



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT

2021



Photo: Trent Inness

REFUGEE SOLIDARITY NETWORK

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Photo: Khaledf



Photo: Amors Photos

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends of RSN,

I am truly proud and excited to present to you our 2021 Annual Report. Despite the incredibly complex challenges we confronted throughout the year, we rose to the occasion when needed—supporting communities and initiatives often overlooked. I am humbled by our growth and our persistence to move forward. Though the events of 2021 are not entirely behind us, let's use the opportunity to reflect on our ability to come together during trying times, to entrust each other despite uncertainty, and to strengthen our collective will to protect human dignity. Thank you for being a part of our community.

With gratitude,



Zaid Hydari

Executive Director/Founder
Refugee Solidarity Network



Photo: SAKhanPhotography

CONTEXT

As we entered the second year of a global pandemic, lock-down and quarantining mandates slowly started to lessen, borders began to reopen, and dependable vaccines began gaining approval for general use. At the same time, the plight of humans seeking safety persisted and the need for reliable COVID-19 information for displaced communities grew. We responded by keeping up with the latest health mandates in Turkey—and updating COVID related content on our shared Information Portal.

Mid-year—following the shocking Kabul airport scene of Afghans clinging to an ascending aircraft—RSN actively shifted our focus to better address the needs of Afghan refugees fleeing to neighboring countries. From this, we launched a 2021 year-end campaign—raising over **\$8,000** to dedicate towards our Afghan Response.

In a similar vein, we closely monitored lamentable shifts in Bangladesh’s management of Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar. Numerous deadly fires, questionable camp-conditions, shutdowns of Rohingya-led education sites, and the intentional destruction of Rohingya buildings and shopping centers throughout 2021, reaffirmed RSN’s need to increase collaboration with civil society organizations on the ground and prioritize Rohingya protection and awareness.

Here at home in the United States, we watched with sympathetic eyes the unfolding of violent immigration enforcement tactics against Black migrants in Del Rio. The extensions of Title 42 and Remain In Mexico (MPP), continued to separate families and deny humans their rights to asylum. As an effort to reassert our values—RSN joined a multi-organization movement in alliance against anti-migration policies.

In response to these events, and with your generous support, RSN did what RSN was founded to do—we worked together with our partners in the field in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Mexico, the U.S., and Turkey— to protect and uphold refugee rights.

Though 2021 was marked by applaudable achievements and growth for RSN, we recognize the need for continued multilateral discussion, research, and advocacy—increasing cooperation between policymakers, NGOs, legal practitioners, human rights activists, and academics alike.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

RRT-RSN PARTNERSHIP

41

Know-Your-Rights group counseling sessions organized and **1,660 refugees reached** through our legal empowerment efforts in collaboration with various refugee-led initiatives

200

Lawyers and civil society practitioners trained on refugee protection through **11 training sessions**

