

**RSN-RRT PARTNERSHIP
2015-2022**

IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT

**ACHIEVING LEGAL PROTECTION, ORGANIZATIONAL
RESILIENCE, AND LOCALIZATION**



**REFUGEE SOLIDARITY
NETWORK**

Refugee
Rights
Turkey

Mülteci
Hakları
Merkezi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
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INTRODUCTION	6
--------------	---

01	RRT ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY	8
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01	STAFFING WITH REQUISITE EXPERTISE AND SKILLS	10
----	--	----

02	COMPETENCIES IN THE AREA OF GRANTS MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND EVALUATION, AND COMPLIANCE	12
----	--	----

03	OPERATIONAL REACH AND FOOTPRINT	13
----	---------------------------------	----

04	COORDINATION AND NETWORK WITH BROADER STAKEHOLDER COMMUNITY	16
----	---	----

05	FUNDING EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE	18
----	---	----

02	RSN-RRT STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS FOR REFUGEES' ACCESS TO INFORMATION	20
-----------	---	-----------

01	LEGAL RESEARCH, CONTENT DEVELOPMENT AND PRINT DISSEMINATION	21
----	---	----

02	VISUAL ADAPTATIONS: POSTCARDS AND VIDEOS	22
----	--	----

03	DIGITAL ADAPTATIONS AND WEB-BASED DISSEMINATION	23
----	---	----

04	BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK-DRIVEN DESIGN THROUGH MONITORING & EVALUATION DISSEMINATION	26
----	--	----

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03	ENHANCING REACH AND MODALITIES OF RRT LEGAL SERVICE PROVISION	27
01	<i>HELPDESK FOR REFUGEES</i>	28
02	<i>GROUP COUNSELING SESSIONS</i>	28
03	<i>ADVANCED LEGAL CASE MANAGEMENT</i>	29
04	<i>BENEFICIARY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY</i>	30
04	STRENGTHENING THE SUPPLY-SIDE OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEES IN TURKEY	31
01	<i>PRINT-BASED “REFUGEE LAW MANUAL” FOR TURKISH LAWYERS</i>	32
02	<i>DIGITAL ADAPTATION AND EVOLUTION: “ONLINE REFUGEE LAW INFORMATION PLATFORM FOR LAWYERS”</i>	33
03	<i>TRAININGS AND SEMINARS FOR LAWYERS</i>	34
04	<i>SUPPLY-SIDE ADVOCACY AROUND LEGAL AID DELIVERY MODELS</i>	35
	CONCLUSIONS	36

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since March 2015, the US-based Refugee Solidarity Network (RSN) and Turkish NGO Refugee Rights Turkey (RRT) have been engaged in a comprehensive partnership with a primary goal of improving legal protection of refugees in Turkey, the country that currently hosts the largest population of refugees in the world. The now seven-year partnership between RSN and RRT has demonstrably strengthened the availability of reliable legal information and specialized legal assistance services for refugees in Turkey and has built and strengthened capacities within Turkey's legal professional community. In addition to delivering vital protection benefits for refugees and reinforcing the capacities of legal professionals in providing services to this population, the partnership has also generated significant organizational development for RRT, an independent Turkish civil society organization that exemplifies a successful, sustainable and localized response to meeting protection needs arising from forced displacement.

This report first takes stock of what achievements have been made possible throughout seven years of strategically-driven partnership engagement between RSN and RRT by analyzing both quantitative and qualitative metrics of joint RSN-RRT activities, demonstrating the impact of these interventions on their intended beneficiaries. The report also provides an assessment of the impact of this partnership on RRT's overall organizational capacity as a leading national legal protection actor. To that end, the report provides a detailed overview of the ways in which this cooperation has been put into action and of the roles assumed by RSN and RRT, as INGO and local NGO partners respectively. By examining the outputs and modalities of cooperation which have been achieved over the past seven years, this Impact Assessment demonstrates how the RSN-RRT partnership goes beyond prevailing working arrangements between INGOs and NGOs, instead proposing an alternative approach to INGO-National NGO partnerships which is based on equitable, sustained and principled engagement.

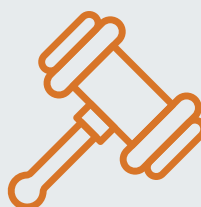
The report's structure follows the four strategic areas of RSN and RRT's collective engagement: legal empowerment of refugees through access to information; provision of direct legal services to refugees; capacity-building to expand the availability of country-wide legal services for refugees; and RRT's organizational growth and development.



**RRT ORGANIZATIONAL
GROWTH AND
SUSTAINABILITY**



**RSN-RRT STRATEGIC
COLLABORATIONS FOR
REFUGEES' ACCESS TO
INFORMATION**



**ENHANCING REACH
AND MODALITIES OF
RRT LEGAL SERVICE
PROVISION**



**STRENGTHENING THE
SUPPLY-SIDE OF LEGAL
ASSISTANCE FOR
REFUGEES IN TURKEY**

The impact of the RSN-RRT partnership over the past seven-year period can be summarized in reference to the following impact metrics, among others:

Expansion of RRT legal service provision operations from a single location to

4

key locations in Turkey, including a main operational base in Istanbul and Field Offices in three key locations across Turkey

Cooperation on capacity-building for Turkish lawyers and CSO practitioners that led to more than

1,900

practitioners benefitting from opportunities to acquire specialized expertise in refugee law

Increase in RRT full-time staff size:

4x

Strategic investment in RRT's legal service capacity and modalities enabling direct legal services for over

19,000 refugees

Informational materials for refugees published in seven languages reaching more than

1,000,000

refugees through print and digital means

Beyond taking stock of the impact of the RSN-RRT partnership in terms of tangible refugee protection benefits and the development of key local capacities in Turkey, RSN and RRT believe that the principles and experiences presented here may also prove relevant in envisioning similar partnerships and cooperation arrangements in other asylum and migration contexts, including with regards to:

- Creating an evidence-base for assessing donor and intermediary NGO investment in capacity-development;
- Demonstrating how INGO-NGO partnerships can effectively serve localization objectives, in ways that further organizational goals for both parties and generate maximum added value for beneficiaries;
- Providing a framework of experience for donors seeking relevant insights in how to fund long-term, impact projects, including by way of re-centering the role of intermediary organizations;
- And inspiring other INGOs and local/national NGOs, including emerging refugee-led initiatives, to work towards more equitable and mutually-reinforcing partnership frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

The Refugee Solidarity Network (RSN) was established in 2014 with a commitment to supporting local and national refugee rights initiatives in refugee host countries. RSN's foundational mission involved a partnership model initially focused on one key host country for refugees: Turkey. As RSN's organizational mission has evolved over the years, the organization has not only maintained this original emphasis on partnerships and localization as a key impact strategy, but also elevated it as the central feature in RSN's approach to refugee protection in the Global South. RSN views improvements in the availability of legal protection for refugees and the empowerment of local and national rights advocates and protection service providers in refugee host states as two mutually-reinforcing and intertwined core objectives.

The history of Refugee Rights Turkey (RRT) dates back to 2003, when it was an all-volunteer refugee legal aid initiative in Istanbul. Over the course of multiple evolutions, it has become a leading national refugee legal assistance provider as well as an important civil society voice in Turkey advocating for rights-based approaches to refugees and migrants.

Until 2015, the organization had operated under the auspices of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Turkey – a Turkish human rights organization, which provided a legal and administrative housing to RRT activities, at the time known as the “Helsinki Citizens Assembly-Refugee Advocacy and Support Program” (HCA-RASP). That precursor to RRT, although much smaller in size and reach in comparison with the current operation, had already established itself nationally and internationally as a credible independent refugee legal aid actor. HCA-RASP was also known for policy advocacy efforts aiming to influence legislation and implementation at the national level, as it had played an important role in galvanizing civil society efforts to input into the development of the country's first-ever comprehensive legislation governing migration, the Law on Foreigners

and International Protection (LFIP) adopted in 2013. The organization was also already involved in delivering trainings for lawyers around the country on refugee law principles and practices.

Shortly before the RSN-RRT partnership was officially initiated in 2015, a strategic decision was taken by the “HCA-RASP” leadership to transition the organization to a dedicated legal and administrative framework as an association under Turkish law. This decision was largely in response to dramatic changes in the Turkey migration context, triggered by the mass arrival of refugees from neighboring Syria 2011 onward. The “HCA-RASP” leadership determined that the organization had to enhance organizational capabilities and operations in order to be able to help address dramatically elevated legal protection needs in a highly dynamic and complex national context. “Refugee Rights Turkey” (RRT) was formally incorporated in 2014 as the vehicle for this crucial organizational evolution.

That was the context in which RSN and “HCA-RASP” at the time initiated a partnership dialogue, with the vision of generating a synergy to support the restructuring and emergence of RRT as a key national refugee protection actor aiming to help address crucial legal information and assistance needs of refugee communities in Turkey, continue to advocate for rights-based improvements in legislation and policy on national level, while also promoting effective and sustainable legal delivery models to expand the country-wide availability of specialized legal services for refugees.

- Oktay Durukan,
RRT Executive Director

By March 2015, RSN and RRT had initiated the implementation of their first joint project, transitioning all “HCA-RASP” operations under the new organizational framework of RRT. RSN enabled this comprehensive organizational transition by collaborating in the design of RRT’s initial two-year program of activities and by securing and channeling an initial project-based funding grant from the United States Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM).

