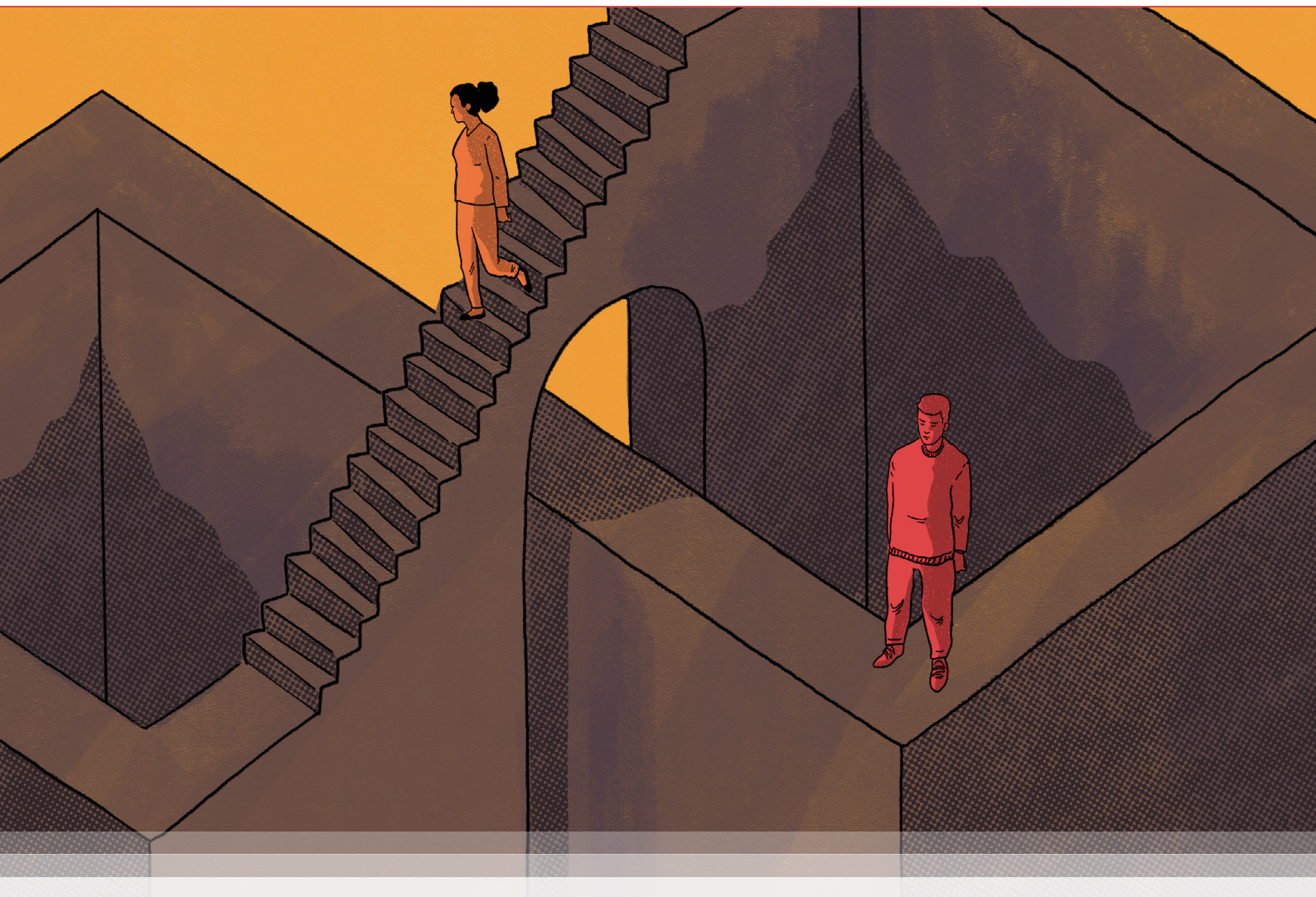


# The failure to fund refugee-led organisations

## Methodology

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# Methodology

## Background

There is a large information gap around how much humanitarian and development funding reaches local and national actors. This makes it extremely difficult to track donor commitments to increase funding to local and national actors, and also undermines coordination, targeting and accountability.

