







The Azadi Project



# Women Leaders Beyond Borders 2023







#### THE AZADI PROJECT



WOMEN LEADERS BEYOND BORDERS 2023



As we step into our fifth year, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey that has brought us to this moment. It fills me with immense pride and joy to witness the impact that Azadi has made and continues to make in the lives of individuals and communities through our programs. What started as a field reporter's idea is now a global initiative that has positively impacted over 6,000 lives across the global south. During my 2015-17 reporting on the mass migration from the Middle East to Europe, I was grateful to be let into the lives of women refugees and for them to share their stories with me. In 2018, The Azadi Project was founded with the idea of giving displaced and marginalized women the power to control their narratives.

Today our flagship project, The Azadi Leadership Program in partnership with Libra Philanthropies stands as a testament to our commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable future. It serves as a launch career pad for talented minds from marginalized backgrounds, providing them with the tools, knowledge, and mentorship they need to rise above their circumstances. We are humbled and thrilled witnessing the transformation of these individuals, and watching them grow into confident leaders giving back to their communities, has been a source of boundless inspiration.

This past year has been nothing short of remarkable. We took bold steps to address critical issues that are often overlooked or stigmatized in our society. This year we have focused our work in India specifically. From breaking down taboos surrounding menstruation to fostering conversations about gender neutrality and equality, we ventured into more pressing issues seen in our society. Our team worked tirelessly, organizing workshops, seminars, and campaigns that empowered individuals to take charge of their health and well-being.

The Azadi Project embodies the very spirit of solidarity by working hand-in-hand with those who are driven from their homes by persecution, environmental upheaval, and myriad other tribulations. But our pursuit is incomplete without collaborating with organizations that also strive toward creating powerful narratives. To this effect, we partnered with Asia Society India Center to develop a series 'Land, Borders and People' and with Refugees International showcasing the life of Rohingya refugees in India in a documentary called 'Displaced and Detained- Rohingya In India' followed by a report 'Shadow of A Refuge: Rohingya Refugees in India.

The heart of our organization lies in the belief that change is not only possible, but it is also inevitable when driven by passionate individuals - women and youth leaders with a shared vision. We've seen firsthand the power of collective action, as our community has come together to challenge norms and forge new paths towards progress.

As I look ahead, I am filled with hope and anticipation for the future. There is still much work to be done, and we are more determined than ever to push the boundaries of what is achievable. We aspire to reach even more communities, touch more lives, and instill a sense of agency in individuals who often miss out on opportunities due to oppression.

Finally, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated team, our partners, and everyone who has supported us on this journey. Your unwavering commitment has been the driving force behind our success. Here's to another year of growth, learning, and creating a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

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### **About Us**

Winner of the Atlantic Council's 2020 Distinguished Leadership Awards, The Azadi Project provides leadership skills and psychosocial support to women and out from some of the world's most conflict-affected regions and marginalized communities in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Azadi has impacted the lives of more than 6000 migrant women and its programs have benefited displaced women from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Myanmar, Niger, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen. Azadi's program participants emerge as women leaders bringing positive change in their communities as well. Azadi is backed by advisors including experts with extensive knowledge of refugee rights, women's rights, and mental health issues.



#### **Program Partner/s**



**DANISH SIDDIQUI** 

FOUNDATION

#### **Event Partners:**

















## Team



**Priyali Sur**Founder & Executive Director



Shreyas Jayakumar

Communications Director



**Chaity Puja Sarkar** Social Media Manager



**Ankita Dan** Program Assistant



**Kaynat Salmani**Program Manager

#### Mission

Our mission is to empower refugee, migrant, and marginalized women and girls to unleash their true potential and transform them into community leaders. We want to create a career launchpad and platform for leadership for marginalized youth. We do this by providing leadership and livelihood skills along with psychosocial support in safe spaces.



#### **Vision**

Azadi envisions a world where women from refugee and marginalized communities can access their rights universally: and are not limited by geographical borders, or their race, religion, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation.