In the framework of this initial partnership project, RSN and RRT jointly launched the “Center for Refugee Rights” (the Center)¹, an operational base from which RRT began to deliver legal assistance services to refugees in Turkey and capacity-building for Turkish lawyers. The Center’s activities were designed to support the implementation of the LFIP, while also serving as a source of expertise to Turkey’s civil society and refugee response community on refugee law matters.² In the years since the LFIP’s promulgation, local protection gaps and needs have continued to evolve in ways that further underline the strategic value of the contributions delivered by RRT. RRT’s continued ability to provide adaptive support for these shifting refugee protection needs has relied on core capabilities and added expertise which were mobilized and generated through the RSN-RRT partnership.

Over the course of seven years, the two organizations have enabled a significant cumulative impact on the refugee protection environment in Turkey and served refugees and legal practitioners country-wide, while also successfully pursuing long-

RRT’s continued ability to provide adaptive support for these shifting refugee protection needs has relied on core capabilities and added expertise which were mobilized and generated through the RSN-RRT partnership.

term organizational development and sustainability objectives to progressively empower RRT as a key independent national refugee legal aid, advocacy and capacity-building actor.³

RSN has advocated vis-à-vis the donor community for the importance and potentials of long-term investment in local and national legal protection actors such as RRT in light of the crucial legal empowerment, independent oversight and national ownership functions these local and nationally positioned civil society actors deliver in refugee host states. The RSN-RRT partnership strategy has been successful in receiving support from a range of donors and other INGOs who aim to help strengthen the refugee response in Turkey and contribute to long-term asylum policy development, and this model has allowed RRT to gradually expand and diversify its sources of funding as well as the organization’s operational reach within the Turkish protection sector, thereby contributing to RRT’s overall sustainability and resilience.

¹ The initial funding to support the launch of the Center and RRT’s operations under its new institutional framework and name were provided by the US Department of State, PRM. At the time of writing, RSN and RRT are implementing their fourth consecutive PRM-funded evolution of this original project. The work of RSN-RRT would not have been possible without sustained financial support from PRM, for which the two organizations are incredibly grateful. This report will indicate how PRM’s investment in the RSN-RRT partnership concept and sustained commitment to supporting the RSN-RRT Legal Center has paved the way for other governmental and private donors to invest in RRT and the Legal Center to further expand RRT’s reach and impact and strengthen the sustainability of the refugee protection benefits and organizational development achievements ensuing from the RSN-RRT partnership.

² Adopted by the Turkish parliament in 2013 and in force since April 2014, the LFIP is the first comprehensive legislation in Turkey governing migration and asylum, with a range of due process and other safeguards which largely meet European standards. As outlined, RRT’s experience with complementary functions of policy advocacy and as a legal services actor under the auspices of HCA-RASP provided the organization with first-hand knowledge of and familiarity with the LFIP, making it an ideal organization to provide training and to field inquiries pertaining to this new law.

³ Of particular note is the fact that the RSN-RRT Center is among the few refugee rights initiatives in Turkey funded outside the scope of the UNHCR Implementing Partner framework, which allows the Center to engage in complementary efforts in the protection sector in Turkey by serving an expanded group of refugee and civil society beneficiaries and thereby progressively contributing to the diversification and localization of protection capacities in Turkey.

RRT ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

As an intrinsic aspect of the RSN-RRT strategy for strengthening the refugee protection space in Turkey, the partnership also concerted aims to enable the continued development of RRT's core organizational capacities. This section breaks down the RSN-RRT approach to organizational capacity-development, demonstrating concrete ways in which the partnership has achieved organizational growth and improved the sustainability of RRT activities as both a means to delivering effective refugee protection outcomes and as an end of the partnership itself.

Conceptual Framing

In the absence of a singular universal definition of capacity development, this report adopts an understanding reflecting the common themes employed by various institutions and actors tailored to the specific context of organizational operation.⁴ In this case, capacity development is used to reflect the process through which an organization makes improvement in performance toward its organizational objectives. RSN and RRT subscribe to a notion of organizational capacity that recognizes the inherent and pre-existing skills and knowledge of national actors as an indispensable and valuable point of departure and therefore choose to employ the term capacity development rather than capacity building. As opposed to conceptualizing organizational capacity as a resource that can and should be built from scratch, the RSN-RRT approach aims to “unleash” existing capacities and to “strengthen, create, adapt and maintain” such capacities over time.⁵

The Principle of Localization

Announced during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the “Grand Bargain” goals articulated an emerging consensus among the world's largest donors and humanitarian agencies, and have come to represent a set of cross-cutting principles to help guide the future evolution of global humanitarian assistance and response.⁶ Chief among the Grand Bargain themes and ensuing pledges is the principle of “localization of humanitarian action,” wherein international donors and agencies commit to investing “in the institutional capacities of local and national responders [...] through collaboration with development partners and incorporate capacity strengthening in partnership agreements.”⁷

⁴ Pearson, Jenny. “Capacity Development.” Learning Network on Capacity Development (blog), 2011. <https://lencd.org/learning/the-core-concept/capacity-development>.

⁵ Di Pillo, Daniele. “About Capacity Development.” Europa.eu, July 31, 2017. <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-cd-tc/wiki/about-capacity-development>.

⁶ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. “About the Grand Bargain.” Accessed January 10, 2022. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/about-the-grand-bargain>.

⁷ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. “More Support and Funding Tools for Local and National Responders.” Accessed January 10, 2022. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders>.

The principle of localization necessarily calls for a reimagined and reinvigorated understanding of “capacity development,” to be carried out within the framework of equitable partnerships with local and national actors. Yet while localization has been widely publicized and referenced within the humanitarian field, concrete mechanisms to measure the implementation of and/or adherence to localization objectives by international organizations and donors remain limited. Research following up on the theme of localization indicates that INGOs struggle in channeling localization principles into existing partnership arrangements and modalities when engaging with local and national NGO partners.⁸ In this context, there is a need for best practices to be compiled and analyzed in order to promote equitable working modalities for INGO-NGO collaboration and to further highlight the possibilities for advancing localization by leveraging INGOs as intermediaries for local and national NGOs.⁹

From the partnership’s very outset, RSN and RRT have placed a central focus on localization principles and organizational capacity-development objectives. RSN, as a relatively small and new INGO, has also sought to draw on and channel the lessons and successful modalities articulated over the course of its ongoing partnership with RRT in Turkey into similar partnership engagements in other national contexts.¹⁰ In this regard, this section of the report examines the impact of RSN-RRT partnership on RRT’s organizational development objectives in reference to five indicators and associated data points, serving also as an example of the success and sustainability of the RSN-RRT model of localization through mutually-reinforcing partnership.

Cooperation Modality

RSN and RRT have jointly designed, budgeted, and developed a series of successive projects, aiming to generate immediate and long-term refugee protection benefits in the Turkey context. As of early 2022, the organizations are co-implementing their fourth consecutive PRM-funded project. Alongside this series of PRM-funded project collaborations, the two organizations have also jointly implemented complementary, smaller-scale projects funded by a private US donor. By collaborating at all stages from project conception to implementation, RSN and RRT ensure that national perspectives and priorities are duly reflected in program design and delivery. While the two organizations share tasks and labor with regards to certain elements of program implementation, a bulk of the direct implementation responsibility is assumed by RRT, and project resources are allocated accordingly. Although RSN undertakes overall project management and oversight responsibilities vis-à-vis the donor, the RSN-RRT partnership approach places a dedicated emphasis on RRT’s organizational capacity-development as a way to progressively strengthen RRT’s means and methodologies towards increased responsibility sharing with regard to meeting donor compliance obligations.

⁸ Shifting the Power. “Localisation of Aid: Are INGOs Walking The Talk?,” October 30, 2017. <https://startnetwork.org/resource/localisation-aid-are-ingos-walking-talk>.

⁹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. “Guidance Notes on Localisation,” May 29, 2020. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/guidance-notes-localisation-may-2020>; Lagomarsino, Gina. “What Are the Right Roles for International NGOs?” Results for Development (blog), September 25, 2018. <https://r4d.org/blog/what-are-the-right-roles-for-international-ngos/>.

