



impact report

2023



report overview

This report presents the impact of the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI) during 2022-23. It covers the impact of the programs and services provided by the RRLI coalition members, as well as the RRLI's refugee-led partners in Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Uganda. The report also highlights the achievements of RRLI's Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program in the five countries where RRLI currently operates. Finally, it outlines how RRLI is advocating for systemic change by working toward shifting power and resources to refugee-led organizations globally.

RRLI's mission is to resource refugee-led organizations (RLOs) to uplift communities and combat systemic exclusion within the refugee response sector. We believe when we center the people who have been forcibly displaced, we also center innovations, solutions, and movement-building, leading to immediate and long-term improvements in communities.

We aim to catalyze the growth and sustainability of community-led responses to forced displacement as these interventions are more cost-effective, transparent, accountable, impactful, and sustainable compared to those of external actors. Through these interventions, RRLI envisions a world in which all people who have experienced forced displacement have agency over their lives and access to solutions that rebuild their lives with dignity.

acknowledgements

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COALITION MEMBERS



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table of contents

4	Letter from the RRLI Coalition
6	Impact Summary
8	Introduction
9	About RRLI and Our Approach
10	Community Impact
12	- <i>Colombia</i>
14	- <i>Egypt</i>
16	- <i>Indonesia</i>
18	- <i>Lebanon</i>
20	- <i>Uganda</i>
22	Beyond Funding: The Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program
24	Advocating for Systemic Change
26	Challenges and Reflections
27	Looking Forward
27	Partner With Us



Letter from the coalition

Transforming the aid sector: it's time for refugees to lead!

Racism is one of the root problems in the humanitarian world. It is institutionalized in many forms, such as by devaluing local knowledge to prioritize external (often Western) strategies and ways of thinking, or undertaking discriminatory recruitment practices that favor outside "experts" to run projects and programs in communities they know little about. Paul Currión argues¹ that racism within the aid sector is inherited from the colonial era: it is reflected *"in how aid flows frequently map to soft power relationships between former colonial powers and former colonies; in how the career trajectory of many international aid workers often resembles that of colonial administrators; in how local civil society is shaped to fit the mold of "the NGO" rather than more culturally appropriate or politically effective forms."*

Conversations about racism in the humanitarian system have been taking place for several years now. The Secretary-General's call at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit *"as local as possible, as international as necessary"* has encouraged the conversation even further. There may be shiny new terms appearing every now and then (*"localization," "accountability to affected people," "leaving no one behind," etc.*), but are we really making tangible changes in the status quo? Has

the abundance of panel discussions and webinars focused on "decolonizing aid," racism in the aid sector, and diversity, equity and inclusion led to a meaningful shift in power and resources to community-led actors?

Having over 31 billion USD flowing annually into large international organizations signals that it is not a problem of the availability of resources, but rather the allocation of these resources. Instead of supporting the efforts of refugee-led organizations and initiatives that are operated by and for communities, donors often direct funds to strengthen INGOs and their footprint in the Global South. As a result, the refugee response system has grown too big, bureaucratic, slow, and far from communities to enable any meaningful change.

Refugee communities deserve to be the driving force behind their own futures, rather than being subject to the whims of a few powerful institutions.

This report presents how refugee-led organizations (RLOs) are supporting refugee communities and transforming the current refugee response system. The impact of RLOs

¹ Paul Currión, "Decolonising aid, again": Found [here](#).



Above: Various leaders of the RRLI Coalition and RRLI implementation team. Photos by RRLI.

is distinct because it is more organic. People often go to their neighborhood and their community when they face difficulties and require support. It is the first thing you often think of. It is fast, safe, and feels right. RLOs treat people with dignity and respect, have a better understanding of their needs, and are more accessible, representative, and accountable. RLOs support communities based on needs, rather than status and labels imposed by external actors. The range of support provided by RLOs is also holistic, from covering transportation expenses to attend a workshop or receive a service; to accompanying a mother to the hospital to deliver her baby; to assisting a family to pay their rent for the upcoming month; to paying the school fees for children who have not been able to access education in their home and host country. Unlike many international organizations, RLOs understand that needs are not homogeneous, making their impact unique, targeted, and long-lasting.

Instead of continuing to perpetuate racist, xenophobic, and discriminatory perceptions of refugees, it is time we shift power and resources to forcibly displaced communities. Refugee communities deserve to be the driving force behind their own futures, rather than being subject to the whims of a few powerful institutions. Vague commitments to support

local actors while continuing to uphold the status quo are paradoxical. We must fundamentally transform the refugee response system to make it one centered around respect, dignity, agency, and power for refugees themselves. Our 2023 Impact Report highlights how we at RRLI are shifting power and resources to refugee leaders and refugee-led organizations around the world. The time to act is now, and we call on other actors to join our movement toward resourcing RLOs and fostering refugee leadership globally. Will you join us?

In solidarity,
The RRLI Coalition



Above: An agroecology and business bootcamp hosted by grantee partner Tomorrow Vijana. Photo by Tomorrow Vijana.

impact summary

In 2022-23, RRLI disbursed **\$2.99 million to 17 RLOs** in Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Uganda through the RLO-to-RLO Fund. The impact of this funding to community-based, refugee-led organizations has been transformative. Our RLO partners supported approximately **633,123 community members in total** (including dependents and household members) through holistic and comprehensive support for entire families. This last July, RRLI issued \$3.18 million in renewals for 16 of our RLO partners in alignment with our commitment to multi-year funding and RLO sustainability.

