to raise awareness and push for systemic change.

The Board was thrilled to welcome two new staff members. Leila Shifteh is a longtime supporter of RSN and joined the organization as Manager of Global Programs. Benil Mostafa joined as Sustainability and Donor Relations Manager. In addition, we were delighted to welcome Miriam Wakim to the Board. We look forward to their contributions to this vital work.

The challenges of 2020 demonstrated how RSN's unique model of on the ground collaboration is more important than ever. We thank you for your support and look forward to continuing to provide these crucial services to the most vulnerable.



About RSN

OUR MISSION

Refugee Solidarity Network protects the rights of people uprooted from their homes and strengthens the communities where they seek safety. In partnership with advocates and local stakeholders, we develop capacity in refugee host countries outside the U.S. and advance legal frameworks that uphold human rights. We believe the complexity of forced migration requires a flexible, collaborative response focused on achieving sustainable solutions.



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