¹⁰ For further information on RSN partnerships with national NGOs in other contexts, see <https://refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/partnerships/>

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS ACHIEVED TOWARDS RRT'S ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

01

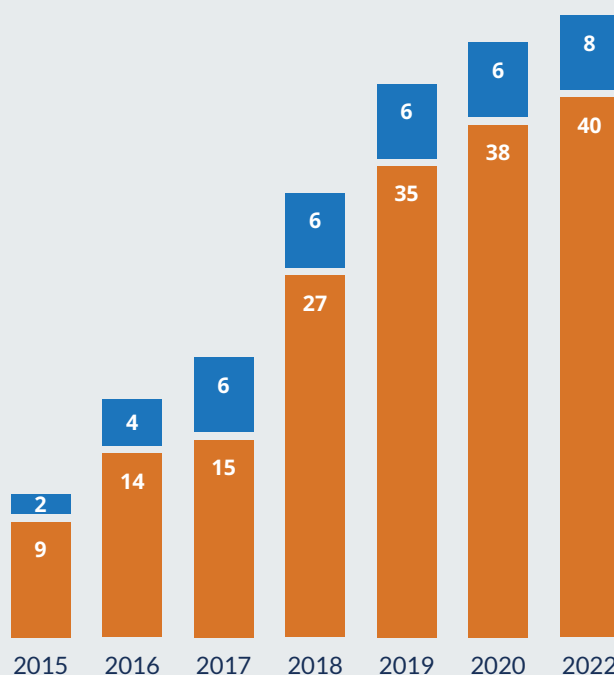
STAFFING WITH REQUISITE EXPERTISE AND SKILLS

In the highly dynamic and resource-intensive context of providing comprehensive refugee protection services including legal interventions, counseling and representation and capacity-building activities, RRT's refugee legal assistance professionals must be specialized, with substantive knowledge of domestic, regional, and international human rights frameworks. As such, a key indicator of the RSN-RRT partnership's impact on RRT's organizational development and resilience pertains to staff size and subject-matter expertise gained through successive RSN-RRT projects. A detailed examination of these metrics provides critical insight into the value of the strategic approach to partnership adopted by RSN and RRT.

As the RSN-RRT partnership was being launched in 2015, in the context of an ongoing historic influx of refugees from Syria to Turkey and a parallel surge of asylum seekers from other countries of origin, RRT confronted the challenge of significantly scaling up its existing, modestly-sized legal service operation. This scaling up of RRT's staff size, operational reach and internal capacities was seen by RSN and RRT as a prerequisite for RRT to be able to strategically engage and monitor the implementation of Turkey's then still-nascent domestic law framework. At the same time, both RRT and RSN sought to strike the right balance between the need for growth in staffing levels and RRT's longer-term sustainability considerations. As a result, RSN and RRT have pursued a deliberately paced organizational growth strategy, reflected in a gradual growth in RRT's overall staff size and in continued organizational diversification over the course of the RSN-RRT partnership.

FULL-TIME STAFF POSITIONS FILLED

2015-2022*



FUNDING SOURCE

PRM OTHER

* through April 2022

Over the course of the RSN-RRT partnership, RRT's staffing capacities have grown from eleven full-time team members to forty-eight, more than a fourfold increase. This growth has been made possible by the expansion of financial support from RSN-RRT's primary donors, as well as funding partnerships that RRT has established with other donors and partners such as the Danish Refugee Council (DRC)/ECHO, the International Commission of Jurists/EIDHR Turkey Program of the EU Delegation to Turkey, and the Sigrid Rausing Trust. Crucially, these various other donor-funded projects were specifically designed by RRT in full complementarity with the core legal information, legal service and refugee law capacity-building activities and operations enabled by the RSN-RRT partnership framework.

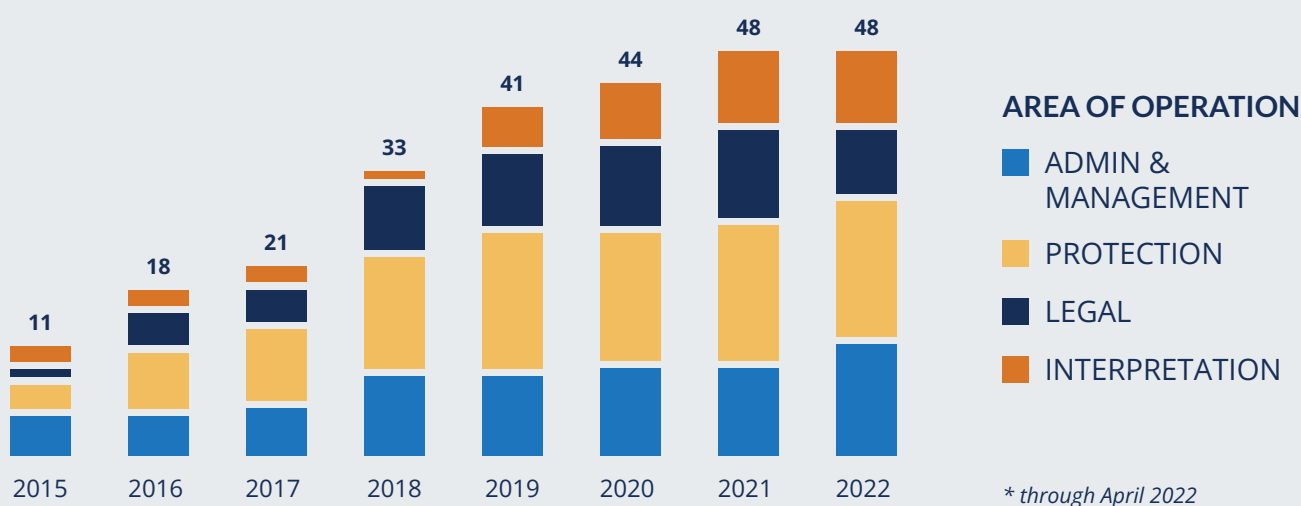
While the growth of program staff with extensive subject-matter expertise (in the case of RRT, on matters pertaining to legal frameworks and migration management), has

RRT's staffing capacities have grown from eleven full-time team members to forty-eight, **more than a fourfold increase.**

been part and parcel of RRT's organizational development, RRT's operations also required various program support contributions by other expert staff such as interpreters and administrative/managerial staff to take charge of various ancillary aspects of organizational performance, including administrative functions, compliance, HR management, labor and employment, M&E, and financial management, among others.

FULL-TIME STAFF POSITIONS BY AREA OF OPERATION

2015-2022*



Notably, prior to 2019, interpretation services were primarily contracted on hourly-paid service basis. Thereafter, investments were made to secure full-time staff members dedicated to providing specialized interpretation services as a critical component of the organization's ability to continue expanding direct legal counseling and assistance operations.

02

COMPETENCIES IN THE AREA OF GRANTS MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND EVALUATION, AND COMPLIANCE

Organizational know-how and competency in the areas of grants management, monitoring and evaluation and compliance constitutes a crucial aspect of the organizational development of a national NGO such as RRT, both in terms of ensuring continued improvements in the quality and impact of activities and the sustainability of the NGO's partnership and funding relationships.

From the outset, the RSN-RRT partnership has placed a particular emphasis on deepening and expanding existing RRT know-how in these areas while making incremental progress towards the implementation of more rigorous standards and the internalization of capabilities, including by investing in an ever-developing array of policies and procedures to ensure and sustain sound organizational practices.

During the initial two-year cycle of the RSN-RRT partnership, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), grants management, and compliance-related tasks were addressed through modestly-allocated human resources capacities on the RSN side. Recognizing the importance of integrating and internalizing M&E and compliance-related knowledge into RRT's organizational structure as part of efforts to ensure the organization's sustainability and resilience, RSN and RRT jointly prioritized the development of dedicated local M&E and compliance staff capacities. Over the subsequent four years, increases secured in budget allocations have allowed for M&E capacities to be expanded from a single full-time staff member on the RSN-side attending to M&E-related tasks between the two organizations to a dedicated unit within each partner organization, thereby enabling program evaluation activities to be carried out more regularly and with a greater number of key refugee and legal/CSO practitioner informants. The resulting increase in the reliability and actionability of M&E findings has helped to strengthen the joint RSN-RRT project, as well as RRT's ability to evaluate its organizational impact for the purpose of securing and managing other funding partnerships. Similarly, advanced grants management skills developed by RRT over the course of

successive projects, including with regards to complex and ever-evolving donor requirements and applicable humanitarian and ethical standards, have similarly increased RRT's ability to develop and successfully manage multiple simultaneous partnerships and funding relationships. RRT's growth in terms of these key competencies has enabled the organization to expand its activities and impacts while also reinforcing the organization's overall sustainability and resilience.



03 OPERATIONAL REACH AND FOOTPRINT

RRT's organizational growth over the course of RSN-RRT partnership has not only manifested in terms of overall staff size and the internal competencies; RRT's growth has also been punctuated by the expansion of the organization's physical operational presence to key locations beyond the main office in Istanbul. While in 2015, at the onset of the RSN-RRT partnership, RRT's operations were entirely concentrated in the organization's traditional hub of Istanbul, RRT has since launched two Field Offices in the strategic locations of Izmir and Edirne in Western Turkey, with an additional third Field Office to be launched in 2022 in the Eastern Turkey location of Van.





Expansion of the Main Operational Base in Istanbul

A cornerstone of the RSN-RRT partnership has been the establishment and incremental strengthening of service provision and other program implementation capabilities from the organization's main operational base in Istanbul from 2015 and onward. Crucially, and as will be discussed further below, RRT's legal information and assistance services delivered from Istanbul and anchored around the RSN-RRT Center have also included remote service modalities, supported by not only an expanded staff size but also through continued investments in communication and service provision infrastructures based out of this office.