The impact of this funding is far-reaching. *Refugiados Unidos* in Colombia, *New Vision* in Egypt, and *Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Center (RAIC)* in Indonesia all unlocked long-term solutions through legal aid and/or private sponsorship. Ten partners, including *Tafawol* and *Faysel* in Egypt and *Help for Refugees* in Indonesia, supported thousands of children to receive high-quality education. *KOWED* and *Tomorrow Vijana* in Uganda, and *Makani* in Lebanon launched economic inclusion initiatives that led to job placements, income generation, or marketable skills development. We offer these successes as examples. The truth is that the RLOs support their communities in myriad ways that meet the needs of the whole family. Anything less would be inadequate.

Last year, RRLI also launched the Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program, a program designed to **enable grantee sustainability, influence, and efficacy** through regular,

grantee-driven, localized support from one of our in-country Coalition Members and the RRLI implementation team. In contrast to standard “capacity-building” programs, RRLI focused on targeted learning, problem-solving, networking, and joint initiatives.

Beyond our direct action, RRLI engaged with **46 key stakeholders** to broadly advocate for resourcing RLOs and enabling refugee leadership. As a result, RRLI unlocked **\$3.4 million for 80 RLOs** outside the RLO-to-RLO Fund (including through UNHCR and UN Women), **provided technical support for 96 RLOs** outside our current cohort of RLO grantees, and **facilitated 71 connections between RLOs and governments**, foundations, INGOs, UN agencies and academic institutions. RRLI also successfully advocated for UNHCR to institutionalize a more inclusive definition of an RLO and influenced a donor government to prioritize refugee leadership in a call for proposals.

We will build on these many successes in 2023-24 together with our grantee partners. We invite RLOs, donors, policymakers, and key stakeholders to join our movement to collectively continue amplifying and accelerating community-led responses to forced displacement.

RRLI's Overall 2022-23 Impact by the Numbers

633,123

community members supported in total (including dependents and household members) in Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Uganda

71

connections facilitated between RLOs and governments, foundations, INGOs, UN agencies and academic actors in the refugee response system

\$3.4m

unlocked for 80 RLOs outside the RLO-to-RLO Fund

\$2.99m

disbursed to 17 RLOs through the RLO-to-RLO Fund

96

RLOs supported with capacity-strengthening outside the current RRLI Cohort

17

RLO-to-RLO Fund Grantees in 2022-23

46

key stakeholders engaged to advocate for resourcing RLOs and refugee leadership

all

grantees reported increased community impact, organizational strength, and amplified networks through their engagement with RRLI



Above: A staff member from Kandaakiat (KOWED) (right) and woman entrepreneur (left) supported by Kandaakiat's seed capital. Photo by Kandaakiat.

introduction

Of the nearly \$31.3 billion flowing through the humanitarian system annually, funding provided directly to local and national actors in 2021 was just 1.2% (US \$302 million) – the lowest in the past five years, in terms of both volume and proportion. Refugee-led organizations, a subset of local organizations, receive a fraction of that funding.²

Despite increased dialogue and commitments to refugee leadership localization and decolonization, **this stark financial picture demonstrates that we have not changed much of what matters.**³ Power and control over the direction of refugee responses continue to live with just a handful of major institutions of power rather than with refugee communities themselves.

The sector's inability or unwillingness to fund RLOs is to our collective detriment, and has become indefensible. [The evidence base](#) that upholds and clarifies the role and importance of RLOs is growing and clear: when RLOs are funded, long-term solutions are uncovered, culturally sensitive services are sustained, and communities feel seen and heard. This report serves as yet another source of anecdotes and data that highlight the imperative of RLO investment.

Though we are dismayed at the pace of change, we have also made progress. In 2022, RRLI directly granted 17 RLOs 2.99 million USD and unlocked 3.4 million USD for 80 more. Unsurprisingly, grantees around the world used this funding to significant effect. For example, **Care the Displaced Children** launched one of the only kindergarten facilities in the entire country for refugee children; **Tafawol** in Egypt established the first-of-its-kind physical therapy clinic in the community for migrant children with disabilities by delivering over 1,000 free and reduced physical therapy sessions for 484 children; and **KOWED** in Uganda supported the establishment of two Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and provided start-up capital for 12 women-led businesses, stimulating self-employment across the community.

These are just a few of the dozens of successes born of RLO investment; you can read about many more below. Please join us in acknowledging and celebrating their successes, and in advocating or enabling a new reality where financing RLOs becomes the norm in the refugee response sector.

² See Development Initiatives (2022). Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022. Retrieved from https://devinit.org/documents/1193/GHA2022_Digital_v8_DknWCsU.pdf. This figure is estimated using the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022 and gutchecked by consulting with RLO partners around the world, who confirm that this is a reasonable estimation. RRLI recognizes that this data point insufficiently captures funding flows. It does not take into account development funding, funding from development banks, the way funding flows through agencies down to RLOs, or hyper-localized funding from churches, for example. Nevertheless, RRLI believes the statistic captures the spirit of the problem well, which is to say, that RLOs are not included meaningfully within funding streams.

³ For example, the [Grand Bargain](#) calls on donors to provide funding to local actors, and the [United States](#) has recently set targets to achieve localization commitments. At the same time, there has been an increasing recognition of giving the power and access so they have agency over their own livelihoods, such as through the focus on the "meaningful participation" of refugees in the [Global Compact on Refugees](#), and the push to include refugees as leaders in strategy development and decision-making processes.



Above: RRLI implementation members and coalition member leaders at RRLI's inaugural retreat in Malaysia. Photo by RRLI.