Reporting to the main platforms for tracking humanitarian and development funding – the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) (under the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN OCHA) and the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) – is insufficient.<sup>1</sup> This is especially the case for funding that passes through one or more intermediary organisations (Girling-Morris et al., 2022). Trying to identify funding that reaches refugee-led organisations (RLOs) is even harder, given that there is no shared definition or option in reporting platforms to tag organisations that are refugee-led.

This lack of reporting to public platforms stems from the fact that many donors only provide small volumes of direct funding to local and national actors, including RLOs, and instead rely on their intermediary partners, such as UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), to pass on and report on this funding. However, these intermediary organisations often do not track the funding that they pass on and those that do often do not make this granular data publicly available.

This transparency issue is accentuated when trying to investigate the volume of funding that reaches particular sub-groups of local actors, including RLOs, women-led/women’s-rights organisations or youth-led organisations. Most donors or intermediaries do not track how much funding they specifically provide to such groups. There is also often a lack of a shared definition of those sub-groups of local actors, resulting in the absence of corresponding tags in public reporting platforms.

## Approach

This lack of reliable available data means that tracking funding flows to RLOs is nearly impossible without primary data collection. To overcome this, we adopted a mixed-methods approach combining multiple quantitative and qualitative data-collection components:

- A **literature review** of existing research and evidence on the quantity and quality of funding to RLOs.
- A **funding survey** with donors and intermediaries to collect data on the quantity and quality of funding reaching RLOs in 2022 (this was focused on the disbursements made to RLOs during the calendar year).

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<sup>1</sup> Data on the main platform for tracking development funding, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS), was not consulted in depth, as recipient funding data for 2022 was not available at the time of the analysis.

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- Analysis of **funding data** reported to publicly available platforms, primarily to UN OCHA's FTS and the IATI.
- Semi-structured **key informant interviews** with funders, RLOs, representatives from (I)NGOs, civil society, advocacy groups, academics and researchers.
- Workshops including **focus-group discussions** with community-based, local and national RLOs in Kenya and Uganda.

To ensure that our findings and recommendations were fit for purpose, we also scheduled a series of workshops with key actors and stakeholders. In April 2023, we held an online methodology workshop with 16 participants to test out and fine-tune our thinking on methodology prior to starting the data collection. This was followed, in September 2023, by a validation workshop with 22 participants to present our initial findings and help shape and inform the research recommendations. In addition, our final report was peer-reviewed by three internal reviewers and six external reviewers comprising a mix of RLO representatives, funders and academics.

This research project aims to provide rigorous and independent snapshots of funding over time. To track progress and identify changes in funding trends, data collection will be repeated in 2025 and 2027.

### Funding survey

The funding survey aimed to provide a snapshot of the funding provided to RLOs from international donors and intermediaries in 2022. The scope of the research was limited to international funders and included both humanitarian and development funding. Three different funding survey tools were developed for different types of funders:

1. donors such as governments and private foundations;
2. international organisations who act as funding intermediaries, such as UN agencies, INGOs and pooled funds;<sup>2</sup>
3. RLOs who act as funding intermediaries to other RLOs, such as RLO networks, funds and coalitions.

The survey requested data on grants provided to RLOs, or to intermediaries providing funding earmarked for RLOs, in 2022. We allowed donors to report on the funding they provide to RLOs according to their own definitions (see sub-section below, 'Definitions').

The following information was requested (where available and relevant):

- total funding volume in 2022, by grant and organisation name;
- total operating budget in 2022 (for RLO intermediaries only);
- RLO definition used internally;

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<sup>2</sup> Pooled funds are multi-donor financing mechanisms aiming to provide a flexible source of financing e.g. Country-Based Pooled Funds.

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- country/region of grant;
- breakdown of humanitarian/development budgets;
- duration of funding agreement (start and end dates);
- level of earmarking.<sup>3</sup>

Surveys were sent to the top 20 government donors of humanitarian assistance, private foundations, UN agencies and those INGOs with a specific focus on displacement. A stakeholder mapping was created, with input from the research steering group, to ensure key actors were not missed. A total of 72 surveys were sent. There was an 81% response rate, and 31% (of total asked) were able to provide data (Table 1).