3,016

Refugees reached—from **40+ different countries**—with direct legal services

8,682

Legal practitioners provided with **legal reference materials**

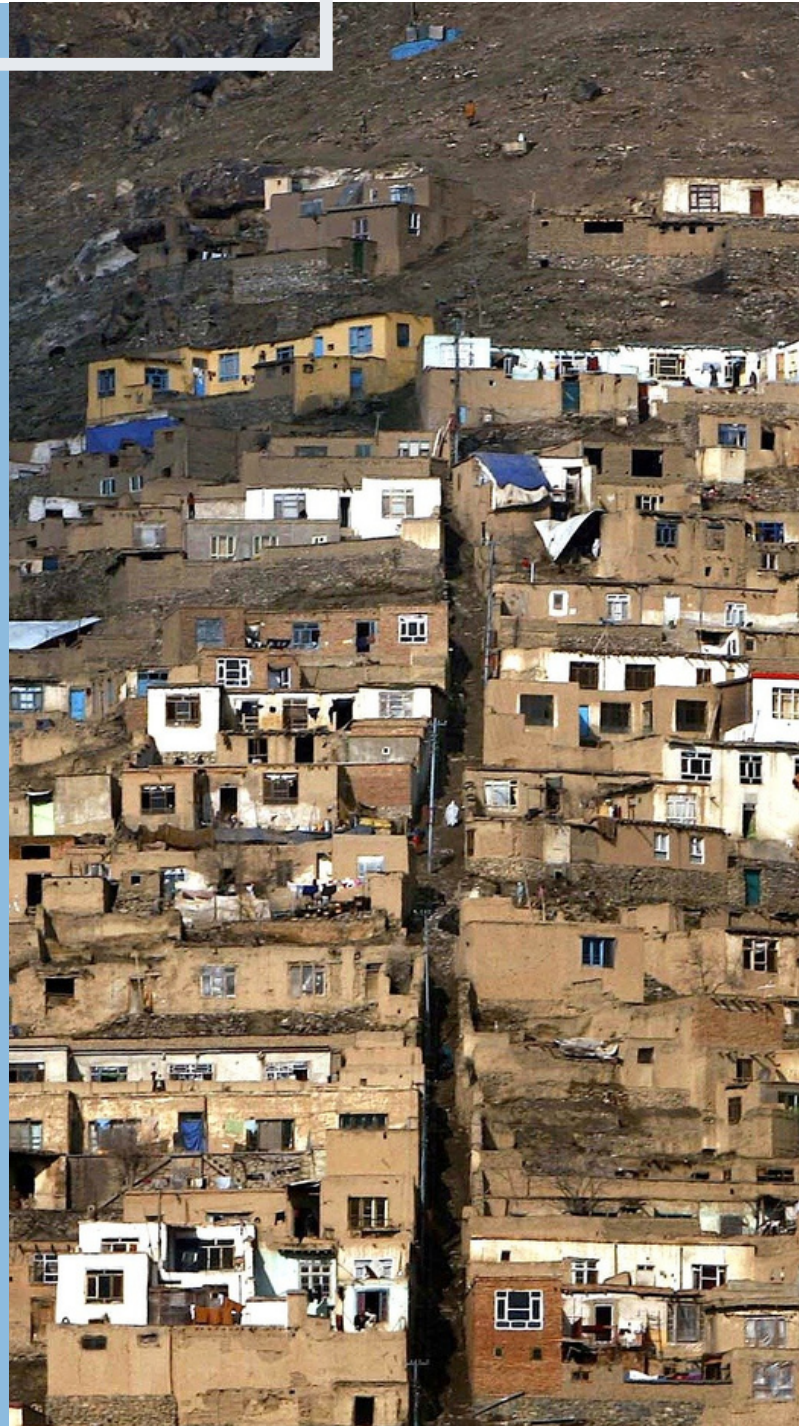
250,819

Refugees accessed information through our print materials and newly expanded online **Information Portal** for Refugees

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

We believe in the power of partnering with and supporting local civil society organizations already working on refugee protection issues. In this way, we recognize the existing expertise on the ground, then offer support where needed—ultimately strengthening their ability to more thoroughly meet the needs of additional refugees.

In 2021, we continued supporting our partner, Refugee Rights Turkey (RRT), by improving and expanding refugees' access to legal information online. Together, we added two new categories—Rights in Detention and Unaccompanied Minors—growing our shared Information Portal on refugee rights to nine complete subtopics. By helping fill a gap in information, our new content received 4,153 page views worldwide.