# **Approach**

We create spaces for marginalized women and youth to facilitate leadership and professional skills. Our unique community-based model was created to meet the various challenges faced by women from refugee and marginalized communities. Our programs build resilience and confidence to transform women refugees into leaders and agents of change, enabling them to identify solutions to mental health and gender equity issues and implement them in their community.







#### **Our Work**

#### **Psychosocial Support**

Providing essential mental health and emotional assistance to individuals within migrant communities, addressing the psychological impact of migration, conflict, and displacement. Offering specialized support and interventions to address and alleviate the trauma resulting from experiences of conflict.





#### **Professional Skills**

Implementing skill development programs aimed at equipping marginalized youth and women with practical skills, thereby enhancing their employability and providing pathways to economic independence.

#### Awareness Against Gender Based Violence

Conducting awareness programs and advocacy initiatives to address gender-based violence, with a particular emphasis on empowering women within migrant communities and creating a safe and supportive environment.



#### Maternal and Child Health Awareness

Promoting awareness and education on maternal and child health issues within migrant communities, ensuring access to essential healthcare resources, and fostering a healthy environment for mothers and children.



The Azadi Project partnered with Ummid Ki Udan in New Delhi to carry out a storytelling, leadership, and psychosocial support program (PSS).



The Azadi Project's PSS program hosted weekly psychosocial support sessions conducted by a certified Ukrainian therapist in a safe space in the center of Krakow to aid refugee women who had fled to Poland.

In June 2022, we also partnered with the Nobel Women's Initiative to host three women Nobel laureates in Poland on World Refugee Day to raise awareness about the condition of Ukrainian women refugees and local feminist organizations.



2021

The Azadi Project partnered with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Becky's Bathhouse to provide refugee families with targeted interventions to protect their health during the pandemic in Moria, Greece. Refugees were sensitized on COVID-19 hygiene management and hygiene products were distributed during the lockdown. The Azadi Project also trained and equipped the team of volunteers for this COVID-19 and menstruation hygiene management campaign in the Moria camp.

2019

2018

### **- 2022**



The Azadi Project conducted a six-month virtual storytelling program to train members of the Peace Track Initiative (PTI), a foundation that aims at localizing and feminizing the peace process through promoting inclusion and enhancing feminist knowledge leadership in the Middle East and North Africa with a focus on Yemen.



The Azadi Project partnered with the Rokeya Foundation in Bangladesh to carry out a storytelling, leadership, and psychosocial support program from September 2021 to December 2021. A total of 100 beneficiaries participated in the program in Cox's Bazar refugee camp.



The Azadi Project, in partnership with LeanIn.Org and with the support of Sheryl Sandberg, implemented the first Lean In Circles for refugee women on International Women's Day 2021 in the Moria Refugee Camp in Lesvos

· 2020



Workshop on multimedia storytelling and community radio for migrants in Niamey



Workshop on digital skills: multimedia storytelling and video production for refugee women. The first class of Azadi participants were seven extraordinary women from Afghanistan, Iran and Palestine.



The Azadi Project has impacted and supported refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar, Niger, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen. In India, we have worked with several marginalized communities. In essence, Azadi is dedicated to creating a holistic support system that addresses the diverse needs of migrant populations, spanning mental health, gender empowerment, skill development, and healthcare awareness. Through these initiatives, we strive to contribute to the overall well-being and resilience of the communities we serve.

08

150+

6,000+

Marginalized
Communities Reached

Psychosocial Support Session

Beneficiaries Impacted

09

Azadi Leaders Supported 07

Community Projects

650+

Beneficiaries From Local Communities

## Our Work In 2023:

# The Azadi Leadership Program

The Azadi Leadership Program was launched in early 2023 by The Azadi Project in partnership with Libra Group Social Responsibility. The Program aims to provide employability and leadership skills to women and youth from refugee and marginalized communities who face intersectional biases and be a career springboard by providing them with internship/employment opportunities in the industry of their choice.

Over the years, the program hopes to contribute to having a higher representation of women in the global workforce while nurturing them to become community leaders who inspire and encourage more participation of marginalized women and youth in the skilled labor workforce in India and globally.