Izmir Field Office

RSN and RRT did not immediately pursue further operational expansion of the Center's activities to other locations in Turkey, instead opting to prioritize the development of effective tools and methodologies to extend the coverage of the Center's services to locations across Turkey by employing a combination of remote assistance and engaging in periodic field visits. The decision to establish a permanent operational presence in locations beyond Istanbul was informed by RSN and RRT continuing to monitor and assess evolving needs on the ground, particularly those arising from the government of Turkey's practices affecting "refugees on the move" who are apprehended and transferred to immigration detention facilities around the country. As a result of careful consideration and planning by RSN and RRT leadership, an additional Field Office (FO) in Izmir was launched in 2018 within the scope of a PRM-funded continuation and expansion project. Since becoming operational, the Izmir FO has allowed for increased provision of legal assistance services to refugees facing administrative detention at Removal Centers along Turkey's Aegean coast, where the majority of attempted sea crossings from Turkey to Greece take place. As such, the Izmir FO also provides a crucial additional monitoring vantage point enabling RRT to track border practices in this key region of refugee and migrant mobility, thereby promoting protection-sensitive migration management practices.

Edirne Field Office

Building around the core service delivery modalities and competencies garnered during the initial phase of the RSN-RRT partnership, later in 2018 RRT launched a second Field Office in the province of Edirne. Situated alongside Turkey's land borders with neighboring EU states Greece and Bulgaria, Edirne is a similarly important place of transit for onward movements of refugees and other migrants looking to reach EU countries. While RRT's Edirne FO was funded with ECHO funding support channeled to RRT by another international partner organization (the Danish Refugee Council), the FO's operation was designed in direct complementarity with the Istanbul-based RSN-RRT Center for Refugee Rights operations and following the same blueprint articulated by RSN and RRT when planning the Izmir FO. The launch of RRT's Edirne FO therefore represented another important instance of organizational growth for RRT, building on RSN and RRT's preceding investments in RRT's core operational structure and project management competencies. Similar to the Izmir FO, the Edirne FO was designed primarily to provide legal counseling and representation to refugees and asylum seekers apprehended by Turkish authorities while on the move and who are therefore facing administrative detention. The establishments of the Edirne FO also introduced a complementary monitoring and advocacy vantage point for RRT's promotion of protection-sensitive border and migration management practices.

VAN (FIELD OFFICE, 2022) 

Van Field Office

In 2022, a third RRT Field Office is due to be launched—the second in the context of the PRM-funded RSN-RRT partnership framework—in the key Eastern Turkey border province of Van, near Turkey's land border with Iran. Due to its geographic position, Van is the primary point of entry into Turkey for asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Iran. The establishment of the Van FO will further expand the reach of RRT's services, particularly to individuals facing administrative detention and who are at risk of deportation in this critical migration hotspot. Similar to the preceding Izmir and Edirne FOs, the Van FO has been designed in complementarity with RRT's Istanbul base of operations and in response to a thorough needs assessment jointly undertaken jointly by RSN and RRT.

04

COORDINATION AND NETWORK WITH BROADER STAKEHOLDER COMMUNITY

Inter-Sectoral Coordination

Over the course of the RSN-RRT partnership, RRT's unique protection programming centered around legal information and service provision and refugee law capacity-building has provided ideal opportunities for RRT to significantly expand on its preexisting network of peer organizations engaged in the broader refugee response in Turkey. This expanded network has concretely strengthened RRT's ability to reach key refugee populations in Turkey, to provide its beneficiaries with high-quality and effective referral to other service providers, and to engage in country-wide monitoring and advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring the efficacy of the Turkish asylum system.

As an example, group counseling sessions that constitute a key legal service provision modality in RSN-RRT program design are also conceived of as collaboration opportunities, resulting in such sessions being conducted in partnership with 29 different civil society organizations and other stakeholders across Turkey.¹¹ These collaborations play a

crucial role in allowing RRT to reach a wider beneficiary population, including specific subgroups such as Afghans and Iranians, LGBTQI+ refugees and refugees with disabilities.

A key aspect of RSN-RRT project designs has been a deliberate emphasis on enabling RRT's active participation in a number of coordination mechanisms, whether at the local, national or international level, as an in-built program sub-component. As a case in point, RRT's role within relevant inter-sectoral coordination platforms in Turkey, including those led by UNHCR, has progressively grown: in addition to active attendance and participation in Child Protection and Marmara/Western Border working groups, RRT is an elected Steering Committee Member of the Istanbul-based Protection Core Group which brings together the key actors within Turkey's protection field to develop joint plans of action to address protection needs across the country.

¹¹ In addition to community organizations and civil society, among the stakeholders are governmental entities such as Municipalities and state-run shelters for minors.

Legal Fraternity, International Networks

In addition to the community of civil societal service-providers, and given the legal nature of the work carried out by RRT, it is critical that the Center and its work be firmly embedded within the broader legal professional community, at both the national and international level.

As discussed in Section IV below concerning the RSN-RRT partnership's achievements in the area of supply-side advocacy for legal assistance services for refugees in Turkey, RSN and RRT's joint planning and program development has focused on networking and collaborating with country-wide provincial bar associations in Turkey with the goal of promoting improvements in both the availability and quality of state-funded legal aid services for refugees and asylum seekers. Successive RSN-RRT programming have seen RRT engage in multi-layered referral, training and advocacy engagements with numerous provincial bar associations across the country.

The joint RSN-RRT program has also created opportunities for RRT to engage with a number of private legal actors, including various local and international law firms in the context of an RSN-RRT initiative

to explore the potentials of pro bono partnerships to generate a complementary supply of legal services for refugees in Turkey. Informed by groundwork research conducted by RSN on relevant experiences and models in the North American context, RSN and RRT set up and successfully implemented Turkey's first-ever pro bono pilot focusing on refugee rights and are currently looking to expand on this initial pilot to involve and support more law firms and NGOs to pursue similar collaborations.¹²

Lastly, the RSN-RRT partnership framework has also provided opportunities for RRT to participate and coordinate with counterparts and potential partner organizations at the regional level as well as in other comparable national contexts. RRT representatives have participated in various important regional and international fora such as the UNHCR Annual Consultations and the PILnet Annual Conference, and have engaged in a number of study visits to expand on existing knowledge of relevant good practices in other countries and to coordinate and network with counterparts.

¹² For more information on this pilot program, please refer to the assessment report: Refugee Solidarity Network and Refugee Rights Turkey, "The Potentials of Pro Bono Partnerships in Turkey for Securing Refugees' Access to Rights: Observations and Recommendations from RSN-RRT's Pilot Project," November 2019, https://refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Probono-White-Paper-Nov-2019_compressed.pdf.

FUNDING EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

An integral and overarching objective of the RSN-RRT partnership has been to foster, in RRT, the effectiveness and viability of an independent, rights-based national civil society organization with the ability to deliver legal information and assistance services while also strengthening the capacity of other service providers, including Turkey's state-funded Legal Aid system. With these goals in mind, the expansion and diversification of RRT's funding sources in order to strengthen the organization's sustainability and resilience have been a deliberate consideration and concrete objective pursued by RRT and RSN.

Lean and Gradual Approach to Operational Expansion

In pursuing long-term sustainability and resilience, RRT and RSN have subscribed to a lean and gradual approach to operational expansion of RRT activities: in consideration of both the organization's financial sustainability and both partners' commitment to maintaining the outstanding quality of RRT's specialized direct legal assistance services, unchecked rapid organizational expansion and scaling of services has been purposefully avoided. Instead, by intentionally offering specialized legal assistance capacities at a modest scale with regards to specific areas of the Turkish migration and asylum system, prioritizing the provision of services to underserved beneficiary profiles and addressing critical protection gaps, the RSN-RRT Center for Refugee Rights has focused on making a strategic, structural impact on the evolution of legislation, policy and practices. Secondly, by pacing RRT's growth in staff size and operations in accordance with this gradualist approach, the organization has been able to more successfully absorb and integrate incoming program staff and to adapt to expanded service modalities under a more easily-sustainable overall operating budget.