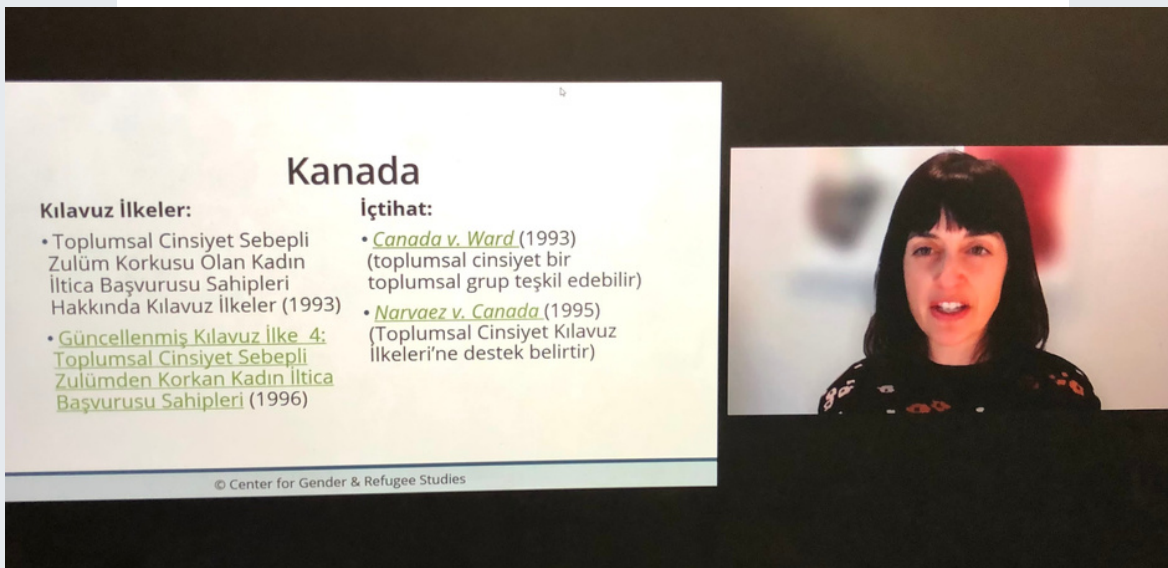
Access to Information Seminar

In early July 2021, we co-hosted a webinar with RRT, on the nexus between access to information and quality legal protection for refugees in the MENAT region. The event featured speakers from other community-based and refugee-led organizations working in Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq. Translated from English to Turkish and Arabic, the presentations allowed participants to identify potential areas of future collaboration—strengthening our shared effort to promote the legal empowerment of refugees in the region.



Violence Against Women and Asylum Seminar

In March 2021, we organized a live-translated English-Turkish seminar for Turkish lawyers and refugee-rights advocates, with RRT. Blaine Bookey—a gender-based asylum expert and Legal Director at the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS) at UC Hastings Law, led the instructive seminar. Bookey focused on persecution on account of gender; international instruments to support violence against women; and international protection applications grounded in gender-based asylum claims.



Information Portal Expansion

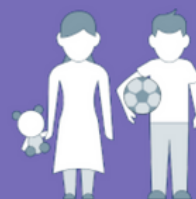
Rights in Detention

In August 2021, together with Refugee Rights Turkey (RRT), we launched a new section to our joint [Information Portal](#) for refugees in Turkey, along with a six-part animated video series entitled, *Rights and Procedures for Persons in Administrative Detention*. The video series aims to educate migrants on the safeguards entitled to them if held in detention, or given a deportation order to leave Turkey.



Unaccompanied Minors (UAM)

Due to their unique vulnerabilities, child refugees—especially unaccompanied minors—are guaranteed special protections by international law. However, many legal resources are not specifically made to target minors. To fill this gap, with RRT, we developed a new child-friendly section specifically for unaccompanied refugee children in Turkey, currently featured on our joint Information Portal. Later, we developed the information into a downloadable PDF booklet entitled, “What’s in my legal backpack?”. The published booklet serves as an accessible guide for unaccompanied minors.



**Rights and Procedures for
Unaccompanied Minors**

ADVANCING FRAMEWORKS

Promoting both stronger asylum systems and equitable responsibility-sharing among the global community requires a nuanced approach involving research and advocacy. We have made this a goal of ours at RSN. We partner with research institutions and other legal practitioners in the field to encourage local and global policymakers to uphold refugee and asylee rights.

In 2021, we continued to do this by publishing our policy research and recommendations in reputable academic journals, online blogs, and presenting our work across numerous webinars.

