

REFUGEE SOLIDARITY NETWORK

Annual Report 2014



Syrian refugee in Istanbul

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“The Syria crisis has become the biggest humanitarian emergency of our era, yet the world is failing to meet the needs of refugees and the countries hosting them ...”

- *UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres*
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A Message from Our Executive Director

With this, RSN's first annual report, I'd like to take the opportunity to share with you the details of our accomplishments this past year, and our plans as we head into 2015. Our task is not easy, but we are confident that with your help we can help make a significant impact toward legal protection for thousands of refugees in Turkey, and do our part in what is an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe.



As of November 2014, roughly 1.6 million individuals are seeking international protection in Turkey. Violent conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan; political repression in Iran; and a lack of rule and law in Somalia, drives individuals and whole families to seek safety elsewhere. Many intend to reach Europe, only to find themselves at a crossroads.

In Turkey there are not enough resources to receive them. The Turkish government has spent millions of its own dollars to construct camps. They house only 221,000 people – entirely Syrian—not even 20% of the population in need. The rest must survive in urban areas across the country.

The international community has responded. Intergovernmental organizations have increased capacity and presence in various parts of the country, as have large international NGOs. They provide critical services, including food, water, shelter, cash assistance, and limited health services.

But none of these important operations focus on the provision of legal assistance or on using a legal approach to address systemic issues.

RSN was created to address this gap, on a few core principles. First, that asylum-seekers must have a legal status in order to achieve security and to access services. Legal status is not just a piece of paper or a document, it is the first step in acknowledging the host state's obligations to those seeking protection. Second, that resources exist among the local NGO community, with expertise in the Turkish and international laws governing this issue, and how to navigate and engage these systems for greater protection for refugees. I know this to be true, because I worked alongside and as part of Turkey's small but dedicated and impressive refugee rights community for a number of years. RSN is a way to support them.

At a time when funding for all facets of humanitarian response is hard to come by, RSN is the only U.S.-based organization focused exclusively on supporting refugee legal assistance NGOs in Turkey.

With your help and support, we're making great progress. Within months of receiving tax exempt status in December 2013, we were able to raise enough money to support our first staff position. We've maintained an internship program, continued to develop our institutional administrative capabilities, and applied for and secured a federal grant. This gives us the opportunity to grow our U.S.-based team and embark on an exciting new project in Turkey in the coming year. I hope you will keep reading to learn more, and thank you for your support.

With the utmost gratitude and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zaid Hydari'.

Zaid Hydari

Executive Director and Co-Founder

Pro-Bono Project

We have something special in the US legal field: a dedication and in fact competition within the profession to provide hundreds upon hundreds of hours of pro bono legal services to worthy causes each year.

RSN has begun to study this practice in detail, to understand the different models for how law firms and non-profit pro bono partnerships are structured and function for domestic asylum and broader immigration law cases. At the same time, we are working to understand the Turkish legal field in more detail, to be able to adapt best practices for the Turkish context.

RSN sees this an ongoing initiative that will involve a number of activities in the coming year. We're excited to continue our efforts at promoting a vibrant pro bono culture in Turkey for refugee legal assistance.

Fellowships

RSN continues to develop a fellowship program for US-based students, recent graduates, and other interested Americans to contribute to legal assistance operations in Turkey. In 2014, RSN provided assistance in identifying and selecting two fellows for placement with our Turkish partner. RSN provided pre-departure training so

that the fellows were well-suited for contribution upon arrival at our local partners offices.

RSN is expanding the joint fellowship program with local partner Refugee Rights Turkey, and hopes to provide support services and financial assistance for future fellows in addition to training and selection.

Cornell Law School International Human Rights Clinic

For the Spring semester 2014, Cornell Law School's International Human Rights Clinic assisted RSN with a major research initiative. Currently Turkey is reforming its asylum system with the implementation of new legislation, which includes among other elements new status determination procedures by the Turkish government. Cornell students analyzed a number of other countries that have recently experienced similar developments, and outlined common areas of concern during such transitions. The report focused on productive roles for NGOs and legal assistance providers in each setting, and was presented to Turkish NGO partners upon its completion. The report was well-received and partners commented that the experiences recounted in the report from Brazil, Cyprus, Bosnia, and Ecuador are instructive for the ongoing transition in Turkey.

A Message from Our Board Chair

Greetings from the RSN Board! I have been RSN's Board Chair since early 2014, and many new and exciting changes have occurred since then. Internally, the Board has become more active, with the establishment of three sub-committees in the areas of strategic planning, finance, and fundraising, which allow us to move more quickly on certain tasks and also distribute workload more evenly.

