

Funding the Frontline

Data insights on a fairer funding future for Refugee-Led Organisations



243,304

Refugees supported by 53 Taking The Lead member organisations.



\$10,000

The median annual budget of RLOs with funding in our network.



1 in 2

RLOs in our network are supporting 48,163 refugees without any funding at all.

Imagine the impact we could achieve with the right funding.



About our network

Taking The Lead is a global network of refugee leaders and RLOs joining forces to shift power and resources to further the rights of people of forced displacement.



277

Refugee Leaders
Active

179

RLOs Represented

34

Host Countries

44

Languages Spoken

The network focuses on four core goals:



Increasing direct
access to funding



Influencing policy
and decision-
making



Shifting negative
refugee narratives

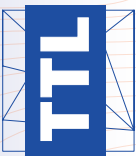
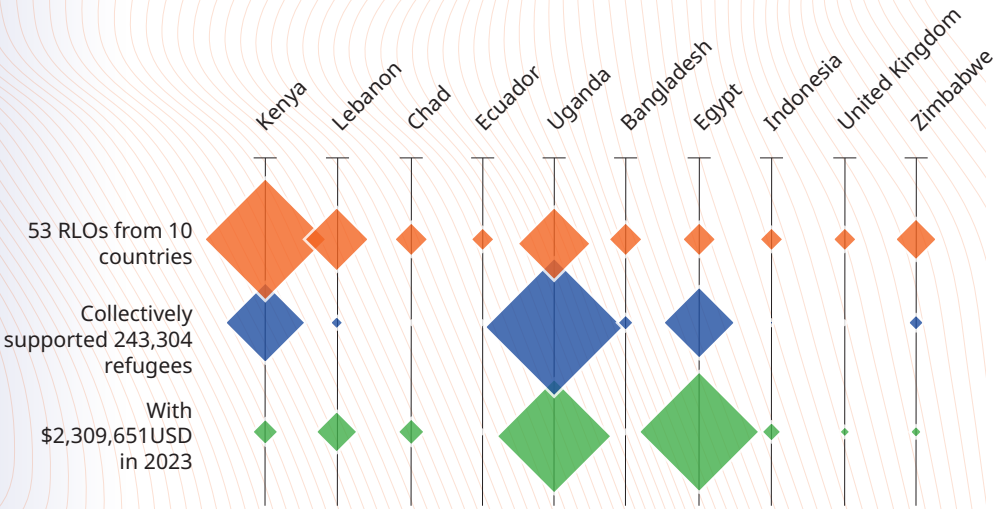


Strengthening RLO
skills and reach

About the data

In October 2023 Taking The Lead sent a digital survey in Arabic, English, and Spanish to capture new data on our members' experiences with funding. We received 70 responses representing 53 RLOs in 10 countries.

Resources and reach



Kenyan RLOs, representing half of our survey respondents, provide services and support to 1 in 5 refugees, with only 2% of the funds.

4,590

Average number of refugees supported per RLO

49%

Percentage of RLOs with funding in 2023

5

Average number of paid staff per RLO

\$10,000

Average annual budget of RLOs with funding in 2023

18

Average number of unpaid staff and volunteers

Committed, but critically underfunded

“In many cases, funders may assume that we RLOs lack organizational capacity or are not equipped to manage resources effectively. For instance, some may question our ability to implement projects at a large scale due to limited resources. This misconception often overlooks the resilience, local expertise, and deep community connections that RLOs bring to the table. It’s crucial to recognize that RLOs often have unique strengths that can lead to impactful outcomes in their communities.”