**Table 1** Breakdown of survey responses

Organisation type	Data received	Data unavailable/do not fund RLOs	No response	Total
Public donors	0	15	2	17
Private foundations	10	6	3	19
UN agencies	1	3	1	5
INGOs	7	9	2	18
Pooled funds	3	1	1	5
Refugee-led organisations and networks	1	0	1	2
Other	0	2	4	6

Note: 'Other' includes RLOs who are known to act as intermediaries to other RLOs, and Red Cross Red Crescent organisations. Some INGOs include affiliates and country offices.

We also considered the option of collating a comprehensive list of RLOs according to an agreed definition and sharing this with funding organisations to cross-check with their grantees. However, due to data confidentiality issues and the level of effort and contextual knowledge required to be able to do this at a global aggregate level, this approach was not pursued at this stage. The option of systematically compiling a robust list of RLOs could be considered for a further data collection, but would be most relevant/applicable for a country- or region-based study.

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<sup>3</sup> Using the Grand Bargain earmarking definitions (see IASC, 2016).

### Public data analysis

In addition to this primary data collection, we also analysed publicly available funding flows reported on FTS and IATI. We compiled a list of over 800 RLOs using the funding survey responses (520 organisations) and the Reframe online platform (approximately 320 organisations). This list of RLOs was then cross-referenced with reporting on FTS and IATI to capture any funding flows (disbursements and outgoing commitments made to organisations in 2022) to those organisations not already captured through the survey data collection. This was not possible on the OECD DAC CRS, as recipient funding data for 2022 was not available at the time of analysis. The FTS search identified around \$2.5 million in relevant funding flows to RLOs and their intermediaries in 2022, and IATI identified \$75,633.

The final calculation of funding provided to RLOs focused on the first RLO recipient and did not try to capture sub-grants to other RLOs. This was based on a compiled dataset from the funding survey and the secondary data analysis, which was reconciled for double-counting between first-level funders and intermediaries passing on funding to RLOs. This calculation was based on a sum of:

- total direct funding provided to RLOs by first-level funders (governments and private foundations);
- total funding provided to intermediaries that are also RLOs (by combining the data provided by donors and the data provided by RLO intermediaries on their total operating budget);
- total funding provided by all other intermediaries to RLOs (UN, pooled funds and INGOs).

### Semi-structured key informant interviews

To complement the quantitative data collection, the project also engaged with a wide range of key informants to provide greater context and clarity about the quantity and the quality of funding to RLOs. These semi-structured interviews addressed issues around flexibility, the level of earmarking, the duration of funding and the inclusion of overheads. They also explored the barriers donors face in funding RLOs and that RLOs face in trying to access funding (and what makes those barriers unique compared with other local and national organisations), and what needs to change going forward. Finally, the key informant interviews also aimed to identify examples of alternative funding mechanisms that are designed to channel funding to RLOs or are working for RLOs.

Two interview guides were designed – one for non-funders and one for funders.

### Questions posed to non-funders

1. How does your organisation define refugee-led organisations?
2. Do you think it is important to fund RLOs? Why?
3. Are donors allocating enough funding to RLOs?
4. What barriers do donors face in funding RLOs?
  - a. How do these compare to other local and national organisations?
  - b. How critical are these barriers? And to what extent can they be overcome?
5. What challenges do RLOs face in accessing funding?
  - a. How do these compare to other local and national organisations?
  - b. How critical are these challenges? And to what extent can they be overcome?
6. What kinds of mechanisms do donors use to fund RLOs?
  - a. What motivates decision-making around which mechanisms to use, not use or prioritise?
  - b. What kinds of mechanisms or sources do RLOs use to access funding beyond traditional donors?
7. In what ways does the presence of intermediaries address the challenges and barriers outlined earlier?
  - a. How important is it for donors to give directly to RLOs versus via intermediaries?
  - b. Why is it important?
8. What do you consider to be 'quality funding' for RLOs?
  - a. How flexible is donor funding to RLOs? Why is it not more flexible?
  - b. How reliable is donor funding to RLOs? Why is it not more reliable?
9. What needs to happen to improve the quantity and quality of funding to RLOs?

