

IRAP

International Refugee
Assistance Project

2020 REPORT TO SUPPORTERS



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Note: The content of this Report is current as of October 2020.
For the security and privacy of clients, some of the names in
this Report have been altered or omitted.

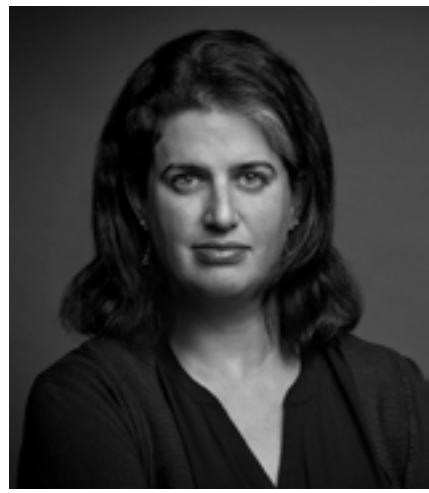
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Photo Credit: UNICEF Ethiopia

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



“

...IN SPITE OF ALL WE ARE WEATHERING AS A WORLD, I FEEL PROFOUNDLY INSPIRED BY OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS TOGETHER OVER THE PAST YEAR.

”

Dear IRAP Community,

Every year feels like a watershed year, but this year has been truly extraordinary. It has been exceptionally challenging, with politicized discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers, protests against police brutality and racial injustice, the global COVID-19 pandemic, and an economic recession the likes of which we have not seen since the Great Depression. As the need for compassion and daring solutions to global inequity becomes ever more glaring, governments around the world are dismantling pathways for refugee resettlement, rejecting the people and values many of them once championed. Yet in spite of all that we are weathering as a world, I feel profoundly inspired by our accomplishments together over the past year.

Our remote legal aid model has proven particularly well-suited for times of quarantine. Although we cannot meet as an organization to do our work in person, we continue to be able to serve our clients, fight for global refugee rights, and enable as many people as possible to reach safety from our living rooms, kitchen tables, and basements. It has been an honor to be able to continue this important work in such trying circumstances.

IRAP is growing, strategically scaling our work, and innovating to protect the rights of forced migrants. As we expand our programming, direct legal services remain our bedrock. Our personal engagement with clients enables us to identify common legal barriers that displaced people face. We combine that firsthand knowledge with our technical legal expertise to advocate for systemic change in courts and the halls of legislatures, and are proud to have achieved significant, concrete victories on behalf of tens of thousands of displaced people seeking safety in the past year.

As traditional refugee resettlement opportunities dwindle, we are helping clients pursue alternative legal routes to safety, such as family reunification. We are excited to be collaborating with partners on family reunification projects in multiple regions around the world, and will be expanding our base of European operations in the coming year. In cooperation with partner organizations and our *pro bono* network, we are also developing new programs for the application of our model, such as our remote legal aid pilot project for asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border.

We have also started exploring the legal protocols surrounding climate migration, as climate change is widely recognized as a growing factor in human displacement but remains virtually unaddressed by the existing legal frameworks for refugees. And with major elections looming, we are developing advocacy and litigation strategies and new programming that will be adaptable to a range of political outcomes in the United States and elsewhere.

We are committed to continuing to advocate relentlessly, creatively, and effectively for everyone to have a safe place to call home. We are privileged to do this work every day and are grateful for our incredible community of supporters and advocates.

With gratitude,



Becca Heller
Executive Director
International Refugee Assistance Project

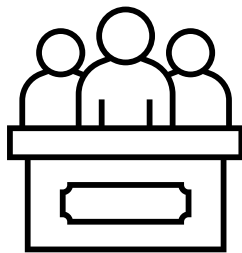


Photo Credit: EU/ECHO Pierre Prakash

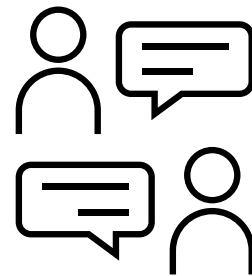
OUR IMPACT

The International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) has become a global leader in advocating for the world's most vulnerable displaced people.

