



Across Borders

Grit, Love and Learning

December 2024

About Across Borders

[Across Borders](#) is a Comic Relief programme that has supported 19 civil society organisations and partnerships that are working to develop routes to safety for refugees and asylum seekers. Over 4 years, the cohort has worked in direct service delivery at a grassroots level, advocating for changes to policy and legislation, and aiming to shift the general public attitudes towards migration.

This cohort has worked together to transform lives since June 2020. During this period, information-sharing, innovative practices and enhanced collaboration put the Across Borders cohort at the cutting edge of refugee support.

About the report

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Introduction

This report brings to a close the story of 19 organisations and their partners, funded by [Comic Relief](#), who have overcome crisis after crisis with grit, love and learning to continue providing critical social and humanitarian programmes for people on the move.

The [Across Borders](#) cohort comprises civil society organisations from North Africa and Europe, and in this report, we look back at their work and learning since June 2020. Here, we uncover the challenges, approaches and successes of inspiring organisations that have responded with agility and determination in the face of unrelenting pressure.

In a context of widespread hostility towards refugees, emergent legislation that undermines basic rights, a dearth of funding and new conflicts displacing communities across the globe, the following pages continue the story of Across Borders into its fourth year.

In numbers

Combined Impact from the *Across Borders* cohort*

**Aggregated numbers from 19 organisations | June 2020 - November 2024*

154,369

People on the move

have benefitted from direct support through Across Borders activities and programmes

22,541

Children and youth

have directly benefitted from Across Borders activities

16,285

Frontline workers

have developed new competencies, as staff or volunteers through Across Borders



Part 1 Impactful Programmes

- 1) Building for sustainability
- 2) Facing down crisis
- 3) Strengthening impact and data
- 4) Working in partnership
- 5) Leveraging technology

Part 1 Impactful Programmes

Building for sustainability

Over the course of the Across Borders programme, many organisations have focused on building resilience for the future.

01

Prioritising co-ownership

Looking to the future from the very start, the European Network on Statelessness has ensured its tools and resources are co-owned by its members, ensuring a collaborative and more sustainable approach to update these in the future.

Meanwhile, Refugee Youth Service has transferred project ownership to their local partner ECPAT France, to establish the foundations for their work to continue beyond the lifetime of this grant in the belief that local ownership fosters a deeper connection to the community, making interventions more culturally relevant and effective.

02

Developing long-term strategies

Boaz Trust feel more resilient and that they are in a stronger place to continue their work after focusing over their multi-year funding on investing in their organisational structure, systems and processes. Similarly, IMIX has worked to embed all funded work into their core operations, ensuring the focus on lived experience inclusion funded through this grant continues into the future.

In Glasgow, Govan Community Project has been investing in building its capacity, recruiting community fundraising officers, business development support and developing social enterprises, such as VoiceOver.

Part 1 **Impactful Programmes**

Facing down crisis

In the face of successive crises, the Across Borders cohort has found ways to respond in agility and effectiveness.

01

Adapting under Covid-19

The first years of Across Borders were shaped by the global pandemic. Organisations rapidly adjusted. In North Africa, UNHCR's local partners IRAP and RefugePoint faced down challenges to their family reunification projects, not only adapting procedures but even doubling the number of individuals supported over 2 years.

02

Responding to new crises

The cohort has also pivoted to respond to crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine, coming together as a cohort to strategise and share intelligence in each instance. In Ukraine, for instance, the Fund for Global Human Rights' agile funding model was able to get rapid grants to local partners.

03

Taking measures to cope with the hostile environment

In the UK, the cohort has weathered increasing hostility over the past years. Refugee Action has had to place more emphasis on wellbeing practices after finding their additional advocacy work to fight the Illegal Migration Act affected staff wellbeing, especially that of Expert by Experience colleagues. Meanwhile, Refugee Youth Service's visits to Home Office hotels had to be suspended in August due to far-right protests.

In Egypt, local support by partner NGOs for education is facing increasing complications as government regulation forces community schools to close and refugees live in increasing fear of arrest and deportation, hampering school attendance.

Part 1 Impactful Programmes

Strengthening impact and data

Developing participatory and evidence-based impact measurement practices has been a key area of growth for many.

