



# Across Borders

## Responding with conviction

**Insights from Years 2 & 3**

*September 2023*

# About Across Borders

[Across Borders](#) is a Comic Relief programme supporting 19 civil society organisations and partnerships that are working to develop routes to safety for refugees. Over 5 years, the cohort is working 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 been transforming lives together since May 2020 and is set to continue its work together for two more years. During this period, information-sharing, innovative practices and enhanced collaboration puts the [Across Borders cohort](#) at the cutting edge of the modern day refugee response.

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## About the report

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Map (right): project activities of the Across Borders cohort

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# Introduction

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

The [Across Borders cohort](#) comprises civil society organisations from North Africa, Europe and the Middle East, and in this report, we look back at their work and learning over the past 2 years. 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 hardline political shifts, emergent humanitarian crises and social hardship felt by all, the following pages draw on reports from each organisation after their second and third years of work in this cohort.

Get ready to be inspired.

# In numbers

Impact from Years 2 and 3 of the *Across Borders* cohort\*

*\*Aggregated numbers from 19 organisations*

**62,235**

People on the move

have benefitted from direct support through *Across Borders* activities and programmes

*74,153 total since 2020.*

**12,993**

Children and youth

have directly benefitted from *Across Borders* activities

*18,453 total since 2020.*

**14,211**

Frontline workers

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

*15,633 total since 2020.*



# Part 1 Crisis response

- 1) Facing challenges at home
- 2) Responding to crises abroad



## Part 1 **Crisis response**

# Facing challenges at home

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*Political developments in many of the home countries where organisations work continue to put considerable pressure on charities.*

## 01

### Opposing the hostile environment

In the UK, many organisations have invested resources in opposing the Nationality and Borders Act and the Rwanda asylum plan. Resisting policies that create a hostile environment have taken up more resources.

At the same time, as [IMIX](#) notes, 'It has also given opportunity to support organisations and the media to change the narrative as well as to develop and test situation-specific messaging. It has enabled us to push the voices of those with lived experience firmly into the spotlight.'

## 02

### Leaving no one behind

Across Europe, inflation and the cost of living crisis has made it increasingly important to ensure no one is left behind.

As the [European Network on Statelessness](#) (ENS) reports, 'As the economic outlook across Europe has worsened, it is increasingly challenging to ensure minority groups are neither scapegoated nor forgotten.' As part of its efforts to ensure stateless persons' rights are upheld, ENS hosted [a major conference](#) in June 2023 in Madrid to develop alliances and build momentum all across Europe.

**“The external environment with negative media coverage, government policy and increased action from the far right has been the biggest challenge for our work under this funding.”**

IMIX



## Part 1 Crisis response

# Responding to crises abroad

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*Over the past two years, wars in Afghanistan and Ukraine have put more demands on refugee communities and the charities that support them.*

## 01

### The fall of Kabul

In 2021, the fall of Kabul and Taliban take-over of Afghanistan changed the landscape of refugee integration in the UK. [Safe Passage](#) mobilised immediately and partnered with lawyers to create their 'Afghan Pro-Bono Initiative', offering advice and referrals for hundreds of Afghans.

Meanwhile, in an effort to boost solidarity and support for displaced Afghans, [Good Chance Theatre](#) launched '[Fly With Me](#)', an international kite-flying festival. Through 47 kite-flying events, led by local Afghan artists and producers, they reached 7,500 people in person and 300 million people digitally via 700+ positive news stories while employing 50 Afghan artists in the process.

## 02

### War in Ukraine

Many organisations responded agilely to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. In the weeks leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, [IMIX](#) prepared for the possibility of an influx of refugees, so that by the time the invasion itself happened, they were already in contact with Ukrainian diaspora groups.

Meanwhile, [Amna](#) offered dedicated training to local community groups in trauma-informed psychosocial support, and [Choose Love](#) quickly developed a portfolio and funded grassroots groups working in the area.





**"To mark one year on from the fall of Kabul in Afghanistan we created **a giant Afghan kite flying festival** across Europe and UK, employing 50 Afghans, reaching 7500 people in person and 300 million people digitally **with messages of hope and direct action.**"**

**Good Chance Theatre**

*Photo credit: Good Chance Theatre*





# Part 2 Learning Organisations

- 1) Improving service offerings
- 2) Reaching more people
- 3) Offering more holistic services

## Part 2 Learning Organisations

# Improving service offerings

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*The last two years have seen many organisations meet growing demand for services through new programmes and programme adaptation.*

## 01

### Expanding programmes

As the needs change and shift over time, many organisations continue to launch new services to meet emerging needs. For instance, [Velos Youth](#) have now started offering English classes in Athens, finding it has a 80% higher uptake rate than Greek, due to students struggling with the generally more advanced Greek classes. Also in Greece, [European Lawyers in Lesvos](#) have opened new offices, now covering four locations.

[Counterpoints Arts](#), meanwhile, has continued to grow the reach of Refugee Week - this year internationally - supporting over 100 events in Greece and a week-long programme of events in Germany.