Refugees supported
243,304

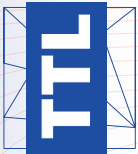
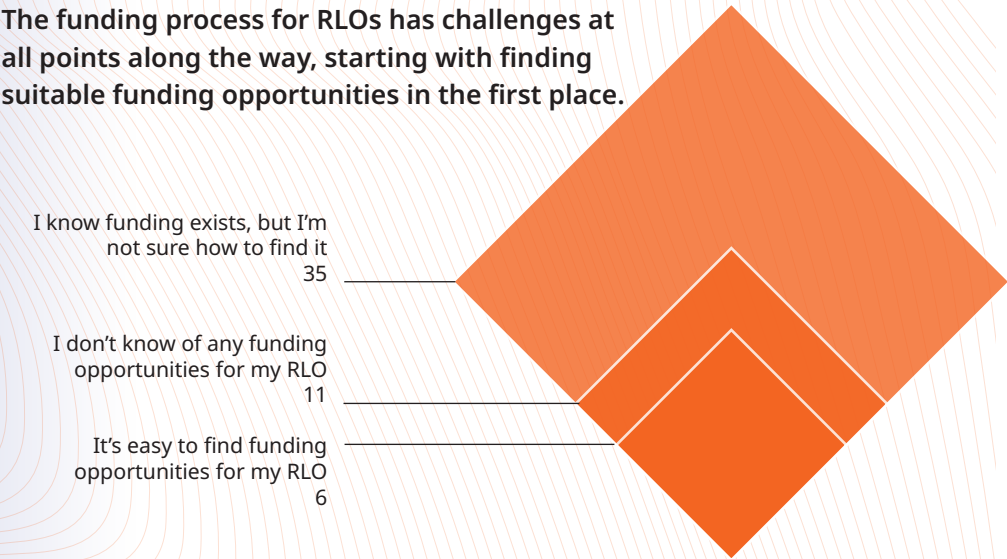
Unpaid staff and
volunteers
1,788

Paid staff
570

RLOs heavily rely on unpaid long term staff and volunteers to continue their mission as they lack resources and funding for paid staff. For every paid staff member there are an average of 3 unpaid team members boosting RLO impact.

Funding landscape

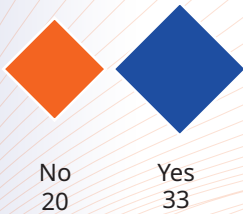
The funding process for RLOs has challenges at all points along the way, starting with finding suitable funding opportunities in the first place.



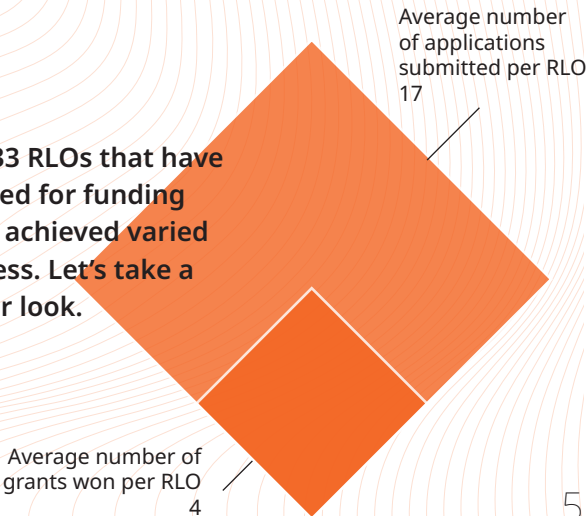
4 out of the 6 RLOs that felt confident finding funding opportunities to apply for, are currently unfunded.

Spotlight

Has your RLO applied for funding or grants before?



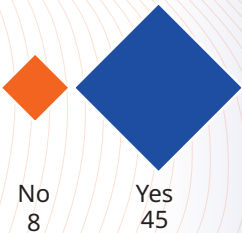
The 33 RLOs that have applied for funding have achieved varied success. Let's take a closer look.



Challenges and barriers

As we saw on the previous page, finding funding opportunities is a big barrier preventing resourcing of RLOs. But it's not the only obstacle. We asked RLOs:

Has there ever been a situation when your RLO chose not to apply for a certain funding opportunity?

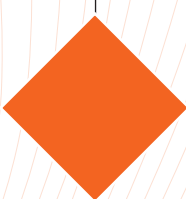


These were the main reasons for not applying for funding for the 45 RLOs who said yes.