01

Developing participatory practices

Finding ways to engage service users in monitoring, evaluation and learning has helped build more effective services. In France, Refugee Youth Service's partner, ECPAT France, has implemented a feedback and participation model appropriate for working with children and young people in transit. It employs quick, one-week feedback cycles to improve the service offering.


In recent years, Safe Passage International has recruited Expert by Experience Consultants to take on active advisory roles in shaping the organisation's strategy, theory of change and day-to-day work, recently developing an Ethical Fundraising Policy and a Lived Experience Manifesto.

02

Evidence-based approaches

The length of this funding programme has also enabled organisations to gather rich data to help inform and evaluate the effectiveness of services. The Boaz Trust has improved its quantitative data collection to better understand and evidence their model of holistic accommodation support.

Stop the Traffik has leveraged data to learn from and improve its digital campaigning across Greece and Turkey to better inform young asylum-seekers at risk of trafficking, reaching over 60,000 vulnerable people with its campaigns.



“We are in the process of implementing a new Theory of Change **with experts by experience. This is helping us continue building a charity that **focuses on impact rather than activity.**”**

Safe Passage International

Part 1 Impactful Programmes

Working in partnership

Partnership development within the cohort and with the wider sector has been at the heart of Across Borders.

01

Collaborating for impact

Many of the cohort have succeeded thanks to effective partnership building. UNHCR worked in close partnership with Miles4Migrants and IRAP to advance their work on family reunification. Meanwhile, the Fund for Global Human Rights continued its partner support and movement-building beyond funding, for instance by providing tailored digital security training to members of the Border Violence Monitoring Network.

Partnerships have also flourished within the cohort. For instance, Good Chance Theatre partnered with Safe Passage International on the theatre piece From Here On to mark the 85th anniversary of the Kindertransport.

02

Working with local partners

In Egypt, an Across Borders partner has been focused on building a strong local network of community schools. In doing so, they are able to quickly mobilise and share information to protect the city's community schools. Meanwhile, Amna has developed a Community Partnership Model, representing a fundamental shift in how they operate sustainably to co-produce locally driven solutions with partners.

Local partnerships were also paramount to Good Chance Theatre's From Here On, to authentically represent history and lived experience on stage, ensure local casting, and attract majority local audiences - many of whom were completely new to theatre and art experiences of this nature.

Part 1 Impactful Programmes

Leveraging technology

Technological shifts - from rapid digitalisation under Covid-19 to the proliferation of AI - have all drastically changed how organisations work in just a few short years.

01

Reaching digital audiences

Technology has allowed organisations such as IMIX to get their message out in times of crisis. Their digital response to the war in Afghanistan helped solidify their digital leadership by spreading toolkits and information to activists and the sector.


Meanwhile, Refugee Action have experimented with collaborative use of Loom to co-produce and record multilingual resources to overcome language barriers. This project has allowed contributors across the UK to come together to ensure new legal guidance is available in multiple languages quickly.

02

Sharing information in real-time

Digitalisation of processes has also helped organisations work in rapid and responsive ways. European Lawyers in Lesvos use a hybrid of both in-person and remote service provision, specifically helpful as clients might move from the Greek islands to the mainland.

Choose Love have been leveraging the automations offered by softwares such as Airtable to get real-time insights into flows of grant-money and impact.



Learning from other partners has **helped
us reflect on the work we do in the UK
with people who have potentially
accessed those services, or similar, **on**
their journey to the UK.**

Boaz Trust



Part 2 Systems Change

- 1) Celebrating Advocacy Success
- 2) Coming together in-person
- 3) Engaging with the media
- 4) Getting the message out there

Part 2 **Systems Change**

Celebrating advocacy success

In the face of testing political shifts, the cohort has achieved some remarkable advocacy successes.

01

Engaging with governments

Despite a hostile government approach typified by the Illegal Migration Act and Safety of Rwanda Act, Safe Passage International successfully brought pressure to bear on the government to concede on the length of time children can be held in detention before they can apply for bail. In just one year, they mobilised 25,000+ supporters to take campaign actions such as writing to their MP or a peer and secured 327 pieces of positive media coverage.