The Azadi Leadership Program has three focus areas – employability skills, leadership skills, and internship opportunities. The Azadi Leaders are trained by experts and industry leaders. Currently, they're working on individual social projects as part of the program to create a sustainable impact in their communities.

Towards the end of the program, each leader gets to work on a professional affiliation/internship with corporate, non-profit, and public sector organizations. The on-the-job experience provides training, mentorship, and support to each participant including a stipend.



Leadership Skills



Employability Skills



3-Month Internship



Community Projects







## Impact of Azadi Leadership Program



Guidehouse Review

92%

Participants reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that they learned a new skill across all training sessions. Participants reported learning a new skill after every training session.

81%

Participants indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in their ability to apply the skills learned in the training session in a professional setting.



An important aspect of the Azadi Leadership Program included training sessions by sector experts from across the world. Here are some over scores **out of 5**:

4.52

Training Session Environment Comfortability

4.33

**Training Session Meeting Needs** 



4.52

**Training Session Enjoyment** 

4.14

**Skilled Learned** 



























#### **Internships**

To ensure our leaders are ready for a professional work environment and gain valuable experience, we facilitate internships for a period of three months with premier organizations. The first cohort was placed in reputed national and international organizations.





Siddhi Joshi at Asia Society India Center







<u>Dalberg</u>

Pragya Sikka at Dalberg Consulting



Erish E and Muskan Verma at Aam Aadmi Party, Government of Delhi











Aylam Sheikh and Shivani Singhal at The Quint and The Quint Hindi (media house)



Tahera Safe and Rauti Hmar at Jesuit Refugee Service

## **Community Projects**

Paint Our Stories: With a powerful blend of art, inclusivity, and healing, Erish and Siddhi are building a vibrant community, a place where individuals can connect, share experiences, and find solace in each other. Together, they aim to create a powerful network of support, offering guidance, empathy, and understanding.

This effort is an ode to resilience, a testament to the strength within each and every one of us. It's time to shatter stereotypes, challenge norms, and celebrate the beauty of our diverse identities.





Psychosocial Support for Refugees. This project was specifically designed to meet the unique needs of refugee women and young adults, providing essential support to ensure their safety and well-being during the challenges of displacement.

As an important component of this initiative, a mental health and wellness session was conducted, which included an expert who provided invaluable guidance on dealing with the mental health challenges that often come with such a difficult situation.



**Educational Awareness Among Religious** Minorities. At a slum in Delhi, this project was dedicated to creating awareness opportunities for education within the Muslim community. The objective was to introduce activities that not only promote education but also nurture essential skills. accordingly, a workshop was conducted highlighting how easily available materials can be used to facilitate basic education. These activities not only promise to enhance the learning experience but also contribute to sustainable solutions to the educational challenges of this community.







# **Community Projects**



Mental Health Awareness around Puberty. This project supported girls and addressed the issue of mental health during menstruation. Due to a lack of access to proper knowledge and support systems, many girls and women face difficulties in effectively managing these challenges. Coupled with social taboos, misinformation, and stigma surrounding menstruation, these factors affect their mental health, resulting in feelings of anxiety, irritability, and isolation.

To combat these issues, the project includes a range of holistic interventions, such as Yoga for Pain Relief, Music and Art Therapy, as well as sessions with mental health experts and gynecologists. This provided a well-rounded approach to supporting the mental and physical well-being of menstruating people.





Campus Allies. This Community Project aims for the prevention and redressal of sexual harassment for all college students of all genders by conducting workshops and engaging in a dialogue on identifying sexual harassment and assault, Awareness of PoSH law on college and university campuses, and how to be effective allies to victims and survivors.

With it's wide scope, this project hopes to create a space for survivors and create more dialogue on sensitive issues related to sexual harassment in higher education establishments across India





Laal Lahar: Project Bloom In Red is a one-ofinitiative aimed at addressing a-kind menstrual hygiene and gendered environmental sustainability concerns among marginalized individuals in the National Capital Region of India. The project focuses on democratizing access to menstrual raising products, awareness menstruation, bursting common myths, and normalizing conversations about periods.