Unsure of how to find funding opportunities
18



Belief that you wouldn't qualify or succeed
19



Process seems too complex or resource-intensive
27



Past rejection(s)
14



When RLOs do find suitable funding opportunities, the next wave of challenges hits. For the 33 RLOs who have applied for funding in the past, these are the biggest challenges they encountered.

Navigating English-language Materials
13



Understanding requirements and eligibility criteria
16



Gathering required documentation
19



Writing proposals
18



Lack of human resources
8



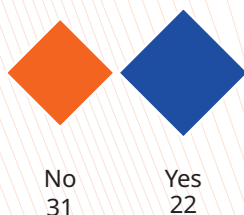
Technical aspects
4



Bureaucratic barriers

As we saw in the previous charts, understanding eligibility criteria and gathering required documentation are two of the biggest hurdles RLOs face. Registering and getting a bank account is difficult. We asked:

Is your RLO officially registered in your host country?



Many of the 31 unregistered RLOs, are not legally permitted to register. But for those who are the barriers are insurmountable.

"Where we work it's hard to get funds as an RLO even if you are registered legally. In order to be legally registered, at least 90% of your board members must be nationals, not displaced people, so your mission must totally change."

It wasn't easy for the 22 RLOs who were able to register officially. Stereotypes and negative narratives along with bureaucratic obstacles meant it took a long time for many.

"It was not easy to register our organization. We went through many challenges. The host community was against us registering. They said, refugees can't do this in our country. We needed some documents from the government to register, but getting them was not easy."

Despite more than half of our RLOs being unable to register officially, a majority do have a bank account in their host country.

Does your RLO have a bank account in your host country?

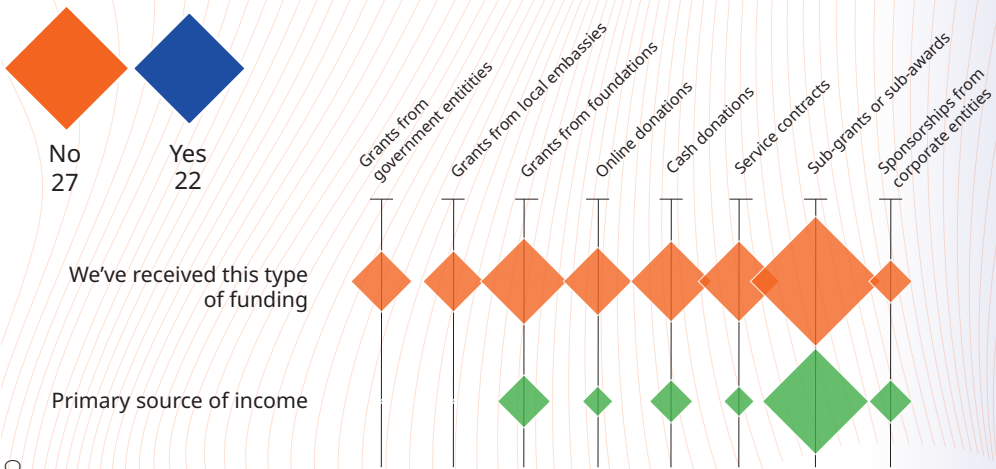
The 20 RLOs without bank accounts have had to get creative when it comes to receiving funds. Here's how they do it:



Intermediaries

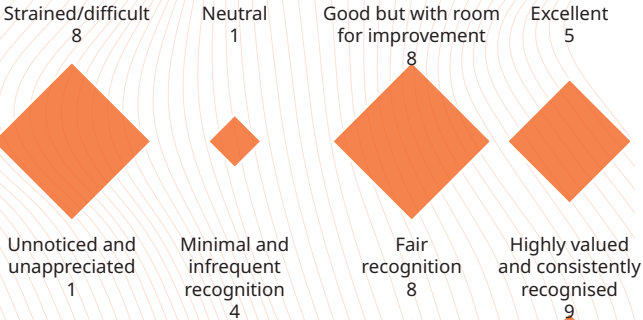
For most funded RLOs, subgrants via intermediaries is the primary source of income. However, indirect funding comes with its own set of challenges. RLOs in our network want to secure more diverse and direct funding.

