

Annual General Conference 2022, 28 June, Brussels

Asylum in Europe: Strategies for Resistance and Resilience

Rue du Parnasse 19, 1050 Bruxelles

Workshop 2, Madrid room, 11h00 to 13h00

Title: Inclusion of Refugee-led Community Organisations (RCOs) in EU-level Advocacy: From Challenges to Good Practices

Lead organisation(s): ECRE

Objectives:

The workshop aims at fostering an exchange of views among different stakeholders on the inclusion of refugee-led community organizations in advocacy activities, with the objectives

- Provide a space for creating a dialogue between different actors in the advocacy landscape.
- Discuss the opportunities and strategies of RCOs who wish to be active in EU-level advocacy work.
- Identify opportunities to address capacity challenges.
- Share tools or initiatives targeting the empowerment of refugee advocates.
- Promote networking between RCOs and other stakeholders.
- Disseminate Training Toolkit on Empowering Refugee-Led Community Organisation.

Moderator: Farzana S. Islam, Active Citizen Europe

Speakers:

- Alyssa Ahrabare, the European Network of Migrant Women
- Shaza Alrihawi, Global Refugee-led Network
- Adam Elsod, Voicify
- Neil Falzon, aditus foundation
- Elena Ponzoni, Refugee Academy, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Agenda:

Opening and Welcoming

Section 1: Roundtable Discussion

Speakers will present their insights on the following topics

- The role of RCOs in advocating refugee rights in the national and the EU level.
- Opportunities and strategies for RCOs especially in the EU level, including particular RCOs (such as refugee women, LGBTIQ+ refugees, children, youths etc.)

Section 2: Presentations for Good Practices

Speakers will present their projects/initiatives and examples of good practices to empower those refugees who want to play an active role in their communities and at the EU level. The topic of each presentation will be decided by the speakers.

Section 3: Q&R session and Open Discussion

Interactive discussion with participants

Structure/method:

It is planned as a roundtable discussion including presentations of each speaker on pre-defined topics and an open discussion between speakers and participants.

The session will kick off with a round table discussion to illustrate the role of RCOs in advocating refugee rights in national and EU level, challenges they have been facing in national and EU level and good practices to empower those refugees who want to play an active role in their communities and at the EU level. After these short interventions of each speaker, the workshop will focus on the discussion on opportunities, good practices, available toolkits, and related activities to empower RCOs. Speakers will present their related projects, initiatives, or activities and explain their priorities. For the last part of the workshop, the moderator will open the floor to exchange ideas and experiences about how to promote meaningful participation of refugees to influence policy and decision-making processes, and more specifically how to strengthen the skills and capacity of RCOs to be more active in national and especially EU advocacy.

Description:

Refugee-led Community Organizations (RCOs) are organizations created and led by refugees and their descendants, and whose activities and services address the needs and rights of refugees. Refugee-led organisations, which are the rarest on both national and local levels among the migrant-led organizations, have a diverse scope of work and greatly vary in terms of the populations they assist.

RCOs play a crucial role in bridging the gap between refugees' communities and host societies. Many RCOs are working at the local level providing support to newly arrived refugees, facilitating their integration by offering several services and tools to empower them, such as language training, information, and cultural exchange activities; and most importantly by providing a space for newcomers to build a sense of belonging to make the host county their home. Even though advocacy is the most common line of work for migrant organisations, the number of RCOs working at the policy level, particularly influencing the EU policies, is limited. They face many challenges and hardships when promoting the rights of refugees in the broad advocacy landscape. The lack of refugee voices and the contribution of refugee-led groups on the development of policies aimed at them risks forgetting the needs and interests of the very people for whom they are made for.

While refugee-led groups are well-established, active, and engaged in some EU Member States, in other member states they have many challenges due to the specific realities in the national context defining to what extent and in what form refugees may organise and engage in different issues. In addition to those contextual challenges, refugee-led groups generally face difficulties including the access to financial resources, the development of organisational skills, and the creation of a strong network with stakeholders to develop collective action.

Studies and reports emphasize that the possibilities to engage with policymakers and become more active in decision-making processes within the civil society organizational structure are often limited for RCOs. Refugee activism does not necessarily lead to meaningful inclusion, what is important is to achieve sustainable and 'meaningful refugee participation' in those decision-making processes affecting the lives of refugees.

It is very important that all actors involved in international protection should actively work towards meaningfully including and enabling refugee-led organisations and initiatives as equal partners in the pursuit of solutions to forced displacement. This includes considerations of how to allocate resources sustainably, how to support refugee-led organizations and networks, how to respond to requests for capacity building, and how to analyze and address barriers to participation, among others. As a way to overcome these challenges, there are already good practices and initiatives to facilitate refugee preparedness and to strengthen refugee inclusion by supporting the empowerment of those refugees who want to play an active role in their communities and at the EU level.

The workshop aims to exchange ideas between stakeholders, including refugee advocates, to address particular challenges, especially in the EU-level advocacy landscape, and to strengthen the meaningful participation of refugees. The workshop is designed to incentivise the sharing of good examples and tools to empower RCOs and to create a space for networking.