Period poverty affects countless individuals, limiting their opportunities and perpetuating stigma and shame. This project has started a ripple of sustainable conversations on menstrual health

# **Community Projects**

#### First-aid Training and Certification session

The First Aid Training Program for Women Leaders included a 'Training of the Trainer' (ToT) Model. In this model, 10 local leaders, all of them women from the refugee community, committed themselves to undertaking a full day, 9 hours intensive First Aid Training Certificate Course. In addition, 2 Azadi members also underwent the course with the refugee women leaders.

took place through a paid course collaboration between The Azadi Project and the First Aid Training Institute 24x7 Medical Service, India. One community member volunteered to give us the space. The training was held on Tuesday, December 5th, 2023, from 10 am-3:30 pm, and included a full day of hands-on practice. The course was taught in English and Hindi and cost 1200 INR per participant (14.5\$). The leaders committed to teaching the rest of the women in the community basic first aid knowledge in a practical simplified way and training them both in theory and practice. After course completion and community training, each participant received a medical First Aid kit that they can use henceforth in case of emergencies and for further training



















This session was sponsored jointly by The Azadi Project and by the generous support of Mr. Olivier Vandercasteele.

# Our Work In 2023:

# Shadow of Refuge: Rohingya Refugees in India

Our report written by Priyali Sur and Daniel P. Sullivan from **Refugees International** recounts the living conditions, detention, misinformation, and education crises faced by Rohingya refugees in India. The Azadi Project and Refugees International bear witness to the experiences of Rohingya living in India and call for action.

"Right-wing agitators have regularly referred to Rohingya as "terrorists", and political leaders, including the head of Modi's Hindu nationalist party referred to Rohingya as "infiltrators" and "termites" and threatened to throw them into the Bay of Bengal."

Priyali Sur, Displaced and Detained 2023

Displaced and Detained - Rohingya in India

Displaced and Detained – Rohingya in India, a short documentary by The Azadi Project and Refugees International, bears witness to the experiences of Rohingya living in India and calls for action.











Scan to read the full report

# Displaced and Detained

One of the major challenges faced by the Rohingya refugees in India is detention. The Azadi Project in partnership with **Refugees International** created a short documentary that bears witness to the everyday struggle of the community.

# Lands, Borders and People

Lands, Borders and People, a four-part set of interactive learning modules that took place over June and July 2023 unpacked an important and relevant contemporary issue that affect nations and communities across the world: migration, displacement, and refugees.

In each session, a panel of experts discussed and examined aspects of this topic in detail, focusing on the legal, social, economic, and cultural specificities of South Asia, with an engaged audience of stakeholders working in this sector human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, NGOs, and others. This series intended to create an open platform where we can raise awareness about and build an understanding of refugee issues in one of the largest regions affected by this human emergency in the world.

Collaborating with Asia Society whose mission is to bring together diverse perspectives on modern Asia to cultivate a nuanced understanding of Asia-Pacific affairs has been an honor. We believe that a shared and collaborative approach to addressing challenges and finding solutions together is the only way forward.

"We want to work together...
governments will come and go,
we need people-to-people
contact".

Prof. Aqdas Afsal, Professor Economics at Habib University











#### Azadi Talks

Azadi Talks is a platform conceptualized and facilitated by The Azadi Project to facilitate open conversation. It is a space for industry experts to share their views on gender justice, migration rights, human rights, mental health, and more.

Currently, we conduct these short, virtual sessions on Instagram and Zoom. In the past 1 year, we have conducted 10 sessions with experts addressing gender rights, policy, forced migration, trafficking, and representation.

Some of Azadi Talks' previous guests include Ruchira Gupta (activist and author), Atika Chohan (screenwriter of movies like Chappak), Sabika Abbas (poet and activist), Amrita Tripathi (feminist, journalist and mental health activist), Pari Saikia (journalist and activist) Pallibi Ghosh (activist against human trafficking), Namita Bhandare (senior journalist and womens' news editor) and Sunita Vishwanath (founder of Hindus for Human Rights).

### Emergency Mental Health Fund for Displaced Women

In the heart of Azadi's mission lies an urgent call —the silent yet pervasive need for mental health support echoing through the displaced migrant communities we serve. Our work in Delhi has revealed a stark reality: accessible resources for urgent mental health needs are scarce or non-existent, leaving displaced communities grappling in the shadows.