About RRLI and Our Approach



The [Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative](#) (RRLI) is a coalition of six refugee-led organizations (RLOs)⁴ whose mission is to resource RLOs to uplift communities and combat the systemic exclusion of refugees within the refugee response sector. The recipients of the 2021 [Larsen Lam ICONIQ Impact Award](#), our coalition is comprised of [BasmeH & Zeitooneh](#) in Iraq and Lebanon, [Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Centre](#) in Indonesia, [Refugiados Unidos](#) in Colombia, [St. Andrew's Refugee Services](#) in Egypt, [Young African Refugees for Integral Development](#) in Uganda, and [Asylum Access](#), a global advocacy organization, family of local refugee rights organizations in Malaysia, Thailand and Mexico, and the host organization for RRLI's staff and programmatic budget.

RRLI uses four interconnected strategies to spearhead a movement to transform the forced displacement sector, challenge the exclusion of refugees, and sustainably fund RLOs:

1. *Funding RLOs*: Flexibly and sustainably funding RLOs through the RLO-to-RLO Fund
2. *Strengthening RLOs*: Supporting RLOs in a mutual and collaborative manner through the Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program
3. *Advocating for Refugee Leadership*: Engaging with influential stakeholders to push for refugee leadership and the resourcing of RLOs
4. *Generating Evidence*: Expanding data, information, and research on the impact of RLOs

⁴ We define an RLO as any formal or informal initiative/organization that is founded and run by people of forced displacement background and/or any formal or informal initiative/organization where people of forced displacement are in major leadership positions and able to influence the work of the organization.

A forcibly displaced artisan supported by Basmeh & Zeitooneh. Photo by Basmeh & Zeitooneh.





community impact

When RRLI thinks about impact, it first and foremost considers what is happening for community members supported by the RLOs we invest in. Here, we articulate the impact witnessed in 2022-23 thanks to the hard work and dedication of our 17 grantee organizations.



Above and opposite: a public advocacy campaign by EL DANO for refugees' rights in Colombia. Photos by EL DANO.

colombia

While Colombia is often lauded for its accepting policies towards the 2.4 million Venezuelans who have fled to the country, access to the rights provided by these policies remains challenging because of confusing processes, lack of information, and bureaucratic requirements, among other obstacles. In addition, while 80% of Venezuelans intend to stay in Colombia long-term, rampant xenophobia causes widespread discrimination and even violence against Venezuelans. To combat these issues and improve the lives of community members, RRLI's partners—Fundación RadaBer (RadaBer) and El Derecho a No Obedecer (EL DANO)—and RRLI Coalition Member, Refugiados Unidos (RU), provide a wide range of services and programs in Colombia, including legal assistance, employment and entrepreneurship support, healthcare, psychosocial services, emergency aid, and community cohesion and integration.

Protection of Rights = Protecting People

RLOs are guaranteeing community members' access to rights, including the right to move freely, support their families, send their children to work, and access healthcare. Both RadaBer and RU supported thousands of community members by providing legal assistance and accompaniment, ensuring that individuals were able to access legal status

as well as the benefits that come with that status, including work permits, benefits, and healthcare. For example, one RU client learned her ID card had been deactivated without notice and was refused her HIV medication. RU was able to quickly reinstate her ID card, and is now working to get her a more stable legal status for better access to healthcare so she can have a necessary surgery.

Challenging Xenophobia

EL DANO analyzed hundreds of thousands of communications to develop a deep understanding of xenophobia in Colombia. They then developed methodologies to tackle the issue, including community conversations, artistic and cultural encounters, and workshops on narratives against xenophobia, which reached thousands of people. Many of their workshops bring host and refugee communities together to address common concerns, further creating integrated communities. Similarly, RU was instrumental in creating a space where elected refugee and migrant leaders work directly with government officials on issues facing their community. Their advocacy also ensured the creation of local government policies in Bogotá, specifically addressing the needs of displaced people.

“Having been part of Aquí cabemos todxs has given me the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, and I was also able to meet wonderful women, learning from them. I am very grateful to them for allowing me to be part of this wonderful project, and from there to feel that Colombian-Venezuelan integration is a reality.”

Participant in one of El DANO's initiatives

From Aid to Economic Stability

RRLI partners address short-term needs while also generating long-term stability. To provide two illustrative examples, RadaBer provided one woman nutritious food for her children who were malnourished upon arrival in the area, while also helping to regularize her children's status so they could attend school. RU similarly provided groceries to a newly arrived family while providing the mother with entrepreneurship training. She is now starting her own business with seed capital from RU.

Key Highlights

Fundación Radaber

- Supported over **1,100 people** with legal aid, basic necessities, and referrals to social programs

El Derecho a No Obedecer

- Trained **247 people** in narratives against xenophobia
- Strengthened the integration capacities of **1,822 individuals** through artistic, cultural, and community encounters

Refugiados Unidos

- Provided legal advice to **3,829 people**
- Delivered employment and entrepreneurship workshops for **570 people**
- **112 entrepreneurs** received seed capital for their business ideas





Above: Students from Tawasul Community School learning about countries in East Africa. Photo by Tawasul Community School.

egypt

Refugees in Egypt face various challenges, including but not limited to poverty, inability to meet basic needs, homelessness, and lack of access to healthcare and education. The conflict in Sudan, inflation, and currency devaluation have exacerbated these challenges, leading to growing mental health needs. RRLI's partners—New Vision, Tafawol Association for Special Needs & Development, and Tawasul Community School—and RRLI Coalition Member, St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS), are providing wide-reaching services and programs, including legal aid, psychosocial support, specialized healthcare, education programming, employment skills training, livelihood development and much more to meet short-term needs and support long-term integration for refugees and migrants in Egypt.

Services for all

RLOs in Egypt are playing an essential role by filling critical gaps in service provision for refugees and migrants, especially as these communities cannot access certain services due to discrimination and financial barriers. Tafawol established the first-of-its-kind physical therapy clinic for migrant children with disabilities, ensuring access for 480+ children who would otherwise be unable to obtain such a service

due to cost and discrimination. Meanwhile, StARS provides legal services to individuals who would not qualify for assistance under UNHCR's requirements or are stuck on a waitlist.