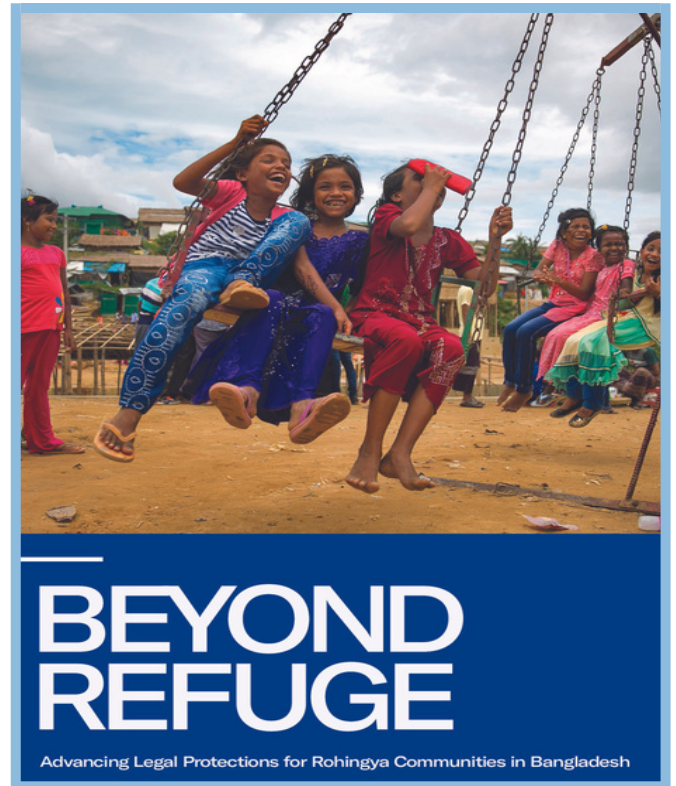


Photo: Tomas Hliva

Legal Research

Beyond Refuge Report

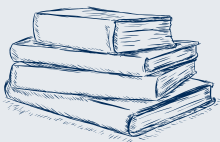
Our joint publication with the [Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust \(BLAST\)](#), “Beyond Refuge: Advancing Legal Protections for Rohingya Communities in Bangladesh,” was made available in 2021. *Beyond Refuge* is intended primarily for use by frontline legal practitioners in Bangladesh, including lawyers, paralegals, judges, and others directly involved in the Rohingya response. The [report](#) aims to increase awareness and contribute to training, advocacy, and other strategy formulations to improve conditions for non-citizens in the country. The report will be translated into the Bangla language in early 2022.



Beyond Refuge: Impact at a Glance



78 total laws, policies, and cases researched and assessed in the report



24 practitioners thus far trained through a legal seminar guided by the report

Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law

Together with the Open Society Justice Initiative, we co-authored a scholarly [article](#) in the Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law (APJHRL) examining policies and practices related to refugees, migrants, and stateless individuals in six major host countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

ASIA-PACIFIC
JOURNAL ON
HUMAN RIGHTS
AND THE LAW

Our Afghan Refugee Response

In 2021, U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan reignited one of the world's longest-standing refugee situations. Our work advocating for and supporting Afghan refugees is an ongoing measure we have committed to over the past few years. We continue to work with our partners, mobilizing resources to better respond to the legal needs of Afghan refugees.