### Questions posed to funders

#### Donor funding to RLOs

1. How does your organisation define refugee-led organisations?
2. Do you think it is important to fund RLOs? Why?
3. Can you briefly tell us how much funding you provide to RLOs and what type of RLOs?
4. Do you fund RLOs directly, or through an intermediary? Why do you choose this approach?
5. Are you able to internally track how much funding you provide to RLOs specifically, directly and indirectly?
6. To what extent are RLOs identified as a strategic funding priority for your agency?
  - a. Why?
  - b. What is the background to this policy focus?
7. Going forward, how much funding do you plan to allocate to RLOs and to what extent will RLOs be a strategic funding priority?
8. Is the funding you provide to RLOs from humanitarian or development budgets?

### Quality funding

1. How do you provide funding to RLOs, i.e. project funding or core funding? Is this different to how you fund other local and national actors?
2. Is the funding you provide to RLOs earmarked or tightly restricted? (Why/why not?)
3. What is the typical duration of the funding agreements you have with RLOs (less than 12 months, less than 24 months, more than 24 months)? (Why?)
4. Do you provide overhead/indirect costs for RLOs? (Why/why not?)
5. How flexible is the funding provided to RLOs (e.g. flexibility to adapt programming or move funding between budget lines)?
6. Can you describe the reporting requirements (i.e. frequency and extent of reporting required)?
7. For your recipients who pass funding on to RLOs, to what extent do you provide guidance or regulations around how the funding is cascaded (e.g. quality funding, overheads, flexibility)?

### Barriers to funding

1. What are the main barriers you face in funding RLOs (directly or indirectly)? How are these barriers unique to RLOs, compared to other local and national organisations?
2. What unique barriers do RLOs face in accessing funding, compared to local and national NGOs more generally?
3. What could be done to improve the accessibility of funding for RLOs?
4. What could you do as a donor/intermediary, and what would you need to do this?

Following a detailed stakeholder mapping exercise, a broad sample of informants were selected, which was subsequently supplemented through snowballing techniques. A total of 37 interviews were conducted (Table 2).

**Table 2** Breakdown of interviews

Stakeholder group	Number of interviews
Public donors	2
Private foundations	6
INGOs	8
Refugee-led organisations and networks	12
UN agencies	4
Pooled funds	3
Academics	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>



## RLO workshops

The research also engaged with community-based, local or national RLOs through a series of four workshops with RLO leaders and representatives in Kenya and Uganda. While East Africa was the initial focus in 2023, this will extend to other geographies in subsequent years (2025 and 2027) of the project. The workshops will be tailored to the different geographies, and the details outlined below are specific to the East African context.

The workshops were led by Andhira Kara, a refugee researcher and core member of the research team, who has worked extensively with RLOs in Kenya and Uganda. To deliver the workshops, we also partnered with Cohere and several RLOs. In Uganda, we worked with the Refugee-Led Organisation Network (RELON) and People for Peace and Defence of Rights (PPDR). In Kenya, we partnered with Kalobeyi Initiative for Better Life (KI4BLI). Each workshop comprised 7–8 participants, bringing the total number to 29. This relatively small number was not intended to be a substitute for deeper research and engagement with RLOs. Rather, the purpose of the workshops was to help elevate local voices and balance perspectives on RLO funding in our report.

To ensure diversity of representation, a cross-section of RLOs was identified using purposeful sampling techniques (see Table 3). Diversity of representation was a key reason for selecting Kenya and Uganda, where previous research has revealed a large number of operational RLOs (Pincok et al., 2021; Kara et al., 2022). In Kenya, the geographic focus was Kakuma, where there is a high representation of camp-based RLOs. In Uganda, the workshops took place in Kampala to expand the focus to urban RLOs. In addition to including RLOs run by women and by people living with disabilities (PLWD), we also invited RLO representatives from across the three development stages (self-help phase, growth phase and expansion phase) identified by Kara et al. (2022) in their study of East African RLOs.

**Table 3** Breakdown of workshops

Type of RLO	Kenya	Uganda	Total
Women-led RLO	3	6	9
PLWD-led RLO	1	1	2
Self-help phase	3	2	5
Growth phase	8	7	15
Expansion phase	3	6	9

Each workshop lasted 90 minutes. Given the sensitivity of the information being requested, we did not ask RLOs for information about the amount of funding they receive. Instead, we focused on issues around the quality of funding, key barriers and opportunities in accessing funding, and priorities and preferences of RLOs going forwards – as outlined in the discussion questions below.

