

# 2024 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award Winner Bios

Bios being shared under strict embargo until **0700 CET on Wednesday, Oct. 09**

## GLOBAL LAUREATE:

**Sister Rosita Milesi, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2024 Global Laureate, is a Brazilian nun, lawyer, social activist and movement builder who has championed the rights and dignity of people on the move for almost 40 years.**

Drawing on her Catholic faith and leading by example, she has personally assisted thousands of migrants, refugees and others in need of international protection – helping them access shelter, food, health care, language training, jobs and legal documentation in Brazil. She not only directs a frontline humanitarian agency (the Migration and Human Rights Institute, or IMDH) but also publishes and compiles scholarly articles on displacement and migration and coordinates a national network (known as RedeMIR) of 60 organizations taking action to strengthen solidarity among people on the move and the communities hosting them.

Sister Rosita's policy insights and powers of persuasion were instrumental in shaping Brazil's 1997 refugee law – ensuring that it does more to protect, include and empower people forced to flee and aligns with international standards like the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. By bringing together a wide set of stakeholders and mobilizing parliamentarians, she played a similarly pivotal role in crafting the nation's 2017 migration law.

Now 79, Sister Rosita was born in southern Brazil and holds Brazilian and Italian citizenship. She is a member of the Scalabrini order, which is known for serving refugees and migrants.

## AFRICA:

**Maimouna Ba, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2024 Regional Winner for Africa, is a grassroots activist in Burkina Faso who has helped more than 100 displaced children return to the classroom and empowered 400 displaced women to gain financial independence.**

Born in the country's Sahel region, Ba comes from the first generation of women in her family to get a formal education. Overcoming numerous obstacles, she earned a bachelor's degree in marketing and management. She was still a teenager when conflict erupted in 2016 but began marshalling support for displaced women and children seeking refuge in her community. She collected donations, secured sponsorships, and became a vocal advocate for their rights and well-being.

Convinced that education and financial autonomy are indispensable tools for addressing the devastating consequences of the humanitarian crisis, Ba co-founded an organization that trains women to be entrepreneurs, combats gender-based violence and fosters peaceful conditions. A scholarship program she set up for orphaned children offers educational opportunities, psychosocial support, and protection from exploitation.

Now 28, Ba has earned the affectionate title of "Maman Sahélienne," or "Mother of the Sahel," in recognition of her leadership and impact. Her deep commitment to peace and empowerment was further acknowledged at the 2023 Young Activists Summit in Geneva, where she was honoured as one of five laureates.

## ASIA & PACIFIC:

**Deepti Gurung, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2024 Regional Winner for Asia & the Pacific, is a Nepali activist who campaigned to reform her country's citizenship laws after learning that her two daughters had become stateless.**

The problem arose because the girls' father had abandoned the family, and Nepali law did not let mothers pass on their nationality to their children. As a result, the girls were likely to encounter some of the many barriers facing stateless people, like the inability to get birth certificates, access health care or education, open bank accounts or get a SIM card for a mobile phone. What's more, they would not be able to vote or inherit land, get a passport or even a driving licence.

In 2012, Gurung started a Facebook group, hoping to connect with others facing this predicament, and soon realized there were "tens of thousands of Nepali mothers like me". She then left her career as a marketing director and began organizing rallies, petitions and weekly sit-ins to raise public awareness and put pressure on policymakers.

Working alongside other grassroots campaigners, they won significant victories in the courts and secured major legal reforms – including a 2015 amendment that allowed children to acquire Nepali citizenship through their mothers. To date, the measure has enabled more than 100 individuals to obtain citizenship, including Gurung's daughters, and helped 1,000 others get birth certificates and other legal documents.

## **EUROPE:**

**Jin Davod, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2024 Regional Winner for Europe, is a young social entrepreneur who drew on her own experience as a refugee to create an online platform that provides mental health support to trauma survivors, including refugees and local communities.**

Born in Raqqa, Syria, Davod fled with her family to Türkiye in 2014 to escape the conflict. She eventually resumed her education, finishing high school and embarking on a degree in computer engineering. As a second-year university student, she designed and built Peace Therapist, an online platform that matches licensed therapists with people struggling to heal and recover from traumatic events. Crucially, it helps break down language and cultural barriers that often prevent refugees from accessing mental health services.