## 02

### Small changes for impact

As the NGOs iterate on their programmes, many are finding impactful ways to tweak and improve service design. [Amna](#) has recognised the importance of providing a certificate to its training participants as recognition of continued professional development in trauma, particularly valuable to those with refugee backgrounds looking to work in the refugee sector.

[Refugee Action](#), by increasing Experts by Experience (EbE) engagement on an organisational level, have been better able to identify and respond to EbE support needs through capacity building and skills development so that existing and new EbEs can actively engage in their [Asylum Guides](#) programme.

**"The young people we support are generally in need of quick results in their education for work and integration purposes."**

**Refugee Youth Service**

## Part 2 Learning Organisations

# Reaching more people

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*Through technology and inclusive practice, Across Borders organisations are reaching more people, more equitably, than ever.*

## 01

### The role of technology

Driven initially by the pandemic, many organisations are continuing to develop their online offerings in order to reach hard-to-access communities in hotels in the UK or remote camps in Greece. [Velos Youth](#) is in the process of developing new activities for unaccompanied children who live in closed reception centres or far away from Athens.

[Govan Community Project](#) is continuing to offer classes online, finding that it boosts attendance due to reduced transportation time. Meanwhile, [European Lawyers in Lesvos](#) are continuing to use technology to achieve efficient case management.

## 02

### Efforts towards inclusivity

Organisations have made efforts to address barriers to inclusivity. At [IMIX](#), forging partnerships with LGBTQIA+ organisations - such as [Micro Rainbow](#) - has helped introduce new people to their work, building stronger relationships that they hope will lead to some joining their Experts by Experience network. IMIX have also managed to reach more women by moving their training sessions online.

Other organisations, such as [Govan Community Project](#), are addressing the fact that some of their sessions are gender split, which may not always be inclusive for members of the LGBTQIA+ community.



## Part 2 **Learning Organisations**

# Offering more holistic services

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*There is marked shift in recent years towards organisations providing more holistic and individual support to their beneficiaries and sub-grantees.*

## 01

### Going above and beyond

Many organisations are now offering more holistic support to their service users. [European Lawyers in Lesvos](#) have shifted to supporting clients with the administrative aspects of the legal process too. They note, 'Our work had previously focused solely on supporting people with their substantive case, but we realised that assistance in navigating the legal procedure is also crucial.'

[Boaz Trust](#) have offered 'Floating Support' to 85 individuals, involving specialist one-to-one support tailored to their needs.

## 02

### More than just funding

[Choose Love](#), as it works with its funded partners, is doing more to support with their sub-grantees' organisational development and advocacy efforts. As they report, "By helping our partners consider these [broader] aspects, we can broaden their audiences, diversify their funding sources and ultimately increase their reach. This, in turn, contributes to a more cohesive and coordinated response within the broader sector."





**"We responded to the **Taliban takeover of Afghanistan** by partnering with lawyers to offer advice and referrals to the **hundreds of Afghan people** who had contacted us."**

**Safe Passage**

*Photo credit: Getty Images*





# Part 3 Leading the sector

- 1) Toolkits and training
- 2) Building stronger partnerships
- 3) Affecting policy change

### Part 3 **Leading the sector**

# Toolkits and training

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*Three years into the programme and many organisations are now producing robust toolkits and training to support the sector.*

## 01

### Working with trauma

The [Helen Bamber Foundation](#) published their trauma-informed [Code of Conduct](#) in 2022, which has now been adopted by professionals working in health, care and police, helping many to work better with survivors of human trafficking and slavery. [Amna](#), meanwhile, has been developing training and story-telling tools, such as their [SADA](#) platform, to ensure the importance of localised, trauma and identity-informed care is fully understood.

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## 02

### Multilingual resources

[Refugee Action](#), as part of the Navigating Asylum Partnership project have developed [multilingual videos and resources](#) to better reach and support asylum seeking communities across the UK.

## 03

### Supporting child refugees

[Family for Every Child](#) has co-created their 'Supporting Integration of Child Migrants Toolkit' (soon to be released), testing it in numerous countries and involved substantial user feedback through workshops with European practitioners and from experts with lived experience.

Meanwhile, [Safe Passage](#) has delivered training to over 300 practitioners to better support children to reunite with family in the UK and [Refugee Youth Service](#), have developed their [Journey with an Unaccompanied Child](#) capacity-building training for professionals, practitioners and communities supporting unaccompanied children in the UK, and have trained over 500 people who collectively support over 1200 children.

### Part 3 **Leading the sector**

# Building stronger partnerships

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*The cohort continues to demonstrate that, through partnership, social impact goes from strength to strength.*

## 01

### Investing in partnerships

[Stop the Traffik](#) has managed to establish stronger partnerships across Turkey to reach audiences with its awareness raising campaigns across the country. This builds on their previous track record of ingenious partnership work, as seen in their [Power of 10 Data Sharing Initiative](#) in Greece, a way of engaging organisations to increase information sharing and better identify victims of trafficking.

In Egypt, [St Andrew's Refugee Services](#) has strengthened the Education Working Group partnership by securing the participation of 15 community-based organisations, a previously unrepresented stakeholder group.