1. Where do you get your funding from?
2. Do you receive any funding directly from donors or via intermediaries? Are you happy with this set up? To what extent do you think it is important for donors to give directly?
3. What challenges do you face in accessing funding? How do these challenges compare with local CBOs [community-based organisations] – do you think you face more challenges as an RLO?
4. Does the funding you receive come with any limitations? In an ideal world, what would quality funding look like to you?
5. What needs to happen to improve the quantity and quality of funding to RLOs? What changes should donors make? Is there anything that RLOs can do differently?

To promote reciprocal value and opportunities for mutual capacity-strengthening, the workshops also included a tailored training for RLO participants who were interested in taking part. Capacity-strengthening has been highlighted in East Africa as a ‘key need for many RLO leaders in terms of project development, implementation and proposal writing’ (Kara et al., 2022: 29). Participants were able to choose between two modules taken from Cohere’s capacity-strengthening and -sharing course: finance budgeting and financial due diligence. Delivered by Cohere staff, the budgeting module covered topics such as project budgeting, financial reporting and accountability. The financial due diligence module provided step-by-step guidance on achieving financial compliance.

We recognise that short-term training sessions are unlikely to yield long-term results or gains. With this in mind, Cohere will continue engaging with the RLOs who participated in the workshop. Their team will provide tailored feedback on how the RLOs can improve their financial capacity. Cohere will also continue to engage with the RLOs on targeted training options, and onboard them onto Reframe, a platform designed to showcase their work and network with funders.

## Limitations

### Data availability

While all efforts were made to capture as much funding reaching RLOs as possible, tracking this type of data is notoriously hard, and is inevitably incomplete. As data is not readily available on public funding platforms, this research relies on those donors and intermediary organisations who are able to internally identify the funding they provide to RLOs. Most large donors were not able to provide this data and there will be donors who fund RLOs that either did not respond to the survey request, were not able to be contacted, or were missed. This round of data collection is the first of three over a five-year period. Data collection will therefore be repeated and remain open on a rolling basis. This

provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the exercise and build a consolidated database over time, by allowing for more donors and intermediaries to contribute and provide back-dated data if we miss them in the first round, or if they are initially unable to provide this data.

### Scope

This research aims to understand the contribution made to RLOs by international donors, rather than all the different sources of funding RLOs receive. The funding data collection was limited to international funders – government donors, private foundations, UN agencies and INGOs. This decision was made for two reasons. Firstly, to keep the focus on the stakeholder group that this research ultimately seeks to influence – the international community. And secondly, to ensure the scope of the work was focused and manageable within the timeframe and budget. Nevertheless, this means that the data collected represents just one funding stream available to RLOs, and we were not able to quantify the volume of funding reaching RLOs from other funding sources, for example from diaspora fundraising, domestic government and private sector support, income-generating activities and other national/local fundraising activities. While these funding streams were probed during key informant interviews and focus-group discussions with RLOs, the research did not seek to identify specific amounts.

### Definitions

The data collection allowed funders to submit funding data based on their own definition of what constitutes an RLO or their own approach to classifying RLOs (i.e., self-identification). These definitions were requested from contributing organisations and while many were similar and overlapping, the data used for this snapshot is not based on one uniform definition. In a few cases, funders adopted a broad definition to include all organisations led by people with lived migration experience (e.g. including asylum seekers, IDPs and returnees), not just refugees. It was not feasible to independently verify whether each organisation receiving funding meets a commonly agreed definition (particularly given no such shared definition exists), nor was that an intended exercise for this study.

### Data comparability

The data collection was limited to the 2022 calendar year. Preliminary scoping suggested that the policy drive to fund RLOs directly began in 2021, and that for most donors, 2022 data will be available for a data-collection exercise in Q2 2023. For organisations that reported their budgets for multi-year projects, and for donors with financial years different to calendar years, an estimate for the 2022 calendar year had to be calculated. This was achieved by estimating 2022 project budgets based on the provided project duration and total budget. Most funders were also not able to provide additional information requested in the funding survey, for example on the level of earmarking and whether the funding was from humanitarian or development budgets.

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