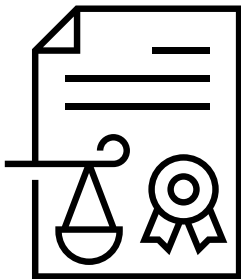
Since 2010, IRAP has:



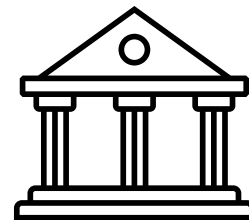
PROVIDED LEGAL
AID TO MORE THAN
30,000
INDIVIDUALS



ASSISTED MORE THAN
14,000
PEOPLE THROUGH OUR
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POWERED CHATBOT,
WHICH HELPS INDIVIDUALS
NAVIGATE REFUGEE
RESETTLEMENT AND
VISA OPTIONS



LED THE PASSAGE OF
12
PROVISIONS OF BIPARTISAN
U.S. CONGRESSIONAL
LEGISLATION, OPENING
AND IMPROVING PATHWAYS
TO SAFETY FOR OVER
173,620
PEOPLE



LEVERAGED THE COURTS
IN CASES THAT COULD
MAINTAIN PATHWAYS TO
SAFETY FOR MORE THAN
339,000
INDIVIDUALS

OUR RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic has been especially profound on forced migrants. The wide-ranging travel restrictions implemented in the wake of this public health crisis have posed significant challenges for our clients, as pathways to safety for refugees and other displaced people have been temporarily suspended. Under these circumstances, IRAP's innovative program model of remotely connecting people with critical legal resources is more vital than ever.

Since the onset of the pandemic, we have continued to advise our clients, process their cases, and advocate on their behalf, even amidst COVID-related restrictions. We immediately responded to the impact on our clients resulting from border closures, travel bans, and the suspension of various refugee and visa processes by monitoring which pathways to safety remained open and providing clients with timely information and legal counseling, with an emphasis on safety. We are also advocating in the U.S. Congress to extend all immigrant visa and background check validity periods and provide COVID-related benefits to refugees, and we are prepared to combat any attempts to exploit the pandemic to further curtail migrant and refugee rights.

At the same time, we worked to alleviate the immediate humanitarian impact of the COVID-19 crisis by providing vulnerable clients in urgent situations with emergency resources for food, medicine, shelter, and other necessities, and helping individuals access medical and mental health care. Clients in Jordan and Lebanon were acutely affected by the pandemic, as Jordan introduced one of the strictest lockdowns in the world, and Lebanon grappled with concurrent financial crises, extreme political instability, and the devastating impact of the explosions in Beirut. These conditions compounded existing food, shelter, health, and protection vulnerabilities, leaving many refugees in deeper poverty and uncertainty. IRAP teams in Amman, Jordan and Beirut, Lebanon collaborated with our extensive referral networks of local partners to help identify and assist numerous clients in highly insecure situations caused by the pandemic and these events.

Since the pandemic began, IRAP has provided financial assistance through our Emergency Client Support Fund to individuals and families in need. One of the recipients was the family of a client who survived sexual and gender-based violence. Unable to find work during the crisis, the family of five faced eviction, but thanks to our supporters who generously contributed to the Fund, this family was able to cover their rent payments and remain safely in their home.

As the pandemic continues, the long-term effects for forced migrants are still unknown. IRAP remains steadfast in our commitment to adapt to the rapidly changing global landscape in order to meet our clients' needs and address the multifaceted challenges of the current climate.

“

...IRAP'S INNOVATIVE PROGRAM MODEL OF REMOTELY CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH CRITICAL LEGAL RESOURCES IS MORE VITAL THAN EVER.

”

REUNITING SEPARATED FAMILIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Our legal team has delivered direct legal assistance to more than 6,300 individuals over the past year. Of these, nearly 900 were separated family members seeking reunification.