In the UK, Medical Justice acted as a Core Participant to the Brook House public inquiry, providing pivotal evidence exposing the dysfunction of clinical safeguards in detention facilities.

02

Partnering in advocacy

European Lawyers in Lesvos have built partnerships on an EU level with the Council of Bar Associations and Law Societies of Europe, amongst others, to fight against the new EU Pact on Asylum and Migration.

Meanwhile, Stop the Traffik's AMAN Safety Project has recently trained 50 professionals from 18 financial institutions with the aim of disrupting the financial trafficking flows that make trafficking so dangerously profitable.

Through its funding of the Greek Forum for Migrants, Choose Love has helped refugees and migrants in Greece to engage directly with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

Part 2 **Systems Change**

Coming together in-person

In the wake of Covid-19, organisations have returned to in-person events with vigour, recognising their value in building meaningful connections.

01

Building networks for change

Across Lebanon and Jordan, Amna is organising week-long immersive training in-person to provide partners with hands-on learning experiences and practical tools to integrate trauma and identity-informed practices into their work effectively.

In 2023, the European Network on Statelessness hosted an extremely successful pan-regional conference in Madrid focused on how institutions in Europe can achieve a holistic response to statelessness. In Egypt, an Across Borders partner has hosted successful networking and collective advocacy events for community school leaders.

02

Engaging wider stakeholders

Many in the cohort have been establishing links with stakeholders in other domains. For instance, IMIX has held in-person gatherings for journalists, including holding an in-person Channel Crossings briefing which resulted in the publication of several articles.

In France, Refugee Youth Service's local partner has been organising a multi-stakeholder conference amongst police, justice departments, children's services and media to unite distant actors and build more trust.

Part 2 **Systems Change**

Engaging with the media

A key challenge for the cohort has been to confront media narratives around migration that are overwhelmingly negative.

01

Conveying concrete solutions

Confronted with a toxic debate on migration, the European Network on Statelessness has focused on presenting statelessness as a fixable problem, providing technical solutions and avoiding politicising language. Similarly, Safe Passage International has presented concrete alternatives to hostile policies, rooted in compassion and common-sense, such as their 2024 General Election Manifesto.

Medical Justice, meanwhile, over the course of just one year, managed to raise awareness about detention and its health implications through 66 mainstream media articles.

02

Focusing on positive stories

There has also been a shift to more positive story-telling. IMIX capitalised on momentum following the Ukraine invasion to mainstream the idea of safe routes and community sponsorship through positive, success stories.

Over the last years, Good Chance Theatre has also focused on positive story-telling, from the The Walk with Little Amal in 2021 to Fly With Me in 2022 and The Jungle returning to stages in 2023. These productions engaged hundreds of groups and tens of thousands of people all across Europe through creative and community-led events.

“Across 65 towns and 9 countries, Amal brought **100,000 people** together to celebrate the power of **welcome, art and shared humanity.**”

Good Chance Theatre

Photo credit: Andre Liohn



Part 2 **Systems Change**

Getting the message out there

In a world full of noise, the cohort has been testing ways to ensure outputs really have an impact.

01

Releasing reports, training and toolkits

Over the past years, several organisations have released reports, training and toolkits to the public and wider sector. These include Family for Every Child's 'Supporting Integration of children on the move' toolkit, IMIX's downloadable guides, Medical Justice's research reports and Refugee Youth Service's 'Journey with an Unaccompanied Minor' training series.

In the process, IMIX has found that alongside a report, it's always worthwhile to include accessible resources and to run engaging workshops that help users use them.

02

Ensuring accessibility in all languages

Working internationally, Family for Every Child has invested in making their practitioner guidance for supporting young people on the move available in 6 languages. Moreover, they've developed audio-visual materials to supplement the written-word and built a microsite to break down the toolkit into even more digestible chunks.

Stop the Traffik, meanwhile, has developed dedicated landing pages in Somali and Arabic - their target languages - and uses language-targeted ads to ensure critical information reaches users in their native tongue.



Part 3 Lived Experience

- 1) Shifting power to lived experience
- 3) Influencing led by lived experience
- 4) Funding refugee-led organisations

Part 3 Lived Experience Leadership

Shifting power to lived experience

Many organisations have been on a journey of creating more opportunities for those with lived experience to thrive in the workplace.