RSN-RRT joint program in Turkey: 2018-2021 Afghan refugee impact

**1,000 AFGHAN
BENEFICIARIES**



=

**13% OF RSN-RRT
CLIENTELE**

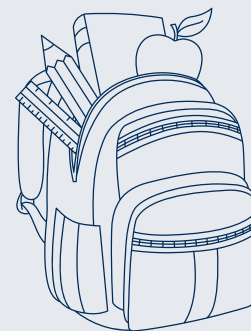
**11,500 USERS ACCESSING
OUR FARSI-TRANSLATED
MATERIAL**



=

**LANGUAGE USED BY MOST
AFGHAN REFUGEES**

**67% OF CHILDREN
ASSISTED**



=

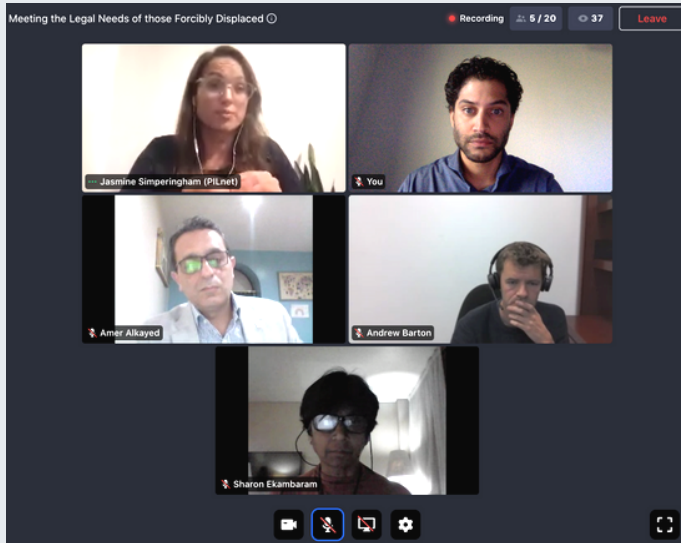
**OF AFGHAN
DESCENT**

The above efforts are a vital part of our response to Afghanistan. Following the fall of the Afghan government in August, we also began engaging with civil society and community groups working with Afghan refugees in Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey—encouraging coordination and knowledge-exchange among the three host countries.

In 2021, we also engaged in dialogue with the following European stakeholders: representatives of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), members of European Parliament, and the European Commission.

Global Legal Community Pledge

As a part of our commitment to advance the Global Legal Community Pledge with our partners at [PILnet](#), we helped draft and submit a joint statement to delegates of the UNHCR High-Level Officials Meeting, urging for a recommitment to the "whole-of-society" approach when assessing refugee protection.



Additionally, as a part of this PILnet commitment, RSN's Executive Director, Zaid Hydari, participated as a panelist in October of 2021. The panel, entitled "Meeting the Legal Needs of those Forcibly Displaced: Community and Collaboration," deconstructed the legal community's role in ensuring refugees' right to mobilize and find solutions.

Asylum in the Americas

Venezuelans in Colombia: Syrians in Turkey 2.0

Featured on Refugee Law Initiative, our Executive Director co-authored a [blog](#) exploring how countries in the Global South draw lessons from one another in their refugee and migration management policy formation. Published in late fall of 2021, "Venezuelans in Colombia: Syrians in Turkey 2.0," draws comparisons from Colombia and Turkey case studies.



Asylum in the Americas Cont.



In November 2021, we organized and moderated an event with the New York City Bar Association entitled, "U.S. Border Policies & Title 42: Regional and International Accountability," exploring how U.S. border policies comply with regional and international legal obligations, and the effects they have on other countries, namely Mexico. Experts discussed actions before the Inter-American Commission, and advocated for the U.S. to rethink Title 42 and adopt greater respect for regional and international law.

Strengthening Mexico's Asylum System through Cross-Border Civil Society Engagement

Over the spring of 2021, working together with Kelsey Norman and Ana Martín Gil of Rice University's Baker Institute, we conducted research on the level of transnational cooperation the U.S. currently employs when engaging with advocates based in Mexico. The findings were compiled and released in a [policy brief](#) that was later adapted into an [Op-Ed](#) included in the Washington Post. Our conclusions allude to strengthening asylum systems in Mexico by bolstering transnational cooperation between Mexican civil society organizations, and U.S. policymakers and NGOs. The article led to a number of productive engagements with U.S. government officials.



Given the ongoing and troubling policies at the U.S. border, we joined the [Welcome With Dignity](#) advocacy campaign. The multi-organization movement speaks up and against unjust policies targeting asylum seekers.



AWARENESS- RAISING

In order to garner support for and strengthen refugee-focused civil society organizations, we recognize the need to dismantle the negative portrayal of refugees and asylum seekers often presented to society.