Family reunification has emerged as a key route to safety for migrants at a time when traditional resettlement opportunities are shrinking. Family reunification programs have a large role to play in providing safe passage for hundreds of thousands of highly vulnerable refugees, including more than 150,000 unaccompanied refugee children around the world.

However, many refugees eligible for these programs do not have access to the legal aid they need to successfully navigate the highly bureaucratic processes that could reunite them with their loved ones. There is a clear need to identify and assist refugees seeking family reunification. Together with a consortium of international organizations, grassroots partners, and *pro bono* attorneys, we launched timely and impactful programs to help reunite separated families around the globe.



CLIENT STORY: GLORIA*



Gloria*, a Congolese mother living as an asylum seeker in Tunisia with her minor daughter, has been separated from her daughter's father for seven years. He had fled the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to grave political persecution and was recognized as a refugee in France. The clients' first family reunification application to be reunited in France was rejected unlawfully on the basis that Gloria and her partner are not formally married, even though French law allows for unmarried partners in stable relationships to reunite with their minor children.

IRAP assisted the couple in filing a new family reunification application with specific legal arguments about why the previous decision was unlawful, violating the right to family unity and the best interest of the child. We are prepared to appeal and litigate the case if it is rejected again.

**Name has been changed to protect her identity*



Photo Credit: © EU/CHO

> FAMILY REUNIFICATION IN EUROPE

In Greece, where thousands of arriving refugees languish in deteriorating conditions, we partnered with Equal Rights Beyond Borders to create a successful pilot program that delivers legal aid to refugees seeking to reunite with relatives in Europe. Through this project, our team has provided family reunification assistance on **over 300 cases representing unaccompanied refugee children and at-risk adults** in Athens and Chios. In collaboration with Equal Rights Beyond Borders and other groups, we are also successfully litigating unlawful rejections of family reunification claims that are keeping families apart. To date, we have won 57 lawsuits against rejections of such claims, potentially bringing thousands of families one step closer to being together.

In addition to our work in Greece, IRAP developed a pilot project with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and RefugePoint to help unaccompanied children at risk in Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, and Libya reunite with family members in the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. So far, we have assisted **162** refugees through this program and identified **896** additional individuals who may be eligible for family reunification programs and in need of legal assistance. We are planning to expand the project to Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Israel this year.

> FAMILY REUNIFICATION IN THE UNITED STATES

There are hundreds of thousands of family reunification slots in the United States every year and refugees applying for immediate family members do not have to wait for visas to become available, yet this pathway has been underutilized. Thanks to our 2017 court victory over the refugee ban in the case *JFS v. Trump*, the United States resumed refugee family reunification processing globally. IRAP's legal team has worked with our **30** law school chapters and over **100** outreach partners including resettlement agencies, law firms, and community-based organizations to develop legal clinics and referral networks to screen specifically for eligible family reunification cases. Since the program's inception, we have hosted several family reunification clinics in the United States, assisting over **150 individuals**.

We also followed up on the court victory we won with co-counsel, Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP, which could allow an estimated **2,700** at-risk Central American children to reunite with their families in the United States. We continued our outreach campaign to families who can benefit from this win, including by establishing a hotline with the International Rescue Committee for individuals to receive information on how they can bring their family members to the United States. The hotline has responded to **approximately 1,000** calls since September 2019. In partnership with the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, Latin American law firms, and several *pro bono* partners, we also prepared pamphlets for distribution in Central America to reach as many families as possible with this information. To date, despite obstacles posed by COVID-19 travel restrictions, **338** beneficiaries of the program traveled to the United States and an additional **653** have been cleared for travel.

SAFEGUARDING U.S. RESETTLEMENT

Over the past year, our litigation team won court victories that opened and expedited pathways to safety for over approximately 42,000 individuals.

Even in the face of growing anti-refugee and anti-immigrant policies in the United States, IRAP's strategic litigation and systemic advocacy continue to achieve key wins to protect migrant rights and help them reach safety.