01

Transforming governance

A centrepiece of many organisations' work has been shifting power at the highest levels. One stateless changemaker has now become a staff member in the Secretariat of European Network on Statelessness and leads on community engagement work while 50% of their Advisory Committee has lived experience of statelessness.

The Helen Bamber Foundation has fostered survivor participation at all levels of the organisation, launching a Board Observers programme to engage with Trustees to bring knowledge and expertise and has improved decision-making around service development, recruitment and organisational strategy.

02

Creating opportunities for career progression

In the arts, Good Chance Theatre has been supporting young professionals to get into the theatre and film sector through their Stage Door programme, helping young people from refugee backgrounds to gain paid, part-time, flexible work experience in their offices, on film sets and West End theatres in Central London.

In Greece, the promotion of the Velos Youth Project Manager to the role of Director and CEO has been a thoroughly successful process bringing authentic leadership to the forefront.



“A highlight has been the promotion of the Velos Youth Project Manager, who began **as a volunteer** in 2017, to the role of Director and CEO. This individual’s journey, **grounded in lived experience** of forced displacement, exemplifies our commitment to empowering those we serve and bringing **authentic leadership** to the forefront.”

**Refugee Youth Service /
Velos Youth**

Photo credit: Comic Relief

Part 3 Lived Experience Leadership

Influencing led by lived experience

Organisations have also developed more inclusive and effective advocacy strategies led by those with lived experience.

01

Centring experts by experience

Refugee Action worked closely with Experts by Experience in their advocacy against poor asylum accommodation. Similarly, the Boaz Trust has centred the voices of people who have become homeless in their short film A Place to Call Home.

At Safe Passage International, the award-winning 'Young Leaders' advocacy programme has centred individuals with lived experience in advocacy work for improved routes to safety to the UK.

In July 2024, the Across Borders cohort also co-produced an event to celebrate lived experience leadership and share good practices, working collectively to influence the wider sector around shifting power.

02

Making the case in the right way

IMIX have shown that stories of lived experience are more persuasive than traditional moralising messages used by campaigners. As such, their focus has been to centre lived experience voices wherever possible. To a similar end, the European Network on Statelessness has developed a Community Speaker Policy to help ensure that people with lived experience are fairly and appropriately engaged as spokespeople by organisations.

In the arts, Counterpoints Arts' film and TV consultancy programme has recently taken on 4 projects, connecting people with lived experience to creative productions in need of advice and professional services.

Part 3 Lived Experience Leadership

Funding refugee-led organisations

On a funding level, there has been a marked shift to channel funds to refugee and migrant-led organisations.

01

Resourcing refugee-led organisations

Choose Love has been partnering with and funding remarkable refugee-led organisations in Lebanon, Greece, Afghanistan and across the world. In Greece, they've funded the core costs with a focus on story-telling and advocacy while in Lebanon they're mobilising a network of funders to strengthen the refugee-led ecosystem in the region.

More recently, Comic Relief has worked with Refugee Action to develop a Fund Reference Group made up of people with lived experience of the UK asylum system. The group helped design and make decisions on a new round of funding for the migration sector.

02

Funding local

In its own grant-making, the Fund for Global Human Rights has found that fast and flexible funding is critical, particularly in emergencies such as the devastating earthquake in Morocco in 2023, where many of their sub-grantees could respond immediately with pre-established trust and presence.

03

Providing more than just money

Over and above money, Choose Love recognises the value of sharing resources and expertise beyond grant-making, meeting rising requests for organisational development support as funds shrink and contexts worsen.

“Funders **big and small**
must come together to
re-think the flows of
money.”

Choose Love





Part 4 Learning Together

- 1) The Across Borders Learning Programme
- 2) Embracing creative approaches
- 3) Creating connections
- 4) Taking time to learn

Part 4 **Learning Together**

The Across Borders Learning Programme

A community of practice focused on innovation, inspiration and transformative impact for 5 years.

01

Value beyond money

The cohort has engaged in 25+ informative, creative and participatory webinars and workshops, an in-person Summit in Athens, hosted 3 public events in London, released a 6-part podcast series, the Re-Rooted exhibition, developed shared resources as well as a number of learning reports.