Education for all children

Education is another place in which RLOs are filling critical gaps. New Vision, Tawasul Community School, and Tafawol are providing education for over 2,000 children through their community schools in Cairo. Many students cannot access school otherwise because of legal restrictions in public schools, lack of funds to access private schools, and inability to meet qualifications for UNHCR education grants. These schools also offer children a safe place to learn and develop free of discrimination. RLOs are ensuring refugee children can develop and learn in a safe, understanding environment.

Emergency response

RRLI partners have provided adaptable, flexible, and holistic responses to increasing community needs due to the escalating conflict in Sudan, in part due to flexible funding from RRLI. Between 15 April and 30 June, StARS screened 2,571 cases (representing over 10,000 individuals displaced due to the conflict in Sudan), and provided them with support

"I love Tafawol so much because of the way they treat me. In Tafawol, I was a recipient of the handicrafts training 3 month program. This training for me has been life-changing because I learned a new profession that I am now using to put food on the table for my four children. I, myself, now train 20 other women from our community on handicrafts work, such as henna art and making hand bags and purses. Thanks to Tafawol, my four children go to Tafawol school too and they feel very safe and included there."

A Sudanese refugee benefitting from Tafawol's holistic programs in Egypt

ranging from housing and humanitarian aid to emergency psychosocial support. They are also providing capacity-building and funding to other RLOs to strengthen capacity and respond to urgent needs. Tafawol has already received 1,300 inquiries about psychosocial and educational support from newly arrived community members, and is on track to cover these needs because of flexible funding from RRLI. They are also providing know-your-rights sessions and individualized assistance to ensure the protection of community members from deportation, detention, and other rights violations. Such agile responses are critical in ensuring services during times of crisis.

RLOs Providing Comprehensive Support During Emergencies: A StARS Case Study

Five siblings from Sudan between the ages of 5 and 17 were living with their grandmother in Khartoum, as their mother escaped Sudan to seek asylum in the UK in 2019. Tragically, the children witnessed their grandmother being killed by bombardment after the conflict erupted in Sudan in April 2023. As the conflict intensified and they lost all their support, especially their primary caretaker, the siblings were forced to flee from Sudan without documentation. Upon their arrival in Egypt, a woman from the community hosted them for a couple of days, but due to the economic difficulties in Egypt, she could not care for them in the long run and took them to the UNHCR office. UNHCR referred the siblings to StARS to support them as the children did not have a place to stay.

When the children approached StARS, they looked exhausted and traumatized and struggled to cope with the new environment. In light of their heightened vulnerabilities, the Unaccompanied Children and Youth Department provided emergency housing through a host from the StARS Community Hosting Program to provide them with a safe shelter and a nurturing environment. A psychosocial case-worker was assigned immediately to follow up on the children's emotional and physical well-being. The children were given clothes, emergency food, hygiene boxes, and cash assistance to cover their basic needs.

After a few weeks of staying with the community host, StARS established contact with the children's mother in the

United Kingdom. After reconnecting with her children, the mother found a friend to host her children on a longer-term basis. In the meantime, the children were provided with a mobile phone for better communication, and their caseworker continued to monitor their situation and provide them with ongoing emotional support. In addition, the children receive ongoing support from the StARS Refugee Legal Aid Program to ensure their application for family reunification to join their mother in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, the siblings are now more stable than before. Through StARS' case management services for unaccompanied and separated children, they receive support in terms of access to education, legal counseling, and psychosocial services.

Key Highlights

New Vision

- Established a school in Cairo, enabling **47 displaced children** aged three to seven to access education

Tafawol Association for Special Needs and Development

- Opened the **first-of-its-kind physical therapy clinic** for migrant children with disabilities
- Provided legal services for **2,300 community members**

Tawasul Community School

- Provided education to **1,620 children**
- Aided **3,000 families** through vocational training and adult education

St. Andrew's Refugee Services

- Holistic support to over **32,000 people and 53,000 dependents**, including legal aid, psychosocial support and education



Above: A young pupil smiles on her first day at school at Care for the Displaced Children.

indonesia

Refugees have no legal right to work, study, find housing, or simply build a life for themselves in Indonesia. The lack of legal protection and accessible services has devastating consequences for refugees, including a high risk of poverty, mental health disorders, detention, and inability to meet basic nutrition, sanitation, health, and housing needs. To meet the critical needs of refugees and fill service gaps, RRLI's refugee-led partners in Indonesia—Care the Displaced Children (CDC), Help for Refugees (HELP), and Refugee Learning Center (RLC)—as well as RRLI Coalition Member, Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Centre (RAIC), are providing a broad spectrum of support, including education, health services, food security, legal and resettlement aid, community development, women's groups, and livelihood training.

Critical education provision

CDC, HELP, and RLC are offering educational programming for hundreds of students who may not have had education in their home countries due to conflict and also are not permitted to attend local schools in Indonesia. CDC runs programming for young children (ages 4-7), vital for early childhood development. HELP and RLC also offer education with globally recognized certifications. Through these certifications, they

are preparing children for long-term integration if they are resettled or opening up further opportunities for them to be able to work or study in another country, often the only sustainable and long-term solutions for refugees living in Indonesia.

Livelihoods and resettlement

While many interventions for refugees in Indonesia focus on humanitarian aid due to the difficult legal context, RLOs are helping community members provide livelihood support while uncovering long-term solutions for a small number of community members. Beyond the educational initiatives outlined above, RAIC supported 19 refugees to navigate the private sponsorship application process to Canada, a vital service as many cannot access UNHCR's resettlement process. They also provided information on such processes to thousands more people. RLC's skill-building initiative has also enabled graduates to find work or start their own business selling crafts, allowing them to support themselves and their families in a context where most refugees are unable to find jobs.