Has your RLO ever received funding via an intermediary?

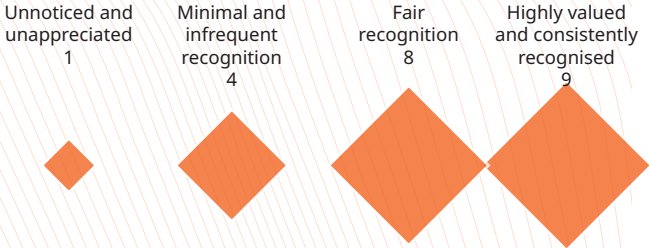


We asked the 22 RLOs who've received funding via intermediaries to:

Describe their working relationship



Describe how well intermediaries recognise RLO contributions



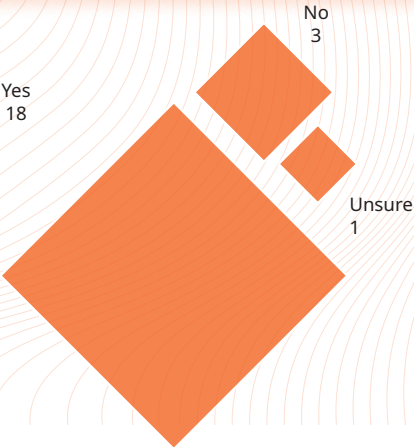
A positive experience with an intermediary can open up a whole new world of opportunities for RLOs.

But for some RLOs working with intermediaries can be a demoralising experience.

“Our intermediary funder share opportunities with us and also engage their network so that we can present our work in their networks which gives us virtual visibility which in return eases applications.”

“We implemented a project but we were hardly recognized for the success of the activities by the intermediary. We only felt motivated by the community support and appreciation.”

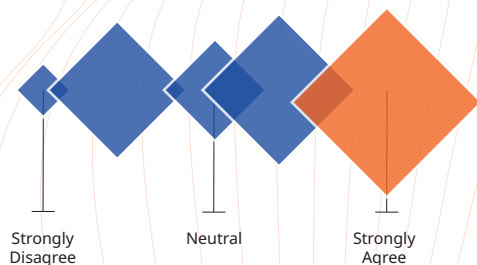
Relationships with intermediaries are complex and they often vary in nature. But RLOs unanimously recognise that in the current funding ecosystem, intermediaries are crucial when it comes to receiving funding. We asked: Do successful projects with intermediaries help with future funding applications for your RLO?



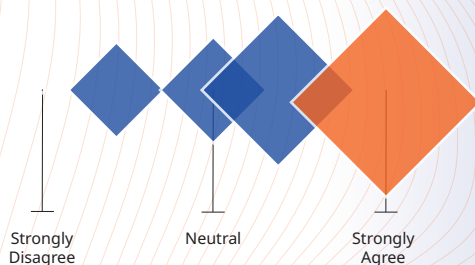
Perceptions and realities

All RLOs in our survey were asked about how trust, stereotypes and visibility influence the funding landscape. This is how we feel.

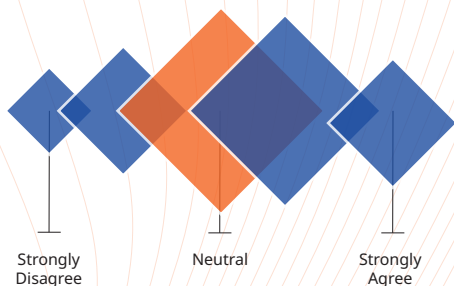
Funders have a clear understanding of the need of the community we serve



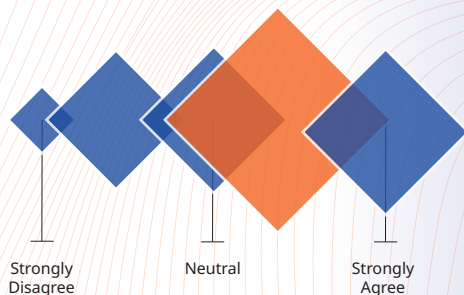
Stereotypes and biases against refugees influence the funding landscape