> MAINTAINING RESETTLEMENT IN ALL 50 STATES

In response to the September 2019 executive order granting state and local officials unprecedented power to veto refugee resettlement in their jurisdictions, IRAP immediately filed the lawsuit, *HIAS v. Trump*, on behalf of three resettlement agencies, challenging the order as a violation of federal law that caused irreparable harm to refugees and the resettlement agencies that assist them.

We secured a major victory in this lawsuit in January 2020, when a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction blocking the order, allowing refugee resettlement to continue in all U.S. states. This decision is a victory not only for refugees seeking safety in the United States, but also for resettlement agencies and local communities around the country that welcome them.

To complement the lawsuit, IRAP led an advocacy campaign urging state and local officials to publicly support refugee resettlement. Together with partners at Amnesty International, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and HIAS, IRAP's policy team collected over 400 signatures from officials in 46 states for a bipartisan letter sent to President Trump, affirming their commitment to welcoming refugees in their communities. In this year's campaign, IRAP obtained over 560 signatures from all 50 states and will continue to defend this success in the courts.



Photo Credit: UN Photo/Mark Garten

> HISTORIC WIN TO HELP HUNDREDS OF REFUGEES REACH SAFETY

As lead counsel in *JFS v. Trump*, together with the National Immigration Law Center; Lauren Aguiar, Mollie M. Kornreich, and Abigail Sheehan Davis; Perkins Coie; and HIAS, we secured an injunction against the October 2017 refugee ban that ordered refugee processing, including family reunification processing, to resume. In February 2020, we reached a major settlement in this case. The government agreed to expedite the processing of refugees impacted by the ban, meaning that more than **300 individuals** who were in the final stages of their resettlement process when the ban was announced will finally receive decisions on their cases. As a result of this settlement, many individuals who were left in limbo after the ban finally will be able to reach safety and reunite with loved ones in the United States.



Photo Credit: Eric Kruszewski/HIAS

CLIENT STORY: JANE DOE



In 2017, IRAP began working with Jane Doe, a transgender Egyptian woman facing severe harassment and violence in her home country, including multiple attempted rapes, death threats, and a visit by the state police over her gender identity. IRAP's legal team successfully applied for her case to be expedited for resettlement to the United States because she was at high risk, but her case stalled when the Trump Administration issued the October 2017 refugee ban. IRAP's litigation team then represented her as one of many individual plaintiffs in *JFS v. Trump*, which challenged the ban. Immediately after the settlement of *JFS v. Trump*, Jane Doe's case began moving forward again and she traveled to the United States in May 2020. She is now happily settling in and says: "The United States and IRAP gave me the peace between my body and my soul."

PROTECTING OUR WARTIME ALLIES

Over the past year, our policy team helped lead the passage of provisions of congressional legislation that created visas for approximately 32,000 Afghans and their families living in danger because of their service to the U.S. military.

IRAP seeks to maintain and expand existing programs to fulfill our commitments to Iraqi and Afghan allies who provide life-saving assistance to the United States in their home countries. Many allies and their families face life-threatening danger as a result of their service, and we are committed to ensuring they have access to pathways to safety.

> STRATEGIC LITIGATION TO BRING ALLIES TO SAFETY



Photo Credit: Milki Jourdan

IRAP and co-counsel, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, achieved an unprecedented win in our case, *Afghan and Iraqi Allies v. Pompeo*, on behalf of Afghan and Iraqi allies whose Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applications had been egregiously delayed. In September 2019, the judge ruled that the lengthy waits in SIV application processing, often lasting years, were unlawful and ordered the government to propose a plan to expeditiously complete all delayed SIV applications that have been pending in the government's control for more than nine months.

In June 2020, the court approved a plan jointly submitted by the government and IRAP to process approximately **10,000 delayed applications** of class members in our case. IRAP is working with *pro bono* volunteers from Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP and other firms to provide timely legal aid to applicants whose cases will be reviewed in order to ensure as many applications as possible are approved. This could bring thousands of trusted U.S. allies and their families one step closer to reaching safety in the United States.