Peace Therapist now has a roster of over 100 psychologists providing therapy in Arabic, English, Kurdish and Turkish, making it uniquely accessible to the refugees it was designed to serve. After the devastating earthquakes in February 2023, the platform expanded its reach, offering free services and partnering with international organizations to support thousands of people impacted by the disaster from the host community as well. Users say it has helped them regain confidence, return to school, find work and contribute to social cohesion.

## **MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA:**

**Nada Fadol, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2024 Regional Winner for the Middle East and North Africa, is a Sudanese refugee who has mobilized essential aid for hundreds of families fleeing to Egypt in search of safety.**

When Sudan erupted in conflict in April 2023, Fadol was among the first responders providing food and water to refugees arriving in Aswan, Egypt. She had been living in Egypt for several years already and drew on her personal connections to rally volunteers and connect philanthropists with refugees in need.

To date she enlisted nearly 100 people – refugees from Sudan, Yemen and Syria as well as Egyptians – to provide vital assistance in Aswan, Cairo and Alexandria. They have worked with the local community to secure housing for newly arrived refugees, set up safe spaces where refugee children can learn and play, and organized workshops to help refugees of various ages gain skills and earn an income. Additionally, Fadol has mobilized a group of Egyptian doctors who have provided pro bono health care to more than 120 patients.

To fund this work, Fadol has gathered donations from generous Egyptians as well as from within the refugee community. She is dedicated to helping others rebuild their lives in Egypt until Sudan is safe enough for them to return.

#### **HONOURABLE MENTION:**

**The people of Moldova will receive honourable mention for their collective efforts to accommodate more than one million people fleeing the war in Ukraine.**

There is no greater testament to the strength of the human spirit than the collective actions of a nation in the face of overwhelming crisis. After a massive escalation of war in Ukraine since February 2022, forcing millions of people to flee across borders in search of safety, the people of the Republic of Moldova stepped forward with open hearts and homes. In a country of just 2.5 million, over one million Ukrainian refugees found safety, with 124,000 still hosted in the country.

From the first days of the war, ordinary Moldovans transformed their schools, churches and homes into sanctuaries. Thousands of volunteers, driven by a deep sense of compassion, worked tirelessly, often for 14 hours a day, to provide food, shelter and comfort to those fleeing unimaginable horrors. This spontaneous outpouring of support gave rise to Moldova for Peace, a civic initiative that united grassroots organizations, government bodies and citizens in a shared mission of refuge and inclusion.

The commitment of the Moldovan people goes beyond emergency response. It is a long-term project of inclusion and community building, where refugees are not just welcomed but also given the tools and opportunities to contribute to their new society. Moldovan citizens and civil society organizations work hand-in-hand to ensure that these new members of their community have access to education, employment and social services, fostering a sense of belonging in a foreign land.

Moldova, despite its own domestic challenges, stands as a beacon of humanity. The country hosts Europe's highest proportion of refugees to host population, a powerful indicator of its deep solidarity. The People of Moldova have not only provided refuge but have also laid the foundation for a more inclusive society, embodying the spirit of global compassion and resilience.

#### **Background**

The UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award (originally the 'Nansen Medal') was established in 1954 in honour of Norwegian humanitarian, scientist, explorer and diplomat Fridtjof Nansen. This prestigious honour is given annually to individuals, groups or organizations in recognition of outstanding work to help refugees, internally displaced people and stateless people. The first Nansen laureate was Eleanor Roosevelt. In 2022, the global laureate was Angela Merkel. Often, though, it recognizes the work of lesser-known figures, unsung heroes whose work gives hope away from home.

Famous for landmark achievements in a range of fields, Nansen was appointed in 1921 as the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees. The following year, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for his leading role in the repatriation of prisoners of war, in international relief work and as the League of Nations High Commissioner for refugees" assisting people forcibly displaced by World War I. Among his signal achievements was the "Nansen passport" which served as both an identity document and a travel permit for refugees and stateless people.

The Nansen Refugee Award honours a Global Laureate and, since 2017, several regional winners. This year each will receive a certificate of recognition for their outstanding service and dedication as well as financial or material support for their programmes to help sustain and strengthen the work for which they are being recognized.

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