“The program’s emphasis on empathy and understanding has fostered a sense of community among participants, creating an environment conducive to personal growth and healing. Thank you once again for offering such a valuable and transformative program. Your commitment to mental health is truly commendable, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the Cope community.”

An Afghan refugee who participated in RAIC’s Cope Mental Health Program

Community-building for physical and psychological safety

RAIC opened their first-ever physical space where community members gather and facilitate peer-to-peer mental health support. Participants improve their own mental health and learn to train others, a life-saving service considering the high rate of suicide and mental health disorders among community members. All partners create a community for leaders and participants to have a sense of purpose and belonging, vital in a country where refugees cannot access education, livelihoods, or legal status. For example, RLC noted that their students, who have often been in Indonesia for almost a decade, become active in the community post-graduation and use their skills to support their families and the community. HELP’s investment in refugee teachers’ skills has also created a space where these community members feel supported and empowered.

The Power of Holistic and Community-Led Programs: A RAIC Case Study

A young Afghan refugee and his wife were living with their two small children in a dilapidated and abandoned compound outside Jakarta. Without the right to work or earn an income, the family was searching for ways to survive and support their young family. Paying rent for a safe and clean place to live was not an option — the little money they received from another local organization could barely cover the cost of food. Their situation turned more complicated when they were expecting another child, as what should have been a time of celebration instead brought increased anxiety for two young parents overwhelmed by the stress of providing for their family while displaced.

After being turned away by other organizations, the couple knew that the best option to find a solution for their situation is to look within their community for support. RAIC’s staff are known and trusted members of Indonesia’s refugee community, allowing them to reach families who have fallen through the gaps of other services. When they approached RAIC, the team leveraged their contacts to negotiate an affordable, long-term rental and volunteers helped

to renovate and furnish the space. The family was prioritized for monthly food and hygiene packages, as well as a child support stipend from an individual donor in RAIC’s network. They sourced donated children’s goods, including special items for their newborn child, not only providing material aid to meet the family’s immediate needs but also welcoming them into a community to support them through parenthood and displacement.

This story highlights the power of holistic and community-led programs. RAIC’s goal is not to rescue a person from their situation – instead, they aim to create an environment where refugees can make their own decisions and find their own solutions. For this couple, this looked like creating a small sanctuary in Jakarta to welcome their newest addition to the family. With the peace of mind knowing their three children will be supported to grow in relative safety, the couple can now find the energy to explore options for resettlement with the RAIC community by their side.

Key Highlights

Care for the Displaced Children

- Offered kindergarten and primary school programming for **80+ children** free of charge

Help for Refugees

- Provided education to **134 students** aged 5 to 55 years from ten different countries

Refugee Learning Center

- Supported **480 refugees** with education, vocational training, recreational activities and emergency assistance

Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Centre

- Established the Cope Community Centre, a **first-of-its-kind mental health center** for community members



Above: "No one has ever asked us what WE dream of." Worrod, a participant in Makani's Dream Project, which supports refugee women with their professional ambitions.

Opposite: refugee women running a dairy business supported by Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Shabake project.

Lebanon

Lebanon currently hosts 1.5 million Syrian refugees while grappling with various challenges, including political stagnation, the aftermath of the 2020 Beirut explosion, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, economic deterioration, and currency devaluation. Consequently, many displaced households are living in extreme poverty, unable to access sustainable employment and meet basic necessities such as food, healthcare, and shelter. Amidst this reality, RRLI's refugee-led partners in Lebanon—Ettijahat and Makani—and RRLI Coalition Member, Basmeh & Zeitooneh, are leveraging arts and cultural activities to advocate for human rights and providing a space for mutual support and trauma recovery; supporting refugees with building livelihoods through education, training and start-up capital to establish businesses; and providing critical services and programs in the areas of legal aid, education and psychosocial support.

Wraparound service provision for solutions

While humanitarian funding often comes with thematic restrictions, RRLI's grantee partners provide holistic services that enable community members to integrate into their new surroundings. Ettijahat's programming enables artists to receive training and scholarships, connections to potential employers, legal assistance, humanitarian assistance, and

direct production support for their work. B&Z provides legal assistance, psychosocial support, and investments in small and micro enterprises, among other services. These types of support provided by RLOs allow refugees to improve their mental health, pursue livelihoods, improve their living conditions, and also obtain security by acquiring legal status, all of which are essential in providing stability and ensuring long-term integration.

Health, healing, and livelihoods through arts

Makani's Oshana program provides a creative outlet for trauma and a dignified income through the creation and sale of embroidery and crochet, while another program provides drama therapy for other program participants needing additional psychosocial support. One Oshana program participant came to the program after suffering extensive injuries during the Beirut port explosion. She was able to process her trauma and gain a source of income through her participation in the program. Ettijahat's holistic programming, which enables artists to receive training and scholarships, legal and humanitarian assistance, and direct production support for artists, is vital in preserving culture, rebuilding individual and community identity, and ensuring refugee artists can support themselves through their work.

"I have three children. I got injured during the port explosion in Beirut. I was rushed to the hospital with internal brain bleeding and many other broken ribs and bones. I lost my memory and lost my ability to speak. I couldn't recognise my children or any of the people around me for four months. After that I started to regain my memory bit by bit. I got involved with Makani and started crocheting. When I go to the center I feel like I am going home to a place that belongs to me. I got so much better mentally, I changed and I started to be more positive and a better person for my children. The work makes me feel that I belong somewhere. I met other women, I made money, I feel I am creating a better future. When I go there I feel that I am actually living."