> UPHOLDING PROMISED PROTECTIONS TO U.S. ALLIES THROUGH ADVOCACY

Our policy team continues to advocate for legislation to create protections and pathways to safety for endangered U.S.-affiliated allies. Our work in Fiscal Year 2020 was especially important as the U.S. government signed a peace agreement with the Taliban and announced a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in February.

In addition, Iraqi allies, who are no longer eligible to apply for the SIV program, but can instead apply for the Iraqi Direct Access Program for resettlement, continue to face numerous challenges to reaching safe haven, in particular due to restrictions on refugee resettlement and processing delays. IRAP has organized bipartisan congressional letters that demonstrate concern about the low levels of U.S.-affiliated Iraqis being admitted to the United States and led efforts to raise public awareness about decreased admissions of Iraqi and Afghan wartime partners.

The plight of Iraqis and Afghans was also a central issue during IRAP's annual Advocacy Day for members of IRAP's law school chapters. In February, we welcomed 60 students from all across the United States to Capitol Hill. Students held 50 meetings with congressional offices — setting a record for the most legislators engaged in a single IRAP Advocacy Day!

CLIENT STORY: FAWAD



One of the named plaintiffs in our SIV lawsuit, Fawad, has already received a positive decision in his case. After the Taliban violently attacked his brother in a case of mistaken identity, Fawad fled his home village and applied for an SIV. He had been in hiding for over three years, unable to return home, where the Taliban continued to question his family about his whereabouts and threaten them because of his work for the U.S. government. Thanks to the hard work of his dedicated *pro bono* team, made up of law students from CUNY's IRAP chapter and lawyers at Kirkland & Ellis LLP, he arrived safely in the United States in February 2020.

Photo Credit: US Marine Corps.



WHAT'S NEXT FOR IRAP?



> DEFENDING ASYLUM SEEKERS AT THE SOUTHERN BORDER AND ELSEWHERE

IRAP is working to protect the integrity of the U.S. asylum system, particularly at the U.S.-Mexico border, which remains a flashpoint in the U.S. immigration debate and the current administration's policies. Several new policies, rules, and guidelines have dramatically reduced individuals' ability to seek asylum in the United States. Together with numerous partners, IRAP is developing strategic legal and policy solutions to mount a coordinated response to these injustices. For example, in July 2020, IRAP, as lead counsel alongside the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project and Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, filed a complaint challenging the Trump Administration's continued efforts to dismantle the asylum system through two rules that would limit the ability of asylum seekers to work legally in the United States while they wait for decisions on their asylum claims. With our partner, RAICES, we are also continuing our lawsuit to challenge harmful rule changes that give asylum officers broader discretion to deport asylum seekers during the credible fear interview process. IRAP is also launching a pilot program to provide remote legal aid to highly vulnerable asylum seekers, including those with mental and physical disabilities, at the El Paso-Juárez border in partnership with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC). This program will facilitate the delivery of legal services to a region with a severe lack of access to counsel, demonstrating the potential for replication in other environments where legal representation for asylum seekers is largely unavailable. Further, this program will allow us to identify issues in the asylum process ripe for litigation.

Photo Credit: USAID Guatemala

> ADDRESSING CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT

Environmental migrants make up one of the fastest growing displaced populations on the planet. Despite broad agreement about the seriousness and urgency of this issue, national and global systems for the orderly protection of displaced people remain unprepared to deal with climate-related migration. Currently, the legal definition of a “refugee” is often interpreted to exclude climate-related displacement, and almost no legal protocols focus on serving people displaced by climate change. Given IRAP’s expertise in refugee law and policy, we are collaborating with environmental organizations to develop a multi-sectoral strategy to advocate for better protections, rights, and safe resettlement opportunities for those impacted by climate displacement.