Expansion and Diversification of Funding Streams

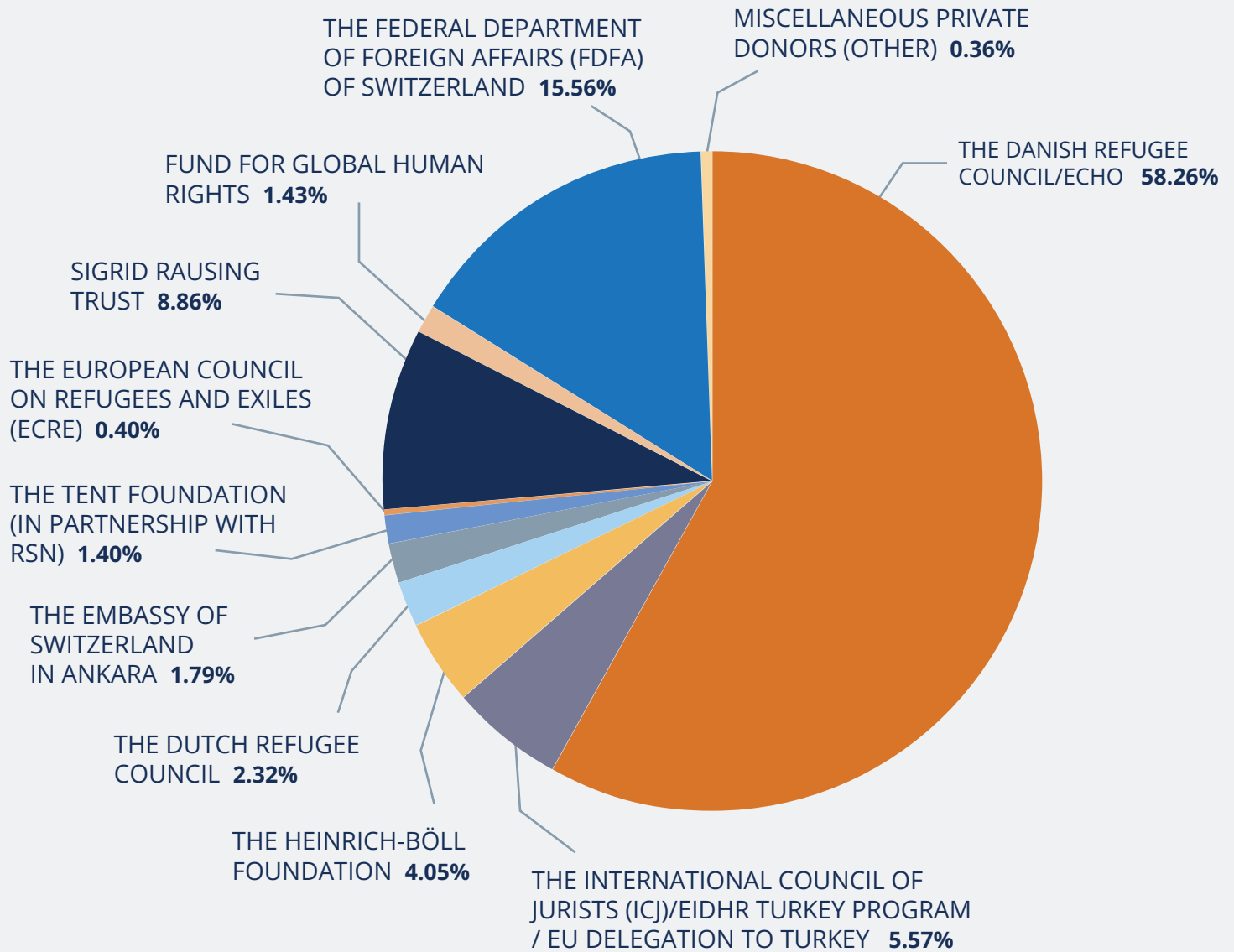
In pursuing this lean and gradualist approach, RSN and RRT have nevertheless proactively pursued to both expand and diversify the funding streams which sustain and progressively strengthening RRT's activities.

As of March 2015, when RRT completed its institutional transition from "HCA-RASP" to "Refugee Rights Turkey," RRT's first (and at the time only) source of funding support was provided via the PRM-funded RSN-RRT partnership. Starting in 2016, RRT began to build around this core program and financing framework to connect with other partners and donors with the aim of gradually expanding and diversifying the organization's funding base.

In 2016, RSN, in coordination with RRT, secured funding from the Tent Foundation to enhance and formalize the launch of a Child Protection team within RRT's existing organizational framework. Around the same time, RRT began a project-based cooperation dialogue with the Danish Refugee Council—thereby securing its first-ever implementation grant for complementary legal assistance programming funded by the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

Over the course of the roughly seven years since the launch of the RSN-RRT partnership, RRT has successfully secured various restricted and unrestricted funding streams from 11 different additional governmental and private sources to complement continued PRM funding channeled with the support of RSN:

COMPLEMENTARY FUNDING BEYOND PRM, BY SOURCE



RSN-RRT STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS FOR REFUGEES' ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Throughout their partnership, RSN and RRT have placed particular importance on Access to Information initiatives (ATI) as a major element within the organizations' broader legal protection programming. This section takes stock of RSN-RRT ATI activities, highlighting the impact of the collaboration on refugee beneficiaries as well as on RRT's organizational capacities to deliver reliable and high-quality legal information to refugee communities on a range of topics.

Conceptual Framing

While refugee rights advocates have long recognized the significant role that information plays in efforts to secure protection for refugees, recently, broader scholarship on the movement of displaced individuals has also begun to highlight the critical role of access to reliable, up-to-date information in the lives of refugees and other people on the move. Studies have demonstrated how information on the multitude of conditions that might be faced while on the move towards countries of potential asylum, as well as the procedures, rights and obligations to which individuals are subject upon arrival in the country of either transit or asylum, is of paramount importance in their decision-making processes.¹³ Oftentimes, a lack of information or misinformation may lead to severe and even fatal consequences. Facing involuntarily relocation to an unfamiliar environment, refugees not only have to deal with new cultural habits and familiarize themselves with a different language, but must also immediately take their first steps in a complex bureaucratic structure. To navigate through the asylum process while managing everyday life, refugees largely depend on a number of channels through which they can access information.¹⁴

With this in mind, RSN and RRT have approached legal information activities with the goal of empowering refugee individuals and their broader communities. Identifying ways to make legal information accessible and useful, the two partner organizations have sought to develop content in multiple formats and languages and disseminate them through a variety of means from print to video and other digital platforms. RSN and RRT have also made a distinction between one-on-one and group-based direct legal information and counseling services aiming to benefit specific individual beneficiaries, and public legal information materials aiming to empower refugee communities in Turkey at large.

Cooperation Modality

Informed by this approach, RSN and RRT have prioritized the development of ATI initiatives as an integral aspect of a broadly-scoped legal information and assistance programming. As with other areas of RSN-RRT collaboration, the two organizations have sought to both produce high-quality informative content and to establish effective methods of ensuring the delivery of these materials to beneficiaries and other stakeholders. In terms of the division of labor between the two partner organizations, while the bulk of legal research and content development was carried out by RRT as the national legal expertise actor, RSN carried technical and operational responsibilities focused on identifying and implementing innovative and effective presentation and dissemination methodologies.

¹³ Melissa Wall, Madeline Otis Campbell, and Dana Janbek, "Syrian Refugees and Information Precarity," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 2 (February 1, 2017): 240–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815591967>.

¹⁴ Antonia Köster, Cora Bergert, and Jana Gundlach, "Information as a Life Vest: Understanding the Role of Social Networking Sites for the Social Inclusion of Syrian Refugees" (International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS), San Francisco, 2018), 3.

01

LEGAL RESEARCH, CONTENT DEVELOPMENT AND PRINT DISSEMINATION

In the content development stage, while RRT has led the identification of topics largely unaddressed through legal information and which directly affect refugee communities, RSN has contributed to these efforts through programmatic feedback and critical monitoring and evaluation activities, highlighting the needs communicated by refugee beneficiaries and providing a roadmap for the production of additional informational materials and their adaptation into multiple formats.

Thematically, RSN-RRT legal information materials have covered an expanding scope of topics and issues, beginning with core components of the asylum and migration system in Turkey and eventually including a variety of more specialized and situation-specific topics. Similarly, in terms of the languages that these legal information materials have been generated in, contents were initially offered in the most commonly used refugee and host community languages, and later made available in additional languages spoken by refugees in Turkey. Lastly, in light of the dynamic nature of Turkish refugee and asylum legislation and their implementation, planning and carrying out periodic content updates and revisions have always formed key activities in the RSN-RRT approach to legal information materials.

Following this framework, the first phase of legal information content developed by RSN-RRT involved comprehensive booklets which focused on basic asylum eligibility criteria, procedures, applicable rights, safeguards and obligations for refugees seeking protection in Turkey, organized according to the basic legislative distinction within the Turkish asylum system between the Temporary Protection (TP) regime applicable to refugees from Syria and the International Protection (IP) procedure available to asylum seekers from all other countries of origin. These information booklets targeted individuals at all stages in the process of seeking protection, including those not yet registered, those with pending applications, and those already granted protective status. The series covered four topics (registration procedures, access to health, access to education, and access to the labor market), and were made available in Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, English, French and Somali.



Information Booklets provide information for asylum-seekers in an easy-to-follow question and answer format.

Over the course of the first PRM-funded RSN-RRT joint project (2015-2016), a total of 192,000 booklets were printed and distributed, both directly to beneficiaries visiting the Center as well as via a country-wide network of NGO and civil society partners working in the field of refugee protection in Turkey. Over the subsequent PRM-funded project (2016-2017), an additional run of 95,700 booklets was printed and distributed to beneficiaries and other organizations serving refugee populations around Turkey.

Post-distribution monitoring and evaluation was conducted by RSN and RRT, including through the gathering of extensive and direct feedback from RRT's refugee beneficiaries. The findings were channeled into the planning of the subsequent PRM-funded project (2017-2019). This third phase of the

9

topics of
information
covered in

4

languages at
the time of
writing'

RSN-RRT legal information materials initiative included updates and additional printing and dissemination of previously developed TP and IP-focused materials, as well as the development and production of a new set of information materials covering additional topics and questions related to refugee and asylum seekers' access to state-funded legal aid services, marriage and divorce procedures, and housing, landlord and property issues.

02

VISUAL ADAPTATIONS: POSTCARDS AND VIDEOS

As a subsequent phase in RSN and RRT's development and dissemination of legal information contents, both organizations have focused on generating visual adaptations of existing ATI content into new formats alongside continued distribution of informational booklets. First, "informational postcards" for TP and IP recipients covering the topics of health, primary education, higher education, and access to the labor market were produced to provide the most important information in a more concise and visually-oriented format for individuals less comfortable with text-heavy resources.



Postcards provide key information at a glance to beneficiaries and can be helpful in identifying which topics are covered in more detail in other informational materials.