## 02

### Funding through networks

The [Fund for Global Human Rights](#) has continued its resourcing of grassroots groups through flexible grants. By working in partnership, they've been able to effectively support emerging crises, including in Ukraine and in the aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

Similarly, [Choose Love](#) have continued to form new partnerships, especially with refugee-led organisations in crisis regions. In Egypt, [St Andrew's Refugee Services](#) continues its model of partnership with local non-formal education projects across Cairo, resourcing a wide network of refugee-led initiatives.

### Part 3 **Leading the sector**

# Affecting policy change

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*Amid political change, the Across Borders cohort has fought hard to achieve positive policy change to protect migrant rights.*

## 01

### The EU Pact on Migration

In Brussels, [European Network on Statelessness](#) has successfully advocated for statelessness to be addressed in negotiations on the EU's new Pact on Migration and Asylum

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## 02

### Nationality and Borders Bill

In the UK, [Refugee Action](#) have campaigned relentlessly against the Nationality and Borders Act, leading the collective campaign 'Scrap the #AntiRefugeeBill'. Though unsuccessful in overturning the Act, this campaign, amongst others, has helped soften some of the Act's more hardline clauses.

## 03

### Home Office

[Medical Justice](#) has influenced the Home Office to adopt policy changes on the way medical evidence is used in asylum claims, benefitting thousands of asylum seekers. Moreover, organising the [All-Party Parliamentary Group's](#) inquiry in quasi-detention, they also managed to create parliamentary-level participation spaces for NGOs and individuals with lived experience.

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## 04

### Education Solutions

In Egypt, [St Andrew's Refugee Services](#) has successfully influenced [ECHO's](#) strategic approach to mainstreaming refugee education, highlighting the role community schools play alongside the public school system.



**"Once the Bill passed, we immediately led over **400 organisations** to come together to pledge to fight the **#AntiRefugeeLaws.**"**

**Refugee Action**



# Part 4 Amplifying Voices

- 1) Story-telling with a purpose
- 2) Involving Experts by Experience

## Part 4 Amplifying Voices

# Story-telling with a purpose

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*The cohort have produced a wealth of powerful story-telling in an effort to change the narrative on migration for good.*

01

### Asylum Speakers podcast

In June 2022, Across Borders released the [Asylum Speakers podcast](#) in collaboration with [The Worldwide Tribe](#). This 6-part podcast series connected organisations from Egypt to England to debunk common misconceptions about seeking asylum.

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02

### The Walk

[Good Chance Theatre](#) successfully completed [The Walk](#), their major international project where the puppet, Little Amal, crossed 8 countries, reaching 150,000 people in person and 40 million digitally.

03

### Digital Exhibitions

[Family for Every Child](#) has developed a [virtual exhibition](#) to share the images, experiences and recommendations of young people developed through Photovoice projects in [Greece](#), [Lebanon](#), and between [Central America and the USA](#).

[IMIX](#) also created [Museum of Calais](#), an exhibition that allows individuals to anonymously frame their own experiences of crossing the channel in a way that is safe for them. Comic Relief worked with the cohort and the award-winning Hassan Akkad to produce [Re-Rooted](#), an exhibition featuring the voices and images of 7 refugees building new lives in the UK. The exhibition also resulted in a blog with [5 top tips for refugee storytelling](#).

## Part 4 Amplifying Voices

# Involving Experts by Experience

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*The Across Borders cohort is leading the way in a transition to a refugee-led sector.*

01

## Strategic involvement

[Medical Justice](#) has found that the involvement of those with lived experience is fundamental to help ‘challenge immigration detention policy and practice, and to set the best strategic direction.’ Similarly, the [Helen Bamber Foundation](#) has created a novel system of ‘Board Observers’ model to engage current and former clients on a strategic level.

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02

## Creating a platform

[Choose Love](#) supported the establishment of a refugee-led media hub in Poland to train Ukrainian refugees as citizen journalists and provide pathways to publication through podcasters and international events.

03

## Amplifying young voices

In May 2022, [Safe Passage](#) won an award in the Sheila Mckechnie Foundation National Campaigners Award, in the [Amplifying Voices category](#) for their work with Young Leaders who take a leading role in advocating for better protection and rights for child refugees.

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04

## Campaigning together

The [European Network on Statelessness' #StatelessJourneys](#) campaign was built in constant collaboration with a group of stateless changemakers with lived experience of forced displacement, from planning the launch to engaging with European parliamentarians in Strasbourg.



For Refugee Week



COMIC RELIEF

presents

RE-ROOTED:

*Stories of starting again*



“We want **good politicians** and they need to be voted in. We need to think about **storytelling as campaigning.**”

Hassan Akkad

# What next?

Over the next years, the Across Borders cohort will continue its work to support people on the move through direct service delivery and campaigning work.

In late 2023, the Across Borders cohort will come together for their first in-person Summit, an opportunity to develop stronger relationships while developing strategies for a truly refugee-led sector by 2023.

Looking further into the future, each organisation will continue to grow and learn, finding new ways to respond to chronic and newly-arising issues. These organisations will continue to work together in partnership to build a just and impactful support sector for people on the move.

Stay tuned for more updates from Across Borders.