Our Board has also grown, with four new members, including myself. Matt Waltrip, our new Treasurer, has assisted with the design and initial implementation of a new accounting system. Laura Garr has joined the strategic planning committee and is assisting us with contracts, recordkeeping, and compliance. Kanishka Ramyar has also joined us to help with corporate fundraising. The Board has passed a budget, developed a payroll system, written and approved RSN's first Employee Handbook, and helped Zaid establish the formal hiring process that brought in our second staff member, Tanyel.

For me personally, it has been an honor to lead the Board through these transitions, and to help RSN grow. I know the potential this organization has for affecting positive change, and I am grateful to all the friends and supporters who have believed in our mission and provided their assistance.

Lauren E. Pérez



Facts and Figures

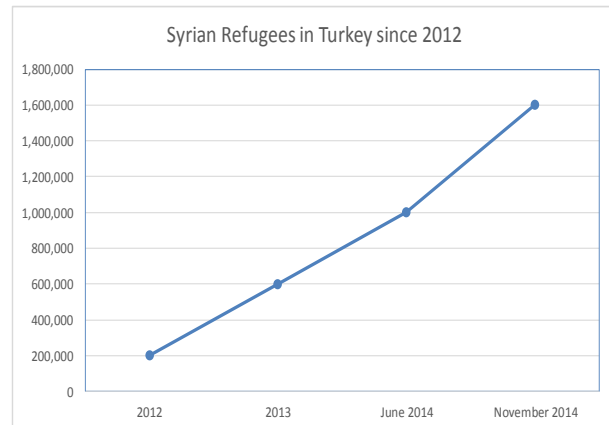
The number of people seeking protection in Turkey has risen exponentially over the last 10 years. In 2006, only 4,550 individual applications were made in Turkey. Very few Syrians were among them.

That number had already risen when the Syrian conflict began in 2011, due in part to stricter controls by the European Union in the Mediterranean and at land borders. By 2013, the numbers began to be alarming, as 44,800 non-Syrian nationals applied for protection in Turkey. Official 2014 figures are expected to be consistent with the pace of growth over the decade.

The Turkish government allows asylum-seekers access to Turkish territory “temporarily,” and does not offer long-term integration prospects for refugees. This means limited rights in Turkey, including a ban on work. Individuals recognized as refugees under international law must either wait for a safe opportunity to return to their homes (which almost never occurs), or a chance at resettlement to a third country.

While applications continue to increase, the number of resettlement (RST) places to third countries has not grown in proportion. Although countries across the world have recently pledged to take more in the coming years, this durable solution remains extremely rare.

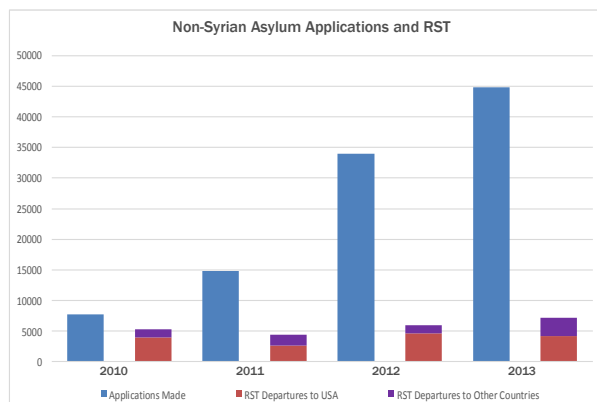
This reality underscores the importance of legal assistance for asylum seekers in Turkey. Since most will not be afforded the chance to relocate permanently, local NGOs and lawyers need support to ensure that this population is able to access basic rights and entitlements, and to advocate for better conditions in Turkey.



The Turkish government established a separate legal status for Syrian refugees, called Temporary Protection. This is a group designation that affords a slightly different set of rights and involves different legal procedures as compared to non-Syrian asylum-seekers.

The number of Syrians entering Turkey has dwarfed the non-Syrian population. For example, in just one month (Sept 18th 2014 – Oct 18th 2014), 190,233 Syrians crossed into Turkey.

Because of the different legal status, the stark contrast in numbers, and to ensure that none of these vulnerable groups are overlooked, RSN presents these statistics separately.



Looking Ahead: Establishing a New Program in Turkey

RSN is excited to announce that we are a first-time partner of the US State Department Bureau on Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). With PRM's financial support RSN will be establishing a Legal Center for Refugee Rights in Istanbul. The Center, to be launched in early 2015, will be run by our Turkish partner, Refugee Rights Turkey (RRT).

RRT staff will carry out a number of critical activities, including:

- Development and mass distribution of written “know-your-rights information for Syrian and non-Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees in Turkey
- Design and delivery of know-your-rights training in urban neighborhoods hosting large Syrian populations
- Provision of direct, no-cost legal assistance services
- Regular engagement with the Turkish government to share and understand challenges and solutions to managing such a large population in need
- Training sessions for Turkish lawyers from across the country on refugee law, to increase capacity and interest among the private bar



PRM is a primary source of humanitarian funding for refugee response worldwide, and our ability to secure their support demonstrates the critical nature of our mission. We are very excited to embark on this initiative and will keep you informed of the challenges and successes ahead.