Among the most vulnerable are at-risk women, their struggles compounded by the weight of financial insecurity, intimate-partner violence, and the extreme poverty they live in. This renders them even more fragile and vulnerable to the severe consequences of untreated mental health illnesses.

















Our Emergency Mental Health Fund for Displaced Women, completely made of funds or support from donations will pay for counseling sessions for the most at-risk women living in Delhi's displaced communities.

Currently, this intervention is able to full support the treatment and counseling sessions of an at-risk mother. Each counseling session of which she is in urgent need costs 1,500- 2000 INR (19 USD).



## Rethinking Migration Azadi to Coexist

"Rethinking Migration: Azadi to Coexist" a two-day event, organized by The Azadi Project and Rethinking Refugees, concluded on a high note on the 4th of November at Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi. Over two days, the event brought together thought leaders, activists, artists, migrants, students, photographers, and changemakers to delve into critical issues surrounding forced displacement and migration.

The event garnered significant attention and participation, drawing a diverse audience from various walks of life. It was a deep dive into various issues of forced displacement set in the Asian context with some reflections. The highlight of the event was the Changemaker Awards. Haritha John, journalist from The News Minute shared the Youth Changemaker award with Chandrani Sinha, a climate journalist for their reporting on migration and displacement. Yasmin Mirza, a Rohingya refugee woman from Hyderabad was awarded the Sustainable Changemaker award for counseling refugee women on child marriage and SGBV (sexual gender-based violence) and Olivier Vandecasteele, a Belgian humanitarian worker who was sentenced in Iran for 40 years and kept in isolation for 14 months was awarded the Long Time Changemaker Award for his decades of work with refugees including in India.

Martine Aamdal Bottheim, the Deputy Chief of Mission of Norway in India inaugurated the event which opened with a photo exhibition in honor of Danish Siddiqui, a two-time Pulitzerwinning photojournalist who photographed the movement of people during conflict, climate change, and COVID-19. While Delhi's AQI crossed 600 on the meter, the panel on climatechange-induced migration seemed relevant than ever. Reena Gupta, Aam Aadmi Party's Senior Advisor said that air pollution does not respect state boundaries and to combat the problem of air pollution, one needs to make it a political issue. She proposed a course of action that hinges on cooperative efforts between Delhi and its neighboring states, facilitated by the overarching support of the union government.

















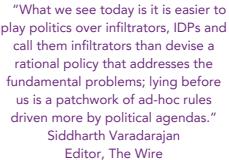


Renowned experts and journalists like Siddharth Varadarajan, Rohini Mohan, Aakar Patel, Tridip Kanti Mandal, Kishalay Bhattacharjee, and Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty addressed the spread of misinformation about migrants and refugees, and the responsibility of the media in using the correct terminology. Varadarajan noted that today it is easier to play politics over migrants and refugees by calling them infiltrators, instead of devising a rational policy that addresses the fundamental problems.

Other speakers included Prashant Bhushan, Indian PIL Lawyer at the Supreme Court, Yogendra Yadav, Indian activist, psephologist and politician, Sunita Viswanath, Co-founder, Hindus for Human Rights (virtual), Anubhav Sinha, Film Director and Producer, Anand Teltumde, Civil Rights activist (virtual), Chinki Sinha, Editor, Outlook Magazine, Preethi Reddy Nallu, Filmmaker and Executive Director, Report for the World, Sabreia Anwari, Afghan refugee and influencer, Svein Osttveit, Chair IBE (UNESCO) Council, Fazal Abdali, Refugee Rights Lawyer and Activist, Ravi Hemadri, Founder and Head of DAJI, S Irudaya Rajan, Founder Chair of IIMAD, Purvi Patel, Council on Foreign Relations, International Affairs Fellow in India, Chandrani Sinha, Award-winning climate change and environment journalist, Hembrom, Ruby Founder-Director Adivaani, Yasmin Refugee and Counsellor, MARI, Dr. Sukriti ETI Chauhan. CEO Services. **Patrick** Phongsathorn, Senior Advocacy Specialist at Fortify Rights, Dr. Jordan Greenbaum, Medical Director International Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Aakar Patel head of Amnesty India, and John Quinley III, Director Fortify Rights.