In 2021, we continued to focus our efforts on spreading accurate unbiased information—reaffirming international laws that protect the rights of individuals escaping persecution and seeking safety. By depicting the challenges migrants and refugees face in their journeys, and by contributing to academic and practitioner discussions, we continue countering the global rise of an anti-migration sentiment. Our role in altering the negative narratives remains a crucial aspect of our awareness-raising efforts.



Photo: Ahmed Akacha

SIS Global to Local: Seeking Asylum Panel Discussion

In March 2021, Zaid Hydari participated as a panelist for an event organized by the American University School of International Service (AU-SIS). Moderated by Dr. Tazreena Sajjad, a professor at AU-SIS and advisor to RSN, the panel discussion included issues related to asylum at a global level, and at the U.S. national and local levels. Zaid stressed that despite the length of time it takes to build quality asylum systems and the challenges that arise when defending human rights, it is critical to invest in host countries.



First Annual Walk-a-Thon

In June of 2021, we hosted our first ever virtual walk-a-thon to commemorate refugee journeys to safety. The *Walk For All Refugees* challenge began the first day of June and ended on World Refugee Day, June 20th, 2021. In the hopes to raise awareness, the walk-a-thon symbolized the perilous journeys refugees and forced migrants take from Central America to the U.S., Myanmar to Bangladesh, and Syria to Turkey. Together with people from all around the world, we showed solidarity and dedicated a total of 3,571 miles for all refugees!



STAFF ADDITIONS

In 2021, our RSN team grew by two new members—helping us expand our capacity and achieve our goals. Welcome, Samah and Amanda!



Samah Asfour joined RSN as our Communications & Access to Information Manager in August of 2021. Samah brings experience in anthropology, strategic communications, and storytelling to RSN. She is committed to changing the harmful, singular narrative surrounding refugees and immigrant communities, and believes promoting progress starts with storytelling.



Amanda joined RSN to assist the Operations team in a part-time capacity and further the organization's vision for strengthening resource networks for refugees. She has a dynamic background as a nonprofit operations and development specialist, first for a large international NGO and then for smaller, regional organizations. Amanda brings additional experience in marketing and event management.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Dear Friends and Supporters,

After a year of extraordinary hardship, 2021 brought new challenges to the world's most vulnerable populations entering the second year of the pandemic. RSN maintained its dedication to partners on the ground assisting refugee communities in various key host countries worldwide. The crisis in Afghanistan mid-year pushed RSN to quickly mobilize to address the needs of Afghan refugees, and the organization continues to prioritize awareness of and protection for those in need.

Joining the efforts in 2021 were two new staff members. Samah Asfour joined the organization as Communications & Access to Information Manager. Amanda Walter joined as a part-time Administrative Associate. Both bring experience in and passion for humanitarian work, and the Board is thrilled to welcome them to the team.

