

**Context: Sadly, refugee and displaced peoples is a population group that is still increasing.**

According to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, at least 82.4 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 26.4 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also millions of stateless people, who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment, and freedom of movement. At a time when 1 in every 95 people on earth has fled their home, because of conflict or persecution, humanitarian organizations' work is more important than ever.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, experts predict that economic hardship, fueled by a devastating global pandemic, new and unresolved conflicts, and accelerated climate change, is likely to only perpetuate the refugee crisis for years to come.<sup>2</sup>

Most often Mental Health and Mental Wellbeing is neglected and a distant afterthought of health programs worldwide. The same is true for Mental Health services for refugees, yet for those who provide services to them, it is perfectly clear that they are in serious need of Mental Health support. Currently, responsibility for mental health support to refugees is shared by a network of agencies, including international and local NGOs, the UNHCR, and the World Health Organization (WHO), mainstream Mental Health and specialist refugee services and voluntary organizations. Yet, the undeniable reality is that most refugees with mental health problems will never receive appropriate services. The main reason for this is the scarcity and inequitable distribution of services, but other important factors contribute to the situation as well, including difficulties in coordinating national and international efforts, barriers to accessing care even when services are available, and the persisting stigma associated with being both a refugee and mentally ill.<sup>3</sup>

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Mental Health is an essential part of overall health and wellbeing. Mental Health includes our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental Health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>. Accessed on 10/14/2021

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/covid-climate-change-global-refugee-crisis-about-get-much-worse-n1275446>. Accessed on 10/14/2021

<sup>3</sup> Derrick Silove, Peter Ventevogel, and Susan Rees. The contemporary refugee crisis: an overview of mental health challenges. *World Psychiatry*. 2017 Jun; 16(2): 130–139. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5428192/>. Accessed on 10/17/2021

## **How was Reaching Across Border Born?**

In 2018, Raiza Kolia, one of our co-founders, went on a two-week humanitarian mission to Lebanon. She returned a changed person. In fact, she felt that she could no longer continue to keep her corporate job in the USA and ignore the people she has met in the Bekaa Valley, in Lebanon. She believed that all her life's journey, degrees, training and expertise, skills as a therapist, and her organizational skills were in preparation for this moment. It was time for her to use all she knows to serve and make a difference in the lives of those in need. With funding from an organization that was already funding medical clinics in the Bekaa Valley, Raiza was given an opportunity to establish a Mental Health clinic.

One third of the Syrian refugees 1.5 million refugee in Lebanon live the Bekaa. With a small professional team of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, our clinic served an average of 7,000 beneficiary encounters each year. We offered psychiatric consultations and medication management, individual counseling, group counseling, group psycho-social support programs, and awareness and education programs on domestic violence, reproductive health, early marriage, and various mental health conditions.

Because of funding challenges, the organization who funded us, has decided to shift their priorities to only physical health services. This left a huge gap in the much-needed mental health services in our community in the Bekaa.

**Disbanding our services and abandoning our community was not an option for us and thus, with the support and encouragement of close friends and family, Reaching Across Borders (RAB) was born.**

## **Our Vision**

Humanitarian mental health services for vulnerable communities, by community members.

## **Our Mission**

Our mission is to focus on the Mental Health wellbeing and resilience-building of refugees, and displaced people, with the goal of prevention and effective use of scarce resources to achieve better Mental Health outcomes for this population.

We are committed to:

- a) Setting up clinics to promote Mental Health wellbeing among refugees and displaced people.
- b) Building capacity on the ground to provide Mental Health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services to refugees and displaced populations.
- c) Partnering with established non-profit organizations and institutions who are already embedded with and serving this population, to build their capacity for far-reaching Mental Health service delivery.

## Underlying Values

Our services are embedded in a set of values that animates our work. Those values include the worth and dignity of each person, human rights for all persons, the centrality of human relationships for all persons, and the importance of service to others.

## Our Goal

To be recognized as the gold standard for evidence-based mental health services to refugees and displaced communities.

## Our activities:

- **Provide evidence-based mental health interventions** to refugees and displaced people either directly or through partner organizations,
- **Build homegrown professional capacity**, by training local professionals so that services are provided to the community by their community members,
- **Prevent and mitigate the harmful effects of** violence, forced migration, environmental trauma and loss, and the scarcity of health providers, medicine, and other professional resources,
- **Strive to make Mental Health services accessible** to refugees and displaced communities, where they find themselves, and
- **Educate and advocate that mental health services** are part of basic needs and human rights for refugee communities, families, and individuals.
- **Be known as the organization to partner with for evidence-based quality** Mental Health services and measurable outcomes.
- **Manage a centralized data repository, for data collection**, management, and impact analysis,
- **Contribute to the knowledgebase** of Mental Health professional practice with refugee and displaced people by publishing our interventions, outcomes, and impact.
- **Partner with a US-based academic institution, to develop** a recognized certificate program for refugees and displaced people in social work so that we built professional capacity within this population.
- **Build long-term donor relationships.**