The Across Borders Learning Programme has also brought real value beyond money, with partners establishing new partnerships, gaining new skills and knowledge and being able to reflect personally, organisationally and on a sector-wide level on their work.

02

Getting together in person

One of the collective highlights of the Learning Programme was the in-person convening of the cohort in Athens in November 2023. Over 3 days, the cohort came together to share learning and develop strategies for a more refugee-led sector by 2030. For many, this Summit was the most memorable part of the Learning Programme. A recipe for successfully convening such events has also been published.

Following the Summit, the cohort continued to work together to share good practice stories and insights to promote lived experience leadership. This culminated in the Lived Experience Leadership event in July 2024.

Part 4 **Learning Together**

Embracing creative approaches

Creative approaches to facilitation and collaboration have been a key condition for success since 2020.

01

Podcasts and exhibitions

In 2022, the cohort worked with Jaz O'Hara from The Worldwide Tribe to co-produce Season 6 of The Asylum Speakers Podcast. The 6-part series takes the listener on a journey all the way from Egypt to England. Along the way, listeners meet many Across Borders organisations and hear from asylum seekers and refugees who are themselves on this long and difficult route to safety.

In 2023, Comic Relief worked with film-maker Hassan Akkad as co-producer and Amir Mahdavi as lead photographer on a creative project that tells seven incredible stories from asylum seekers and refugees who have rebuilt their lives in the UK, released as Re-Rooted: stories of starting again.

02

Creative facilitation style

Over the years, the cohort has come together to participate in over 25 learning webinars and workshops. Many of these have been designed with highly participatory facilitation styles, often inspired by the Liberating Structures formats.

Some of the most effective formats to create community and share learning in large online calls have been the User Experience Fishbowl, 1-2-4-all and the World Cafe.

“The most memorable part of the Learning Programme was the engaging and interactive sessions that made the content come to life.”

Mustafa, Velos Youth

Part 4 **Learning Together**

Creating connections

From Day 1, the Learning Programme has focused on creating connections between the Across Borders cohort, as well as with the wider sector.

01

Transformative collaboration

Creating change through partnership across borders was at the core of the programme. For Choose Love, this journey prompted them to reflect on their own meaningful engagement with partners. Boaz Trust has learnt how best they can contribute to networks and consortia. Similarly, for European Lawyers in Lesvos, the cohort has provided the space to engage on cross-cutting issues and has facilitated contact with other organisations operating in Greece and across Europe.

Meanwhile, Counterpoints Arts' role in facilitating Refugee Week has helped mobilise the whole cohort, supporting events such as the Re-Rooted exhibition launch.

“Meeting other people and organisations working in the same field has not only been inspiring but really helpful. We’ve been able to share ideas, get advice, and even look at potential collaborations to strengthen our work.”

European Network on Statelessness

“We've found connecting to and dreaming with the cohort such an enriching and invaluable experience.”

Hannah, Good Chance Theatre



**“This learning programme was a bit of a
revelation - I hadn't seen one in action to
this level before.”**

Family for Every Child

Part 4 **Learning Together**

Taking the time to learn

The Learning Programme has created a space to pause, reflect and share within a cohort of like-minded yet internationally diverse organisations.

01

Seeing the bigger picture

Being part of an international cohort has helped many organisations put their work in perspective and gain insights from other contexts. Over the years, we've organised webinars designed to share local knowledge from Greece, North Africa, the Balkans and the United Kingdom.

“[We’ve] connected with others and got an understanding of how our work fits into the grander scheme of things!”

Family for Every Child

02

Learning on all levels

The Learning Programme was also designed to foster learning on all levels: for individuals, organisations and between organisations. Individuals have reported a boost to their confidence, connections and skills.

Organisations have taken the time to reflect on their own learning journeys as well as to share this with each other.

“On a personal level, it’s been a great confidence boost.”

European Network on Statelessness

Part 5 **In Review**

Highlights from Across Borders



The Athens Summit
for refugee-led movement!

[Read more here](#)



Re-Rooted Exhibition
with Hassan Akkad

[View here](#)



Lived Experience Leadership
Good Practice Stories & Videos

[View here](#)



The Asylum Speakers Podcast
with The Worldwide Tribe

[Listen here](#)



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