Financials

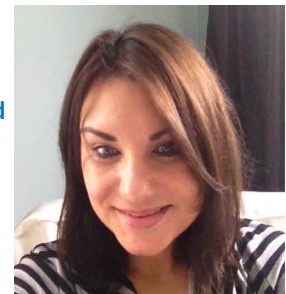
RSN's fiscal year matches with the federal fiscal year, and therefore ends in September. Having received tax-exempt status in December 2013, our first year was abbreviated.

Through the generous donations of our supporters, we raised \$37,445.00 in FY 2014. By the end of FY 2014, we expended \$6,046.79 in personnel costs, with the remainder of this unrestricted funding allocated for FY 2015 as follows: personnel (78%), insurance (4%), accounting (7%), marketing/fund-raising (7%), telecom/equipment (3%) and memberships to professional organizations (1%).

With the addition of PRM funding, we expect that final FY 2015 numbers will reflect an 80% allocation of overall budget dedicated to programming.

New team member

In addition to the Center, PRM's partnership provided RSN an opportunity to hire our second staff member, tasked with managing our federal funding and helping with further development. We are



thrilled to welcome Ms. Tanyel Taysi, who brings a wealth of experience with project design, management and technical implementation, civil society capacity development and monitoring & evaluation in the fields of human rights, gender and access to justice.

Internship

RSN has benefited greatly from the contribution of its first student interns in 2014. Eda Haksal (NYU '14) has served an extended term from the spring through to the present, and Ellen Rehnberg (Mount Holyoke '15), and Elin Matsumae (Kenyon College '15) joined us for the summer. The group contributed to RSN research on our pro bono project, helped research and develop organizational infrastructure, and assisted board and staff members with outreach, administration, and event planning.

Raising Awareness

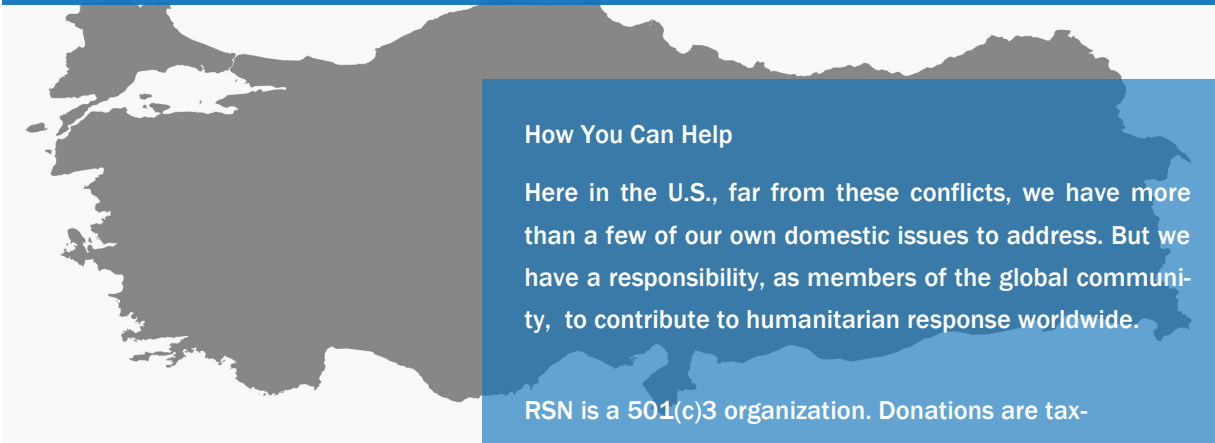
A critical part of RSN's mission is to raise awareness about the refugee experience in Turkey. Our website features a "Stories" page showcasing the human side of our work. The videos feature individuals who, in their own words, explain the kinds of hardships they faced in their home country and in Turkey, and demonstrate how legal assistance played a role in their journey.

Currently, our videos feature stories of refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq. They were made possible entirely by volunteers who lent time, video equipment, and editing capabilities. Special thanks to Sean Stewart and Monique Jaques for their contributions.



RSN is looking for opportunities to produce more media and to develop a comprehensive visual overview of the work we engage in, as well as new stories focusing on those who have fled Syria. We hope to raise funds for this in the coming year.

Turkey is now the 5th largest host country in the world for asylum-seekers and refugees



How You Can Help

Here in the U.S., far from these conflicts, we have more than a few of our own domestic issues to address. But we have a responsibility, as members of the global community, to contribute to humanitarian response worldwide.

RSN is a 501(c)3 organization. Donations are tax-deductible. You can make a contribution at:

www.refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/how-you-can-help

Or by mail to:

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Queens, NY 11104

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