"(Yet) Despite observing the idea of mental health as a universal human right, many of us in mental health (space) have failed have failed to uphold the idea ." Raj Mariwala Director, Mariwala Health Initiative







"Sometimes as a society, we frown upon judicial institutions, (but) our courts ensure that agreements are reached by relying on solid institutions."

Prashant Bhushan, Senior

Advocate Supreme Court of India



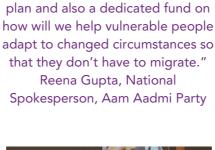
"The prevailing ideology that governs India sees the nation as a civilizational power, envisioning its geographical influence to be twice the current size. However, not all the people of the claimed geographical region are wanted. This is a paradox considering India follows the principle of Atithi Devo Bhabha."

Aakar Patel, Chair Amnesty India



"Media and government often overwhelm us with large numbers in discussions about migration, which can be too much for people to process and act upon. Therefore, it is vital to highlight personal stories and individualize migrant stories."

Preethi Nallu, Filmmaker ED, Report For The World.

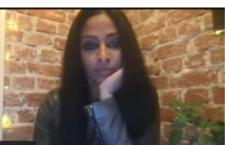


"As a Country, we need to have a



"The combination of misinformation and discriminatory policies of states together make it impossible and difficult for people on the move to access basic human rights like education."

John Quinley III, Director Fortify Rights.





"Refugee children encounter significant challenges when it comes to obtaining an education. These obstacles predominantly stem from disparities in various aspects, such as language, curriculum, cultural differences, and the level of support and assistance provided in schools and colleges."

Chinki Sinha, Outlook Magazine



"Rural Dalits face dual discrimination for being Dalit and migrants forcing them down the economic ladder. Social exclusion, limited employment, landlessness and indebtedness force Dalits to migrate."

Anand Teltumbde, Activist & Writer









































#### **Publications**

HZ Women Of The Month: Priyali Sur's Journey To Creating Safe Spaces For Refugee Women & Girls

This week, Priyali Sur, founder, The Azadi Project joined us for a quick chat on our weekly series HZ Women Of The Month recently. During our chat, she spake about marginalised groups, inclusivity and



Tanya Malik Editorial Undated = 2023-03-22, 20:00 IS

#### She fled home to escape violence. Now she's been lost at sea for two months



By Priyali Sur and Rebecca Wright, CNN
Updated 6:32 AM EDT, Tue April 27, 2021

# 7 E @

(CNN) - Noor Kayas fled the refugee camp without telling anyone at home.

At sea the next morning, the teenager used a satellite phone to call her mother Gule Jaan, 43, to say she was heading for Malaysia on a small wooden boat, packed with 87 Rohingya refugees, including 65 women and girls.

Some were fleeing what their families say is the increased risk of sexual assault and rape during the pandemic in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, in Bangladesh, home to more than 1 million displaced people.

#### Baby dies after teargas fired at Rohingya trying to escape Indian detention centre

Child's death follows hunger strike at Jammu & Kashmir jail amid increasing hostility towards 40,000 refugees ahead of elections



#### Why Host Countries Must Adopt Policies To Support Refugee Women And Girls

Host countries must adopt policies that support refugee women and girls who often have to face sexual violence and abuse during a discharge and abuse during a firely consent.

OPINION RIGHTS

'Separated and Detained': Will Biden and Modi Discuss the Plight of Rohingya Refugees in India?

Biden will likely talk to Modi about China, climate change, and human rights. But what may be absent from the discussion is the hypocrisy of Indi





#### Over 100 Rohingya stranded off India's coast, many feared dead

As many as 16-20 refugees may have died of thirst and hunger or have drowned, according to relatives and activists.



#### Dozens of refugees have been stranded at sea for weeks. No help has come.







The Washington Post

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Join us in our pursuit of equality for women and youth from marginalized communities. Partner with us.



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Support one of our existing or upcoming programs.





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