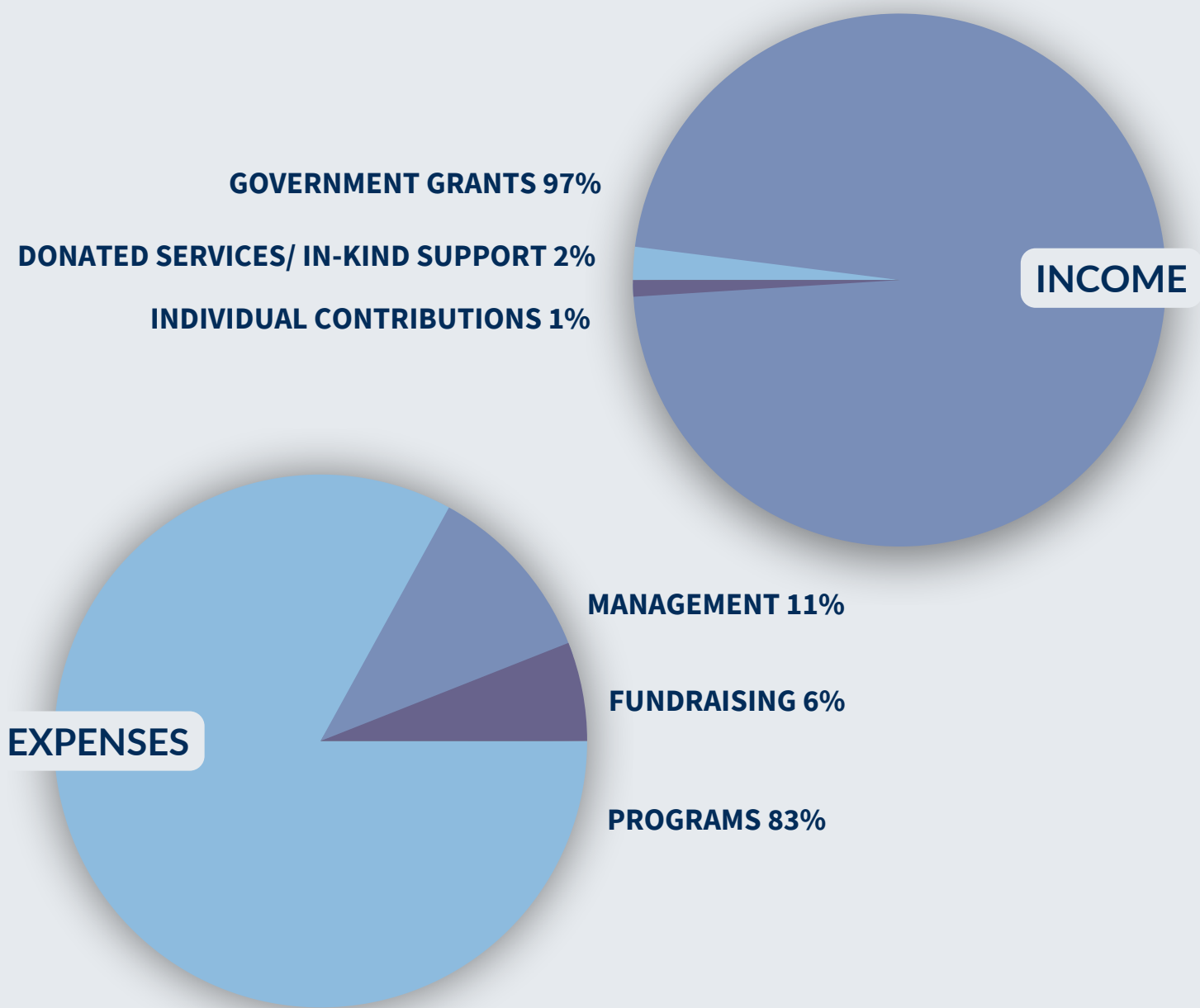
We are proud of the work that RSN has accomplished in 2021. RSN will continue to strengthen its partnerships with local policymakers, organizations, and activists in hopes of making a sustainable impact in 2022 and beyond. We thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,
RSN Board of Directors

Photo: Maruf Rahman



FINANCIALS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Donor Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the U.S. Department of State, Open Society Foundations, White & Case LLP, and Baker Mackenzie LLP, for their generous support and contribution to RSN's work.

A LOOK AHEAD

In 2022, we will remain steadfast in our approach to protect the rights of refugees and migrants—easing their ability to access information pertaining to their rights—and supporting the communities that host them.

We look forward to scaling up and preparing for:

- expansion of our **informational materials** for refugees to include additional topics and languages;
- further engagement with our **refugee community contacts** to ensure inclusion and participation;
- supporting the establishment of our **long-standing partner's (RRT) third field office** in the eastern province of Van, helping to serve refugees closer to the critical Iran-Turkey border;
- active participation in advocacy efforts, including **publication of reports on family reunification opportunities** for refugees in Turkey and comparative positive practices across Asia; and,
- hosting **regional dialogue events** that will bring together prominent advocates for knowledge-sharing and strategy development.

Our efforts will continue to focus on host countries beyond the U.S., but as a U.S.-based organization we will continue tracking asylum policy and advocating for authorities to uphold refugee rights at our own borders.

Thank you for your on-going interest and support in our work!



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY NETWORK



1 Dock 72 Way, 7th Floor Brooklyn NY 11205