Participant of Makani's Oshana program

Building refugee-led civil society

Last year, Basmeh and Zeitooneh provided technical support to 39 RLOs and \$320,000 in financial support for 17 of them. Through this support, RLOs were connected with one another as part of a multifaceted peer-to-peer learning journey touching on MEAL, finance, protection, fundraising, and more. Ettijahat provided operational support and networking opportunities to six organizations. These organizations are now more able to access funding and scale and sustain their services, strengthening the refugee leadership movement and demonstrating the collaborative nature of RLO communities.

Key Highlights

Ettijahat - Independent Culture

- Supported 300+ community members through professional training, scholarships, legal aid, and production support to Syrian refugee artists

Makani

- Supported 40 refugee women with a dignified income and a creative outlet for trauma through embroidery and crochet
- Ran theater therapy workshops for 34 women

Basmeh & Zeitooneh

- Supported over 480,000 people by providing legal assistance, non-formal education, psychosocial services, and small and micro-enterprise investments
- Provided 39 RLOs with technical training





Above: Refugee-led organizations celebrating World Refugee Day in Uganda. Photo by YARID.

Opposite: An agroecology and business student receives her course completion certificate. Photo by Tomorrow Vijana.

uganda

Though Uganda is known as a welcoming country for refugees, refugees in Uganda face various barriers to accessing essential services. The arrival of refugees from neighboring conflict zones has strained existing resources, while inflation and increasing poverty rates have exacerbated economic vulnerabilities. RRLI's refugee-led partners—Kandaakiat Organization for Women Empowerment and Development (KOWED) and Tomorrow Vijana—as well as RRLI Coalition Member, Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID), provide a wide range of support to refugees in Uganda, including education, employment skills training, livelihoods programming, support for entrepreneurs, and more.

Getting refugees into the labour market

RRLI partners are making a concrete impact in the lives of community members through job training programs. Tomorrow Vijana conducted a job readiness boot camp where 20% of graduates found employment soon after. YARID provided job training in English language acquisition, resume building, cover letter development and interview skills. One graduate was finally able to get a job at an international organization after many unsuccessful applications. He is now able to support himself and his mother, and pay for his sister's education.

Economic safety nets that challenge poverty

RRLI partners are ensuring the economic stability of communities. Both KOWED and YARID have invested in various village and saving loans associations (VSLAs). These associations provide financial services that refugees often cannot access, and also act as safety nets during emergencies, creating financial resiliency among the community. KOWED, YARID, and Tomorrow Vijana all provide skill building programming that have ensured that thousands of community members have additional skills to diversify their livelihoods and withstand changing circumstances.

Building community support networks

RRLI partners' impact goes beyond their direct programming. Tomorrow Vijana trained ten peer refugee-led organizations in topics ranging from financial literacy to resource mobilization, and has even helped five of them to legally register their organizations. YARID has been a leader in support for other RLOs, and expanded on this commitment by offering unrestricted seed funding to other organizations in their community. Both organizations are helping to create a vibrant refugee-led civil society that can attend to the needs of their communities. Support networks are also being built to

“The Job Readiness Bootcamp was instrumental in opening job opportunities for young people like myself. Despite completing my bachelor’s degree in the DRC, I struggled to find employment in Uganda. However, after acquiring the skills from the bootcamp, I applied for a job as an Inclusion Officer with Opportunity Bank through an online job posting shared by a Tomorrow Vijana officer in the bootcamp WhatsApp group. Four months after the training, I was successful in the interview process and secured the job. I am immensely grateful to Tomorrow Vijana for providing me with this valuable training and for the opportunity to enhance my employability skills.”

Participant in one of Tomorrow Vijana’s job readiness bootcamps

deliver specific, impactful programs. KOWED uses the trainers method to create more community capacity for skills sharing. For example, they supported two refugee women with training in clean, renewable energy and these women then trained over 50 other community members, who have reduced the usage of charcoal in their settlement.

Key Highlights

Kandaakiat Organization for Women Empowerment and Development

- Supported over 100 refugees with entrepreneurial, financial, and vocational trainings
- Established two village savings and loan associations
- Provided start-up capital for 12 women-led businesses

Tomorrow Vijana

- Established one of the first refugee-built and -owned community learning centers in Uganda
- Conducted a job readiness bootcamp for over 150 participants; 20% of graduates are now employed

Young African Refugees for Integral Development

- Supported over 9,300 refugees through vocational programs, technology training, job readiness support, and protection services
- Invested in five village saving and loan associations



Opposite: An English class at Refugee Learning Center, a participant in the Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program. Photo by Refugee Learning Center.

beyond funding

The Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program

While RRLI knows that funding is often the most critical catalyst for impact, we know more is needed if we want those investments to be protected over time. With this in mind, in 2022-2023, RRLI launched the Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program, a program designed to **enable grantee sustainability, influence, and efficacy** through localized support from one of our in-country Coalition Members (YARID, RAIC, Refugiados Unidos, StARS or Basmeh & Zeitoneh), as well as RRLI team members with different local and subject matter expertise.

RRLI worked closely with grantees to offer support in specific and requested ways. By following the lead of grantees, the Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program supported grantees to (1) expand services for displaced communities, (2) secure new funding relationships, and (3) engage in broader systems-level change. Coalition members, in turn, learned from grantees whose knowledge of certain skills and needs surpassed their own. This mutuality contrasts standard "capacity building" programs, which often deploy one-directional, boilerplate training. These relationships will continue into 2023-2024, supporting the development of effective and coordinated local RLO networks.