Photo Credit: UN Women / Joe Saade

> LOOKING AHEAD: LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN 2020 & BEYOND

As we look toward the coming year, we are preparing for a number of potential shifts in global leadership. Upcoming elections in the United States and Germany, as well as changes to the leadership of the United Nations, may significantly alter the global landscape for forced migrants and refugees. We are assiduously preparing plans for a number of geopolitical outcomes, and are confident that many of our strategies (including a focus on litigation and global family reunification) will be vitally important regardless of political outcomes in various countries. New program areas, such as climate migration legal interventions and our pilot project on the U.S.-Mexican border, will also be critical regardless of who is in office. While we anticipate that specific strategies and narratives will shift in response to global events, our core programmatic areas will continue to challenge xenophobic policies and build out global pathways to safety in any geopolitical environment.

OUR SUPPORTERS

IRAP extends profound thanks to our generous supporters this past fiscal year — September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020.

\$100,000+

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University of Michigan Law School
University of Pennsylvania Law School
University of Southern California, Gould School of Law
University of Virginia School of Law
Yale Law School

> IRAP CHAPTER ENGAGEMENT

In January, the IRAP chapter at American University, Washington College of Law (WCL), held an LGBTQ+ Refugee Week, hosting a film screening, panel discussions on representing LGBTQ refugee clients, and a fundraiser for IRAP.

“

AT LAST YEAR'S IRAP NATIONAL STUDENT SUMMIT, OUR MEMBERS HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR FROM A TRANSGENDER REFUGEE FROM IRAQ WHOM IRAP HELPED RESETTLE TO THE UNITED STATES. WE REALIZED WE NEEDED TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT THE LEGAL INTRICACIES OF WORKING WITH LGBTQ+ REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS.

NOT ONLY DID WE SEE A TREMENDOUS TURNOUT AT OUR LGBTQ+ REFUGEE WEEK, BUT OUR CHAPTER ATTRACTED MORE INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERING WITH IRAP. LGBTQ+ REFUGEE WEEK RAISED OVER \$400, WHICH WE PROUDLY DONATED TO IRAP TO SUPPORT THE IMPORTANT WORK OF DEFENDING RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS AROUND THE WORLD.

”

— KHATIA MIKADZE
WCL IRAP MEMBER



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IRAP would like to thank the following law firms and corporate partners for their generous *pro bono* and in-kind assistance:

