

IMISCOE

24th Annual IMISCOE Conference, Brussels 6-9 July 2027

CALL FOR PAPERS

From Recognition to Representation: Refugees and Refugee-led Organizations in Forced Migration Governance

The Standing Committee on Forced Migration and Refugees (SC-FMR) proposes a workshop on “From Recognition to Representation: Refugees and Refugee-Led Organisations in Forced Migration Governance,” coordinated by Hidayet Sıddıkoğlu, Aminath Nisha Zadhly, and Elena Haberskey. Within the SC-FMR, forced migration and refugees are defined in an inclusive sense, covering a wide range of forms of movement as well as immobility.

In recent years, the role of refugees and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) has been increasingly discussed by scholars and practitioners across academic and policy domains as central to the forced migration and refugee field — from advancing understanding of displacement experiences and migration trajectories (Erdilmen, Milner and Bradley 2025), to delivering sociopsychological support to refugees (Pincock, Betts and Easton-Calabria 2020), to their representation in forced migration institutions and international organizations (Gidron and Easton-Calabria 2025), to informing policy advice for decision-makers in host societies (Şahin-Mencütek 2021; Harley and Hobbs 2020). Yet this growing discussion has not translated into actual recognition of their role or into enabling conditions on the ground. This gap is especially notable against the backdrop of the 2016 Grand Bargain, whose 'localisation turn' positioned RLOs as central actors in humanitarian response, yet with markedly uneven effects on their actual empowerment on the ground (Pincock, Betts and Easton-Calabria 2021). While refugees and RLOs increasingly serve as advisors or sit on advisory committees in a number of Global North countries, this formal presence has rarely translated into effective influence at the policy level, suggesting that recognition remains largely nominal rather than substantive. This limited role becomes even more diminished — or altogether absent — in major refugee-hosting countries of the Global South, such as Egypt, Pakistan, and Iran. Structural constraints further limit RLO activity in these and other countries, including registration restrictions, legal barriers to refugee-led activity, and limited engagement with RLOs by other actors, including UN agencies. These persistent constraints point to the need for further scholarly and policy attention to strengthening RLOs' standing within forced migration and refugee governance.

The Standing Committee on Forced Migration and Refugees (SC-FMR) at IMISCOE launched a series of Expert Panel Discussions with Refugee-led Organizations to address this gap between recognition and enabling conditions. The first panel was held on 15 June 2026, where RLOs from South America, Africa, and Europe discussed their contributions to forced migration and refugee-related research, and the challenges they frequently face in their routine activities. Building on the insights from this inaugural session, SC-FMR proposes the following workshop for the IMISCOE Annual Conference 2027 in Brussels: "From Recognition to

Representation: Refugees and Refugee-led Organizations in Forced Migration Governance." The panel aims to present a platform for refugees, representatives of refugee-led organizations, and international scholars researching the recognition and meaningful participation of refugees and refugee-led organizations in forced migration and refugee governance. Particularly, this panel aims to provide an opportunity for refugees and RLOs whose voices are less heard and who face legal and structural barriers to establishing their organizations, or are permitted only limited activity. The following are the key research questions that this workshop aims to address:

- How do lived experiences of refugees and RLOs inform policy advice for decision-makers?
- How do refugees and RLOs bridge on-the-ground experience and decision-making processes, and what challenges do they typically encounter in this role?
- What spaces and enabling conditions are available for refugees in the humanitarian field, in both displacement and host settings?
- What are the legal and structural constraints on RLOs operating in host societies, particularly in Global South countries with the largest displaced populations?
- How have the 2016 Grand Bargain and the shift towards localisation affected refugee-led organisations in practice, and what barriers continue to prevent these organisations from gaining meaningful influence?

If you are interested in joining this panel session as a speaker, kindly send us (hsiddikoglu@auaf.edu.af) a 250-word paper abstracts, including the names, affiliations and contact details of the author(s) by 21th of September.

References

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Gidron, Y. and Easton-Calabria, E. (2025) 'Risk-taking, risk-making: How uncertainty shapes refugee-led organisations' engagement with international agencies', *The Journal of Development Studies*, pp. 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2025.2581602>

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Pincock, K., Betts, A. and Easton-Calabria, E. (2021) 'The rhetoric and reality of localisation: Refugee-led organisations in humanitarian governance', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 57(5), pp. 719–734. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2020.1802010>

Şahin-Mencütek, Z. (2021) 'Refugee community organisations: Capabilities, interactions and limitations', *Third World Quarterly*, 42(1), pp. 181–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1791070>