Improving and Expanding Services and Programs

The support of RRLI has been instrumental in improving and expanding services offered by RLOs. For example, training provided by StARS on teaching and classroom management to partners improved the engagement between students

and teachers, as well as the capacity of teachers to transfer knowledge to students effectively. Similarly, RAIC connected a partner to experts in refugee education for training and mentorship. This support improved the quality of education for displaced students, increasing the number of new learners enrolled in their educational programs. Four grantees were supported in developing M&E tools, allowing them to monitor, improve, and better communicate the impact of their programming.

Strengthening Organizational Sustainability

Mentorship provided by Coalition Members has been integral in strengthening the internal organizational systems of our RLO partners. 12 organizations were supported to develop the financial systems needed to effectively report on grants, as for some, RRLI funding was their first official grant. This support ensures they can comply with future grants. RLOs were also introduced to donors to obtain funding and ensure sustainability, and some introductions have already led to concrete funding partnerships. Many organizations noted that flexible funding ensured there was dedicated staff to execute projects successfully. This highlights the importance of funding alongside any capacity-building program.

Engaging in Systems-Level Change

To build and advance the refugee leadership movement, RLOs were supported in identifying, working with, and



maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with other stakeholders. For example, Refugiados Unidos trained a partner to better understand the legal issues facing refugees, and the two worked together to raise awareness about refugee issues in advocacy spaces. Through the Program, various partners were connected and integrated into other RLO and civil society networks in their respective contexts, allowing them to exchange knowledge, amplify advocacy agendas, and expand community-led programming. RRLI partners also support other RLOs with the skills they have learned, multiplying the program's impact. For example, one partner is using the fundraising skills acquired through the program to train 10 other RLO partners and expand refugee-led programs and services throughout communities.

RRLI Coalition Members also supported 96 RLOs outside the Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program by providing capacity-strengthening support in areas such as financial management, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, human resources, legal training, and proposal development. Coalition Members also supported RLOs by facilitating fund transfers and acting as a reference for grant applications. Through and beyond the Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program, RRLI is playing a leading role in facilitating mutual knowledge sharing and capacity-strengthening to ensure the long-term sustainability of RLOs in Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Uganda.

“The Strengthening RLOs Partnership Program has been extremely valuable for our organization. By collaborating with RLOs and local community members, we have gained valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities within the community, which have helped us improve our services. Through the program, we have also connected with experienced individuals and organizations in the field. This has allowed us to gain valuable expertise and address social and legal issues more effectively. The program has expanded our network of collaboration, enabling us to work with other organizations and activists in the community. This collaboration has strengthened our joint efforts to bring about positive change. Overall, our experience in the program has been positive and beneficial. It has provided us with valuable learning opportunities, enhanced our expertise, and facilitated impactful collaborations within the community.”

Refugee Learning Center

systemic change

In the past year, RRLI Coalition Members have played a key role in advocating for systemic change toward fostering refugee leadership and resourcing RLOs. This has been accomplished by unlocking funding for RLOs beyond the RLO-to-RLO Fund, engaging with and connecting RLOs with key stakeholders in the refugee response sector, influencing funding and policy priorities of key stakeholders, and ensuring refugee leadership is at the center of activities undertaken by governments, multilateral organizations, and foundations.

Last year, RRLI Coalition Members **unlocked \$3.4 million outside the RLO-to-RLO Fund for 80 refugee-led organizations in Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Uganda**. Basmeh and Zeitooneh, StARS, and YARID themselves provided funding to some of these RLOs as part of these unlocking efforts. RRLI representatives also engaged with 46 key stakeholders to highlight the importance of resourcing refugee-led organizations and fostering refugee leadership. They facilitated connections between 71 RLOs and governments, foundations, INGOs, UN agencies, and academic actors in the refugee response system.

The impact of these engagements has been critical in shifting power and resources to RLOs and changing mindsets about RLOs. Some notable examples include:

- Building on our [open letter](#) from 2022, RRLI engaged closely with UNHCR to influence their [definition of a refugee-led organization](#) to make it more inclusive, ensuring comprehensive access to policies and funding associated with this definition.
- RRLI successfully influenced a government donor to prioritize refugee leadership, resulting in a call for proposals focused on meaningful refugee participation.
- Refugiados Unidos highlighted the importance of funding RLOs and unlocked financial resources for a network of 15 RLOs in Colombia by one UN agency for the first time.
- Advocacy by StARS resulted in funding from a significant intermediary and a major INGO for RLOs in Egypt who are supporting refugees fleeing the escalation of the conflict in Sudan.
- Engagement led to a donor government selecting RLOs to work with in Colombia, as well as developing compulsory indicators on RLO participation in future funding applications.
- Efforts by StARS pushed a government donor to undertake accessible grantmaking by not requiring bank accounts or formal registration, as well as



Above: Lublanc Prieto (Refugiados Unidos, centre), Hane Alrustm (RRLI, left) and Mozghan Moarefizadeh (RAIC, right). Photo by RRLI.

prioritizing the participation of RLOs in their last funding call.

- Conversations between RRLI and a private foundation resulted in selecting RLOs as a majority for their first cohort of grantees on a project.

Other examples of our advocacy efforts include working collaboratively with the World Bank, the European Union, and various governments and civil society actors to advocate for increased funding to RLOs and meaningful participation of refugee leaders in funding and policy decisions. For example, RAIC collaborated with Canada's International Development Research Centre, Asylum Access Thailand, and Chula University to create paid roles for refugee community members participating in a research project. RRLI also successfully advocated for compensation for refugee leaders participating in a study on global funding levels to RLOs. Advocacy efforts of RRLI representatives have also led to policy changes and mindset shifts at the local level. For instance, Refugiados Unidos successfully enabled the participation of refugee leaders in conversations and working groups with government officials to influence policies affecting refugees and migrants themselves in Colombia.