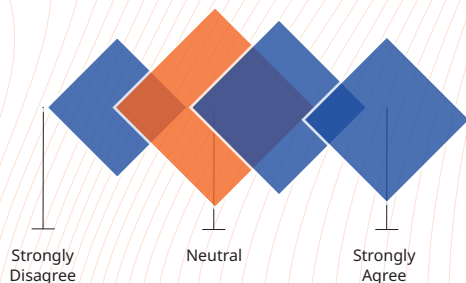
Our achievements or contributions are overlooked by funders



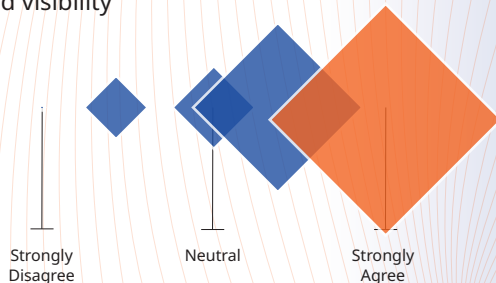
Our achievements or contributions are overlooked by the humanitarian sector



Funders trust us



We don't get enough funds for marketing and visibility



If we could ask you one question, we'd ask...

How do you decide which RLOs to fund?

What specific measures or support can you provide to help RLOs like ours build long-term sustainability and resilience in our mission to support refugee communities?

What areas or topics are you interested in funding?

What stops you from supporting our projects?

Do you think we are not qualified to receive funds?

Do you think we are not resourceful?

Why is all funding indirect rather than directly to RLOs?

Do you know that the founders and members or RLOs are among the most vulnerable? They are rising up to change their community themselves?

Why do funders always reduce the amount of funding when it comes to the disbursement?

Why are funding proposals only in English?

Why are funding links not published more widely?

Why do initiatives need such a long history to be funded? Why don't RLOs have the opportunity to apply for flexible and larger grants?

If I am able to manage my family, my RLO and the community in which I am living, then what would make me mismanage your fund?

How do you connect with project coordinators who lack the necessary skills and technological tools to effectively engage with digital platforms and opportunities?

How can RLOs get funding faster?

We're the frontline actors in the humanitarian response, why don't you trust us?

If your funds are motivated by the needs of our community, why can't you fund RLOs directly since we know our communities best?

Why is the eligibility criteria so restrictive?

Why is the financing through an intermediary and not directly with those in charge of the initiative?

Why are funding opportunities limited to well-known organisations?

What do you rely on to know the true needs and how do you evaluate the rate of aid reaching those who deserve it?

Do you receive first-hand information about us by contacting us directly, or do you rely on what intermediaries have to say about us?

Can you support independent RLOs that are not legally registered but are providing many refugees life-changing aid?

Do you trust us?

Why don't you visit the camps and see the good work RLOs are doing?

Why is funding for unregistered RLOs so limited?

Why can't we RLOs be funded so we can get 24/7 service to our communities, who trust us more than those who only come to the camps during the daytime?

When is your help available?

Why are small initiatives not given opportunities to demonstrate their skill and ability?

Why don't you send direct representatives to follow up on the work of RLOs to see first-hand the real impact that these organisations are having on the ground?

Why don't you give funding to small initiatives to prove their presence on the ground?



We hope that our data has given you clear insights into the fundraising realities for RLOs, highlighting the key challenges we face. It's our aim to bring these issues to light so that, together, we can devise effective strategies to tackle them.

Our network's first collective goal is to:

Ensure Refugee-Led Organisations have direct access to funding and resources and can build the capacity, relationships and recognition necessary to deliver effective and impactful work for people of forced displacement.

With your support, we can make this a reality.

Survey and data
visualization design by:



DATA4CHANGE



DATA4CHANGE



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www.takingthelead.network