Building on this initial visual adaptation, RSN and RRT subsequently developed and produced animated video content to present a growing range of legal information in multiple languages including spoken voice-overs. Starting in 2017, RSN and RRT produced and circulated a comprehensive range of legal information videos, initially made available through RRT's organizational website and via YouTube. Approaching this initiative jointly, RRT and RSN adapted and trimmed down existing informational materials for these videos, while RSN led their technical development and production. The resulting videos effectively translated the Center's legal information content into high-quality and accessible video contents capable of reaching a broader target audience. Successive projects allowed for the continued production of informational videos, with 27 different video contents currently available in multiple languages at the time of writing this report.



Informational materials were adapted into animated videos, increasing their potential reach and accessibility.

03

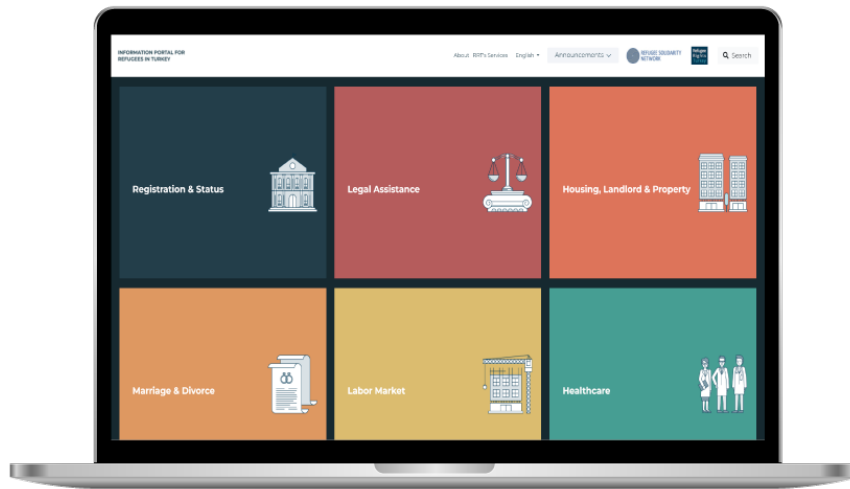
DIGITAL ADAPTATIONS AND WEB-BASED DISSEMINATION

In 2018, RSN and RRT introduced the next stage in the evolution of their joint legal information dissemination activities, investing in the creation of a dedicated web-based Information Portal for Refugees in Turkey ("the Information Portal"), accessible at <https://MulteciHaklari.info> and <https://RefugeeRights.info>.

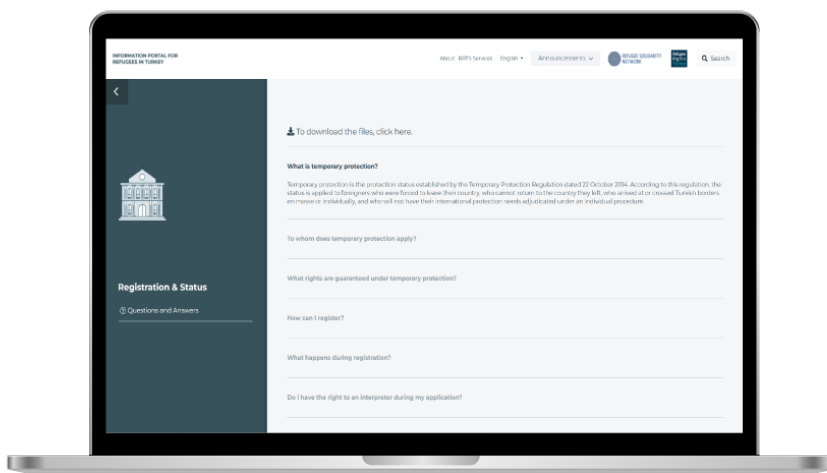
Prior to the launch of the Portal, RSN-RRT legal information content—whether written content, visuals or information videos—were made available online through RRT's organizational website. However, because this website catered to the multiple audiences that RRT serves and has the primary function of serving to represent RRT as a civil society organization, the accessibility and visibility of these contents hosted there was hindered in comparison to a tailor-built legal information dissemination channel. It was also impractical to continue to house a growing number of information booklets (uploaded as PDF files with several separate versions for each language) and informational videos.

Recognizing the need to foster increased access to RSN and RRT's informational materials among refugee communities in Turkey, both organizations worked jointly to carefully design a web-based Information Portal capable of meeting the needs identified through focus groups carried out with the program's refugee beneficiaries. RSN has led the transition to the

Information Portal, seeking out and engaging external expertise to adapt and transition existing RRT legal informational content into formats suitable for this digital platform. This transition has also allowed RRT to dramatically simplify and speed up the process of updating contents in response to changes in legislation or implementation in the field, and allowed RRT to rely on the Information Portal as a resource for reinforcing and optimizing certain direct legal service interactions. Furthermore, this crucial RSN-RRT investment has also laid the groundwork and infrastructure for what has ultimately become an extremely cost-effective and sustainable information delivery infrastructure that can be utilized by RRT for years to come.



Upon visiting the Information Portal, users are asked to select which language they prefer (Arabic, Farsi, Turkish or English), and are then prompted to indicate whether they are seeking information for individuals from Syria or for those arriving to Turkey from other countries of origin. According to the user's selection, they are either presented with information relevant for persons within the scope of the Temporary Protection (TP) regime or the International Protection (IP) procedure.



"The way the website guides you is very good. I looked at other websites, but they did not have the language options that your website has."

- Iranian beneficiary

The Information Portal offers visitors the ability to access information in multiple formats: easy-to-understand questions and answers, infographics, and animated informative videos.

RSN, in supporting RRT develop these innovative and technology-driven legal information formats and dissemination solutions, mobilizing at times cutting edge American external expertise, has thereby empowered and complemented RRT in a way that did not only achieve refugee protection benefits but also contributed to RRT's organizational capacities.

This kind of meaningful and resource-efficient division of labor between the two organizations has also allowed RRT to direct the human and financial resources that it otherwise would have to allocate to building these innovative digital formats and dissemination platform towards direct service provision and other program implementation. One recent example of this type of collaboration and division of labor between the two organizations is the recent development of an age-appropriate illustrated informational booklet for unaccompanied minor refugees in Turkey. Whereas RRT drew from its subject-matter expertise to develop the informational contents, RSN managed the design and development of the booklet's visual presentation.



A sample spread from the booklet titled "What's in my legal backpack? An information booklet for unaccompanied minors".

04

BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK-DRIVEN DESIGN THROUGH MONITORING & EVALUATION

Over the course of the past seven years, RSN has supported RRT in institutionalizing regular evaluation of the reception and impact of the legal information materials disseminated to refugee communities, through focus group sessions and semi-structured interviews with refugee beneficiaries. The development of these feedback mechanisms has provided an important opportunity for RSN and RRT to hear about refugees' informational needs and preferences directly from beneficiaries themselves, and has strengthened both organizations' collaboration by driving the iterative improvement of informational offerings. For example, the importance of offering information on refugees' rights and obligations in a variety of formats was underlined in user's feedback, which indicated that most users had a strong personal preference for either textual or audio-visual mediums. This feedback has solidified RSN and RRT's multiformat approach to producing informative and accessible materials.

As an example, given that refugee populations predominantly access the internet via smartphones and other mobile devices rather than desktop or laptop computers,¹⁵ the Refugee Info Portal has been optimized for users visiting from mobile devices. The online medium also allows for more timely updates to reflect legislative/administrative changes when compared to printed booklets.

I preferred the Q&A sections, but the videos might be a better choice for others. For that reason, it's great that you have multiple format options available at once.

- Syrian beneficiary

Since 2015, more than

1,000,000

print copies of RSN and RRT's Informational Materials for Refugees have been disseminated throughout Turkey,

and the Refugee Info Portal has received more than

46,000

visitors from Turkey since its launch in 2019.

¹⁵ Maren Borkert, Karen E. Fisher, and Eiad Yafi, "The Best, the Worst, and the Hardest to Find: How People, Mobiles, and Social Media Connect Migrants in (to) Europe," *Social Media+ Society* 4, no. 1 (2018): 8.

ENHANCING REACH AND MODALITIES OF RRT LEGAL SERVICE PROVISION

The RSN-RRT partnership revolves in large part around the provision of a unique array of specialized direct legal services to refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey by RRT. As a national refugee legal aid organization and asylum advocacy actor, RRT pursues a deliberately strategic approach to direct legal service provision, aiming not only to empower refugees and asylum seekers to effectively access rights and safeguards under Turkish law, but also to exert case-based monitoring and advocacy impact on several key aspects of the Government of Turkey's asylum and migration practices. RRT's legal case work, alongside experiences and observations collected over the course of legal assistance interactions and interventions in specific cases, also informs refugee law capacity-building efforts which target the broader legal professional community in Turkey, undertaken by RRT in partnership with RSN.

The RSN-RRT partnership has strengthened implementation of direct legal services by RRT in a number of ways. Within this context, RSN's role and contributions as an INGO partner and intermediary have predominately focused on supporting RRT's programmatic and methodological competencies in the areas of beneficiary intake procedures, the development of a custom case file management database, case management and referral procedures.