RRLI continues to influence multiple philanthropic grantmaking initiatives. For example, RRLI representatives

continue to advocate for the resourcing of RLOs and meaningful refugee participation in funding flows as a steering committee member for the Collective for Refugee Leadership in MENA and as members of Porticus's Global Advisory Council for People on the Move, the Mayors Migration Council Global Cities Fund, GIZ's Women in Forced Displacement Action Network, and more.

In the past year, RRLI representatives continued to advocate for the resourcing of RLOs and the inclusion of forcibly displaced people in decision-making spaces by publishing pieces in [The New Humanitarian](#), [Humanitarian Practice Network](#), [Forced Migration Review](#), and the [Chronicle of Philanthropy](#); participating in events hosted by organizations such as the [Asian Venture Philanthropy Network](#), the [Mayors Migration Council](#) and the [Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs](#); and contributing to media coverage on forced displacement in outlets such as [VPItv](#) and [ZTN](#).

challenges and reflections

While the past year has been successful for RRLI, it has also been accompanied by key challenges and reflections for us as a coalition of refugee-led organizations.

Donor emphasis on thematic areas and countries limits impact: *How can we work together to lift restrictions for RLOs?*

Like any other institution, the work of RLOs is most likely to lead to the intended impacts and outcomes when it is flexible, long-term, and significantly sized. Because many RLOs have been operating with virtually no funding, RLOs may also need financing that supports the development of operational building blocks to responsibly and safely grow.

Funds should also be issued **without the emphasis on thematic areas** (e.g., education, protection, livelihoods). This can be a challenge given that donors often have thematic areas of focus that are set by decision-making bodies with bureaucratic decision-making processes. Encouraging RLOs to apply for funding in specific thematic areas may unintentionally hinder the innovation and impact of community-driven interventions; when RLOs receive funding to grow only one aspect of an intervention, the holistic nature of RLO work is harmed, potentially lessening its efficacy.

Unfortunately, RRLI has found that funding rarely operates this way. In 2023 and 2024, RRLI intends to work with

donors to lift these restrictions so that RLO's sustainability and influence can grow.

Lack of trauma-informed engagement with RLOs: *How can we create brave and effective spaces for engagement?*

Refugee leaders in RRLI's community rarely get the chance to participate in critical policy development moments, and when they do, they often lack support in understanding and navigating the industry-ingrained jargon, the complexity of dozens⁵ of intersecting global initiatives, and the prevalence of and preference for Euro-centric, White Dominant,⁶ or other culturally-dependent ways of working. This lack of clarity can pose a significant challenge for refugee leaders to effectively capitalize on political moments.

Furthermore, institutions of power (including governments, INGOs, UN agencies, and donors) do not engage with refugee community leaders in a trauma-informed manner, often leaving people feeling depleted or harmed. Although this harm is predictable and sometimes unintentional, it may cause refugee leaders to withdraw from engagement in these spaces altogether.

Because RRLI is often in a position to broker relationships, we are carefully considering how we can support institutions of power and RLOs alike to prepare for engagement in these shared spaces. This will include documented and distributed guidance on trauma-informed engagement, which we intend to release at the end of 2023.

⁵ A full list of initiatives and "groups of friends" related to the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees can be found on its website (<https://globalcompact-refugees.org/compact-action/initiatives>)

⁶ A useful resource on white dominant professional culture is published on the Cuyahoga Arts & Culture website (<https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf>).

Looking Forward

Our conviction in the role and importance of RLO investment has only grown since our inception. As our grantees continue to demonstrate extraordinary diligence in support of their communities, we are committed to advocating tirelessly for expanded support of their missions. Below, we highlight a few ways we will do this:

1. *Seek to unlock substantial, traditional humanitarian funding for RLOs.* To do so, RRLI is deeply engaged with governments overseeing substantial earmarked humanitarian resources. We welcome conversations with donor governments on how we might partner to ensure financing reaches high-impact RLOs safely.
2. *Support grantees to engage with decision makers directly:* For example, RRLI is facilitating access for its RLO grantees to the upcoming Global Refugee Forum by securing financing for their involvement, providing preparatory guidance via webinars, and facilitating a debrief and processing session at the GRF, specifically for RLOs.

3. *Launch a Community of Practice.* RRLI has collaborated with grantee partners to create a space for peer strengthening utilizing the diverse skills of the RRLI community.

4. *Grow our participatory grantmaking.* RRLI will continue to expand the participation of refugee leaders beyond our Coalition in influencing funding flows.

Through our interconnected fundraising, advocacy, community engagement, and evidence-generation efforts, we will continue to work toward amplifying and accelerating the refugee leadership movement in 2023-24 to ensure refugee leaders have the power, agency, and resources to support and empower their own communities in Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, Uganda, and beyond.

Partner with us!

The call for applications for the RLO-to-RLO Fund is announced on our website. If you are a refugee-led organization, we encourage you to learn more about our RLO-to-RLO Fund and consider applying if you are within our current geographic reach (Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Uganda). We are eager to learn more about your organization and the possibility of partnering with you! If you have any questions about our grantmaking process, please contact us at grants@refugeeslead.org.

Over the past year, we have received tremendous support for our initiative from our fellow RLOs, allied organizations, philanthropic donors, governmental and intergovernmental actors, and multilateral agencies. These partnerships are the backbone of RRLI's success, and we are continuously seeking new and impactful collaborations. If you would like to join us in this journey, we encourage you to reach out by sending us an e-mail to info@refugeeslead.org to start a conversation. Together, we can feed the success of the refugee leadership movement.





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