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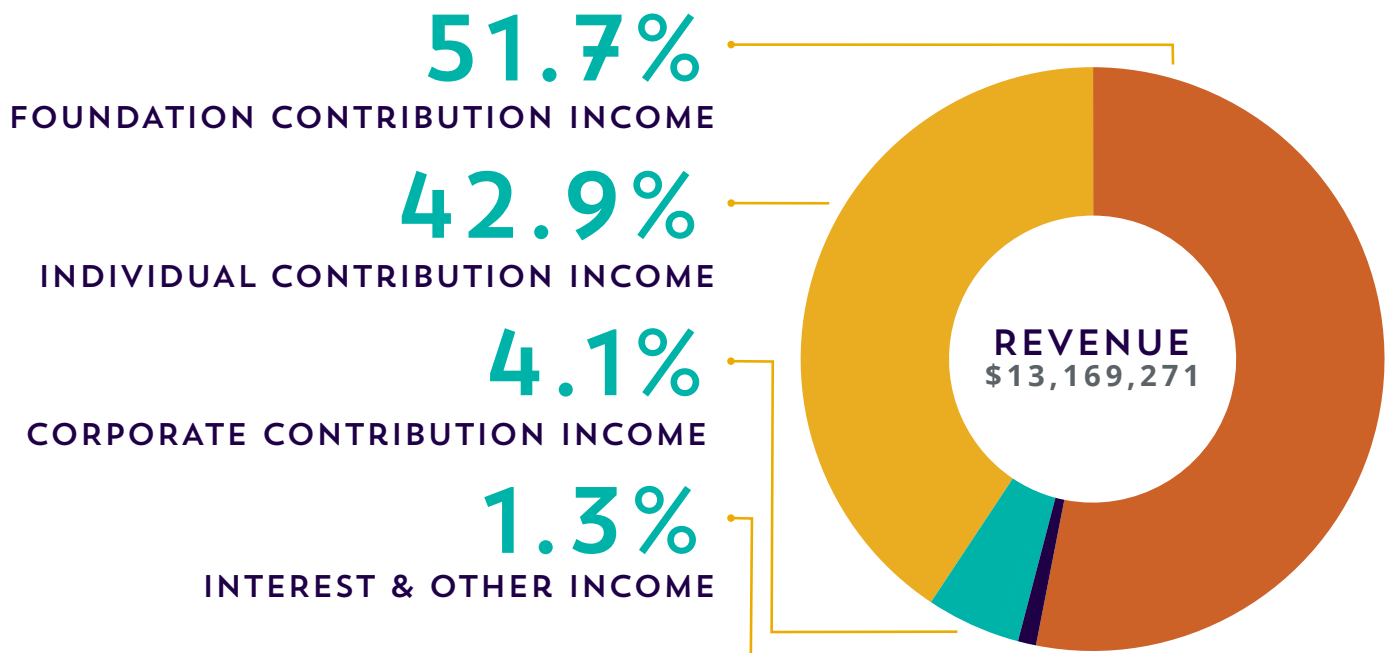
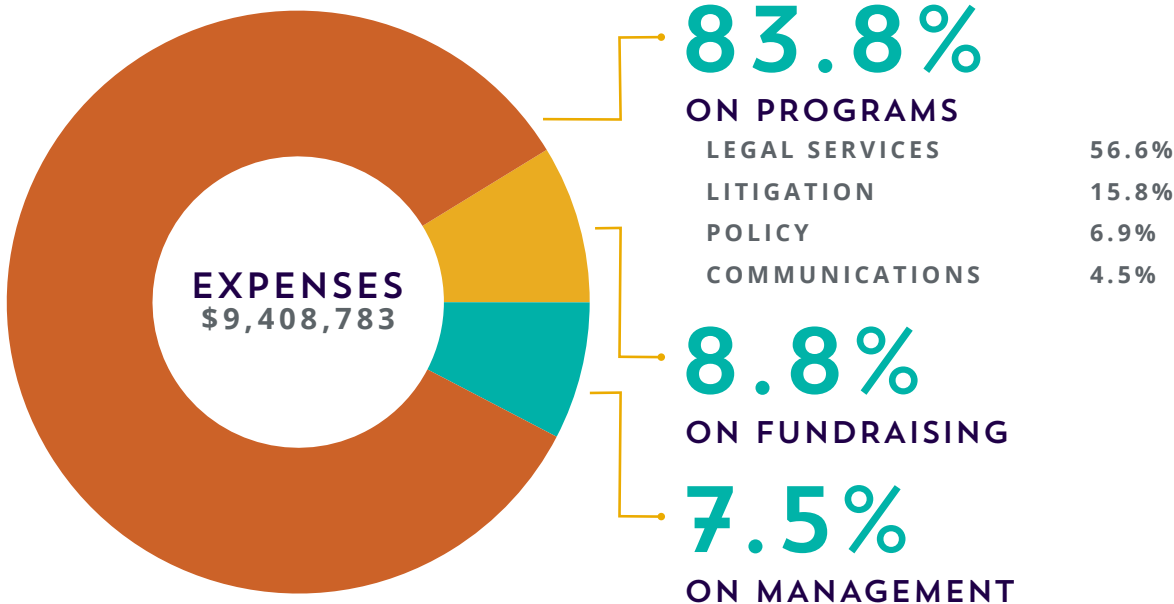
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IRAP, INC.'S 2020 FINANCIALS



The International Refugee Assistance Project is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to transparency and accountability. At the time of this report's publication, IRAP is undergoing our annual audit, to be completed in late 2020. As such, these graphs reflect unaudited financial numbers. Upon completion, IRAP will publish the independently audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending August 31, 2020, along with IRAP's 990 filings, on our website.

We are grateful for our generous supporters who make our life-saving work possible. Together, we will continue defending the rights of individuals who bravely flee their homes in search of lives free from violence and persecution, and protecting those at risk through legal advocacy.

IRAP

International Refugee
Assistance Project

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