01

HELPDESK FOR REFUGEES

Since 2015, the RSN-RRT Legal Center has provided legal information and counseling to refugees located across Turkey via a telephone Helpdesk. The Helpdesk is staffed by RRT personnel trained to receive inquiries, assess vulnerabilities, directly address more straightforward inquiries, and refer other more complex inquiries that fall within the Center's case policy for further intake. The Helpdesk also requires the support of interpreters to respond to inquiries from refugees and asylum seekers who are unable to interact with RRT's expert legal assistance staff in either Turkish or English.

13,756

individuals have received support with their inquiries regarding access to their rights and other protections from the Helpdesk for Refugees.

RSN has supported RRT to dramatically strengthen and modernize the operation of the Helpdesk from a modestly-staffed basic telephone line to a much more comprehensively staffed, complex legal information and advice service operated via a state-of-the-art telephone and communications infrastructure capable of sustaining the high level of legal inquiries received by RRT. Over the course of the last five years, **13,756 individuals have received support with their inquiries regarding access to their rights and other protections from the Helpdesk for Refugees.**

02

GROUP COUNSELING SESSIONS

In addition to providing one-on-one legal information assistance via the Refugee Helpdesk and follow-on advanced legal case management services, RSN and RRT also employ a group-based direct service delivery methodology. Through group counseling sessions catered to various different profiles of refugees and asylum seekers, expert RRT staff provide information on the basic rights and entitlements of protective status applicants and protective status holders in Turkey. These group counseling sessions empower communities with reliable legal information and advice that they can employ in their own lives and use to raise awareness among other members of their communities. Secondly, RRT also identifies individuals who may need follow-on individualized legal assistance services through these group counseling sessions. RSN and RRT pursue a strategy of collaboration with other

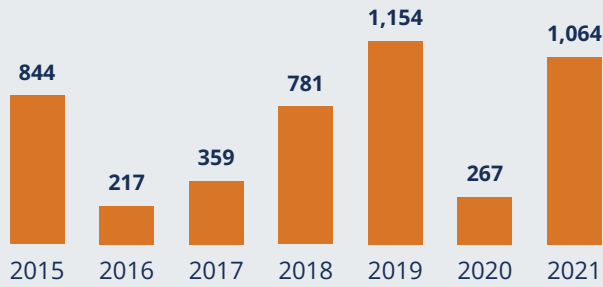
NGO service providers and community organizations in organizing these group sessions. To date, the RSN-RRT program implementation has engaged 29 different local and national civil society organizations serving refugees and asylum seekers across 13 provinces, reaching a total of 4,686 beneficiaries in 168 different sessions.

Significantly, the Group Counseling modality has allowed RSN and RRT to strategically reach certain refugee populations with tailored counseling to fit their specific information needs. For example, as a result of collaborating with organizations that predominantly serve female refugees, an estimated 65% of group counseling session attendees have been females. A number of group counseling sessions have similarly targeted other underserved refugee communities in Turkey, such as Dari-speaking Afghans and Franco-/Anglophone Africans. Because group counseling sessions are held in a single language and often in partnership with organizations serving refugees from a particular country of origin, the overall positive trend in both the total number of group counseling sessions held and the number of session attendees is significant, reflecting programming that reaches and serves the needs of Turkey's diverse refugee population.

4,686

beneficiaries in 168 different sessions, across 13 provinces, with 29 different local and national civil society organizations.

GROUP COUNSELING ATTENDEES PER YEAR



While the Group Counseling modality faced significant challenges in 2020 due to the emergence of the global COVID19 pandemic, RRT's first online group counseling sessions were successfully launched in December of 2020, reaching more than 1,000 beneficiaries by August of 2021.

03 ADVANCED LEGAL CASE MANAGEMENT

In addition to providing basic legal information and counseling via the Refugee Helpdesk, RRT also provides a more advanced scope of specialized legal interventions and legal case management services in response to inquiries and requests for legal assistance that require additional follow-up actions after the initial counseling interaction with the beneficiary. These services are referred to as "advanced legal case management" services.

The case management services offered by RRT in the framework of the RSN-RRT partnership can be broadly categorized into three categories:

1. assistance with Temporary Protection (TP) and International Protection (IP) registration and appeal procedures (registration assistance);
2. assistance to individuals facing or appealing administration detention/deportation procedures (detention assistance); and
3. protection services for children, especially unaccompanied minors (child protection).

After initial identification of a case fit for advanced case management services, unit-level assessments are made within the specialized staff group to discuss and identify the legal options available to the person concerned and the best course of legal assistance action. In this way, RRT case management services are tailored to each beneficiary on the basis of a global case and service policy framework, through which RRT determines what types of legal problems are eligible for RRT services and what level of legal service and what type of legal assistance actions may be pursued in each type of case.

Between 2015 and 2021, a total of

5,292

beneficiaries have been supported with advanced case management services.

DIRECT ADVANCED CASE MANAGEMENT BENEFICIARIES BY SERVICE TYPE



RSN's support for RRT's strategically designed services includes serving as an advisor and partner to ensure awareness of and compliance with international best practices and standards and ethical considerations in service delivery. RSN also makes referrals to RRT from its networks in the US and elsewhere who have inquiries or needs relevant to RRT's work in Turkey.

04 BENEFICIARY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

RSN and RRT work together to offer structured opportunities for the beneficiaries served by the RSN-RRT Center to provide feedback and input on the types of support they require, the effectiveness of the services they have received, and their overall satisfaction. Over the course of the RSN-RRT partnership, the two organizations have increasingly elevated the role of beneficiary engagement and accountability in program design and program evaluation, from what was initially a largely ad hoc process to a mainstreamed, core management component integrated across all project activities.

RSN-RRT Monitoring and Evaluation professionals evaluate program interventions by organizing regular focus-group sessions and individual semi-structured interviews with the Center's beneficiaries. Over time, additional feedback mechanisms have been introduced to supplement

these direct engagements, including the use of exit surveys following group counseling sessions. This self-initiated strengthening of program evaluation frameworks and more frequent gathering of beneficiary feedback extending beyond donor requirements are at the heart of RSN and RRT's shared organizational ethos and plays a crucial role in ensuring that RSN and RRT remain accountable to the populations served by the Center and are able to quickly adapt the Center's services to meet emergent needs among Turkey's heterogeneous refugee populations.

STRENGTHENING THE SUPPLY-SIDE OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEES IN TURKEY

Conceptual Framing

As an important consideration that informs RSN-RRT capacity-building efforts in Turkey, RRT (and the RSN-supported RRT Legal Center) is strategically positioned in the context of Turkey not only as a direct legal assistance provider but also as a national capacity-building actor. In this section, the term “capacity-building” refers to activities which aim to benefit not an individual organization, but rather the range of individual and institutional capacities to offer legal advice, assistance and representation services to refugees and asylum seekers in the community of lawyers and NGO legal practitioners in Turkey. Here, the term “capacity-building” encompasses both efforts to strengthen the legal expertise and practical skills of individual legal aid lawyers and NGO practitioners, as well as to expand the overall supply and availability of legal services to refugees and asylum seekers country-wide by promoting optimal resourcing and clever legal service delivery structures.



+



Accordingly, RSN-RRT capacity-building efforts in the framework of successive PRM-funded project collaborations have not only delivered a range of high-quality trainings and seminars, offered other practical advice, and generated legal learning and reference materials for individual lawyers in Turkey; they have simultaneously included activities that promote and advocate for improvements and innovations in legal service delivery models in this field.

The capacity-building activities developed and implemented within the framework of RSN-RRT partnership projects also create a positive feedback loop resulting in further benefit to RRT: the progress which RRT has made in terms of its organizational development over the course of the RSN-RRT partnership in turn enables RRT to deliver consistently higher quality capacity-building initiatives to its broader community of refugee rights advocates and legal assistance providers.

Target Beneficiaries

In line with the RSN-RRT approach to “capacity-building” in the area of legal assistance services, the two organizations do not only aim to bolster the expertise of the legal community in Turkey; they also engage the level of resource decisions and institutional capacities that are needed in order for those qualified and trained lawyers to actually take on as high a number of cases as possible and those specialized legal services are available and accessible throughout the country – including in particularly challenging settings like immigration detention facilities. To this end, the two organizations have been focusing on existing and potential institutional capacities in Turkey for refugee legal aid with a view to promoting the mobilization and optimal utilization of these capabilities.

The “supply-side” advocacy aspect of RSN-RRT refugee law capacity-building initiatives in Turkey have targeted two such specific institutional capacities: The state-funded legal aid scheme (Adli Yardim) implemented by provincial bar associations around the country, and pro bono partnerships between NGO service providers and law firms.

Furthermore, as RRT has continued to develop its own institutional expertise, capacity-building activities have branched out to include additional target audiences. In particular, RRT’s growing expertise in the field of Child Protection has led to capacity-building activities being carried out with state authorities, such as the staff of government-run child welfare shelters.

01

PRINT-BASED “REFUGEE LAW MANUAL” FOR TURKISH LAWYERS

9,000+

print copies of the Lawyers Manual have been distributed to Turkish lawyers since 2015.

Building on long-standing expertise in the field, RRT led the development of a compendium of international and national refugee law to serve as a reference for lawyers and civil society practitioners representing refugee clients in Turkey. This reference material was compiled into the first edition of the Lawyers Manual on Refugee Law in Turkey, first printed and disseminated in April 2015. A second, revised edition of the Lawyers Manual was released in August 2017, and the most recent third revised edition was printed in August of 2021, with additional amendments and an expanded number of sample documents and exemplary court decisions. In total, more than 9,000 print copies of the Lawyers Manual have been distributed to Turkish lawyers since 2015.

02

DIGITAL ADAPTATION AND EVOLUTION: “ONLINE REFUGEE LAW INFORMATION PLATFORM FOR LAWYERS”

In response to feedback gathered from Turkish lawyers representing refugee clients, RSN led an initiative to develop an Online Refugee Law Information Platform for Lawyers (MulteciHukuku.net) providing law practitioners in Turkey convenient reference to a curated collection of international and national-level legislation concerning refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition, the online portal includes examples of official documents issued to individuals with a protective status or who have applied for one, examples of official decision documents issued by national authorities, and other sample forms and documents necessary when representing this population.



Based on end user feedback, the Online Refugee Law Information Platform for Lawyers is designed to be accessible via computer, tablet or smartphone and features a straightforward design emphasizing quick access to reference documentation.

While law practitioners have often expressed that access to printed reference materials is necessary for working in the field, especially due to security restrictions when visiting clients in administrative detention, there is an equal need for accessible electronic reference material which can be quickly revised to reflect the latest legislative changes. The Online Refugee Law Information Platform for Lawyers therefore serves to complement the printed Lawyers Manual, each with their own unique use cases.

Since its launch in November of 2019, the Online Refugee Law Information Platform for Lawyers has received more than **9,200 visitors from Turkish users in all but one of Turkey's 81 provinces.**



03 TRAININGS AND SEMINARS FOR LAWYERS

Since 2015, RRT has organized and held **56 training sessions on refugee law** for Turkish lawyers, CSO practitioners and government officials, as well as 3 training sessions within the scope of a joint RSN-RRT pro bono pilot program, **providing instruction to a total of 1,972 attendees**. These training sessions and specialization seminars were organized in coordination with and drew participation from more than 40 organizations, including 22 provincial bar associations as well as representatives from the Constitutional Court of Turkey and the European Court of Human Rights.

IN-PERSON REFUGEE LAW TRAINING ACTIVITIES HELD



These **training sessions were held in 13 different Turkish provinces**, both in large urban metropolises as well as in a number of provinces which host particularly large refugee populations such as Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Van and Bursa. Following the emergence of the global COVID19 pandemic in early 2020, refugee law training activities have been adapted into **online virtual seminars**.

Training sessions and specialization seminars have focused on a number of different topics within refugee law such as International Protection applications and appeal procedures for negative status decisions, administrative detention of foreigners and deportation injunction/ appeal procedures, refugee status determination and country of origin information research, and caselaw from the European Court of Human Rights and application criteria within the context of administrative detention/deportation cases.

RSN has played a role in leveraging US asylum experts to input into training and specialization seminars, where relevant. For example, in honor of International Women's Day in March 2021, RSN-RRT co-organized and co-hosted a seminar including the participation of a leading expert from the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies at the University of California Hastings College of the Law. The seminar focused on the specific issue of gender-based asylum claims, their adjudication, and their interpretation in light of the "particular social group" nexus ground.

04

SUPPLY-SIDE ADVOCACY AROUND LEGAL AID DELIVERY MODELS

State-funded Legal Aid Scheme

Building on RRT's previous connections with provincial bar associations around the country has allowed for consecutive RSN-RRT partnership projects since 2015 to engage with bar associations to collaborate on hosting refugee law trainings and seminars. RRT has also specifically kept track of the functioning of the bar associations-led legal aid mechanism in different parts of Turkey in terms of their accessibility and availability for refugees and asylum seekers. In 2017, under the framework of the RSN-RRT partnership, RRT conducted a field survey with bar association leaders and other relevant stakeholders regarding local challenges and the practices which they have observed. This initial research was further developed in a national workshop in 2018 and through the joint publication of an assessment and recommendations report in early 2019. The dual-language report identified specific areas to be improved upon with regards to the resourcing and organization of the legal aid scheme in order to more effectively serve refugee and asylum seeker applicants. Meanwhile, RRT's direct legal service team has also continued to make frequent referrals of beneficiaries to local legal aid bureaus and to support lawyers appointed via the legal aid system who seek advice on legal strategies and their practical options in specific cases, which also provides a vantage point through which RRT is able to track evolving practices and persistent needs. In 2021, RRT once again conducted interviews with representatives of 19 different provincial bar associations and with the nation-wide Union of Turkish Bar Associations in order to identify the latest trends, emerging issues and good practices within the legal aid system. At the time of writing, RRT is preparing to organize another national workshop to discuss additional adjustments and improvements needed to further increase the effectiveness of state-funded legal aid services for refugees and asylum seekers.

Pro Bono Partnerships between NGO Service Providers and Law Firms

Since 2019, RRT has been implementing the first-ever pro bono collaboration for refugee protection in the Turkey context with two leading Istanbul-based law firms, White & Case Turkey and Dündar & Sir.

Since 2017, with RSN's conceptualization, initiative and encouragement, the two organizations have also explored and promoted pro bono partnerships between NGO service providers and law firms in Turkey. Pro bono partnerships are seen by RSN and RRT as a previously untapped, additional potential for the delivery of a complementary supply of free-of-charge legal services for refugees. As the initial step in this initiative, RSN conducted initial research and published a report in 2017 looking at the ways in which pro bono partnerships are being used to assist refugees and migrants in the United States, followed by a study visit hosted and organized by RSN for senior RRT staff, which provided an opportunity for them to visit the U.S. and meet with and learn directly from non-profits and law firms involved in these types of collaborations. Inspired and informed by this initiative, RSN and RRT began implementing Turkey's first-ever pro bono partnership in the field of refugee law in 2019, together with White & Case—a US-headquartered international law firm—and with Dündar & Sir—an Istanbul-based local law firm.

Later that year, RSN and RRT also co-hosted a workshop in Istanbul to take stock of the accomplishments and challenges observed in implementing the pilot and launched a reflection paper to chart the potentials of such pro bono partnerships in Turkey going forward. While continued engagement with this pilot program in Turkey has been temporarily delayed due to the impact of the COVID19 pandemic, RSN and RRT plan to resume and reinvigorate their pro bono advocacy efforts in 2022—with a widely attended national workshop bringing together law firms and NGOs planned for late 2022.

CONCLUSIONS

This report provides an overview and assessment of the multi-faceted RSN-RRT partnership—a relationship dating back to 2015 between a US-based INGO and a Turkish national NGO that seeks to advance refugee protection in Turkey. The RSN-RRT partnership has yielded a number of far-reaching achievements primarily in the form of legal protection benefits for refugees and asylum-seekers, while at the same time reinforcing the effectiveness of the Turkish legal and civil society refugee response community. Equally important, the partnership has also allowed for sustained and targeted investment in RRT’s organizational development, thereby bolstering the reach, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability of a key independent, national, civil society actor with a dedicated refugee protection mandate.

Considered as a whole, the RSN-RRT partnership in Turkey has significantly contributed to the resilience of the Turkey protection space by strengthening key local capacities through strategic and targeted collaborations and interventions.

The approaches and methodologies which RSN and RRT have leveraged in developing and implementing this partnership, and some of the innovative initiatives pursued within this framework, may have relevance for other refugee host contexts beyond Turkey.

Fundamentally, the RSN-RRT partnership approach’s key proposal is that locally-led ownership and interventions are best-positioned to navigate and develop solutions to the complex challenges that are commonplace in developing refugee host states.

As a US-based INGO, RSN remains committed to channeling this partnership experience in future engagements with locally-based operating partners elsewhere in the Global South, including emerging refugee-led initiatives, in order to inspire and support similar organizations embracing a legal protection mandate or any other social justice cause. While challenges certainly abound, this experience from Turkey—a developing country hosting a refugee population of historic scale—demonstrates that with pragmatic locally-led and internationally-empowered strategies, local refugee protection actors in host states can creatively draw upon existing resources and new potentials to contribute to tangible and sustainable improvements in the quality and availability of refugee protection.

With this report, RSN and RRT hope to contribute to efforts to reimagine the international humanitarian assistance space and existing INGO-NGO dynamics around the principle that equitable partnerships which recognize and reinforce the potential and initiative of local actors can bring about successful refugee protection outcomes and ultimately cultivate a stronger, more resilient response. Such partnerships breed long-term, positive impact for the individuals directly served by programs, the organization’s involved, and the field overall.

Refugee Solidarity Network (RSN) is a US-based non-profit organization that seeks to protect the rights of people uprooted from their homes and strengthen the communities where they seek safety. In partnership with advocates and local stakeholders, RSN develops capacity in refugee host countries outside the U.S. and advances legal frameworks that uphold human rights. RSN believes the complexity of forced migration requires a flexible, collaborative response focused on achieving sustainable solutions.

Refugee Rights Turkey or RRT (Mülteci Hakları Merkezi in Turkish) is an Istanbul-based independent non-governmental organization, which provides specialized legal counseling and assistance services to refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants in Turkey. RRT also delivers legal reference materials, trainings other expertise support services to lawyers and NGO legal practitioners, and advocates for improvements in Turkey's legislation and policies affecting refugees and migrants in line with international and European standards.



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