

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a light-colored top and a dark shawl, is speaking into a microphone. She is standing in front of a brick wall. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

Asfari Foundation 2023

A YEAR OF INNOVATION AND IMPACT

Message from the CEO

Although 2023 presented numerous challenges, it also brought forth opportunities and accomplishments. In the early months of the year, a devastating earthquake struck Syria and southern parts of Türkiye, worsening the plight of millions of Syrians who had endured over a decade of ongoing hardship. The later months witnessed a harrowing war in Gaza, resulting in the deaths and injuries of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including thousands of women and children. The unprecedented level of violence and destruction in Gaza requires a prolonged period of recovery and rebuilding, extending for several decades.

Driven by hope, the Asfari Foundation continued its commitment to its values and principles, steadfastly supporting civil society organisations and their diverse activities in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. The foundation aims to empower youth, enabling them to seize opportunities and become active, independent contributors to building their communities and leading positive change.

As we present an overview of the Asfari Foundation's activities in 2023, we express our deep appreciation to all our partners for their dedication throughout the year and their belief in justice and the importance of the causes they commit to. You have been a source of inspiration for us all.

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The foundation continued providing financial support to dozens of civil society organizations, alongside offering learning opportunities and technical support to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness. Collaborating with partners, we worked on designing innovative solutions to overcome various challenges faced by youth, particularly in refugee situations, such as education, capacity development, access to employment, and dignified living.

The focus on generating, developing, and disseminating knowledge remained one of the foundation's key programs. Collaborating with academic and research institutions, we aimed to contribute to the production and dissemination of knowledge content shedding light on development issues in our region, presenting pathways for solutions within a deeper and broader understanding of regional and global developments.

Recognising the importance of networking and coordination for exchanging experiences and translating knowledge outputs into applicable and measurable programs, the Asfari Foundation contributed to supporting both established and emerging networks and alliances in the Civic Space.



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In 2023, the foundation underwent a serious and collaborative review of its strategy and work mechanisms in light of local, regional, and global trends. Soon, it will announce a strategy for the next five years, building on our experience with our partners and continuing our legacy in the region by effectively supporting civil society and youth to play a vital role in leading the development agenda in their communities and countries.

“ We are doomed by hope, and what takes place today cannot be the end of history. ”

-Syrian playwright and writer , Saadallah Wannous

-Muna Abbas, Chief Executive Officer of Asfari Foundation



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The Asfari Foundation

Here are some of the Asfari Foundation highlights from 2023



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Earthquake Response

As the catastrophic 2023 earthquakes hit Syria and the southern parts of Türkiye, the Asfari Foundation supported a number of Syrian Civil Society organisations such as [the White Helmets](#), [Karam Foundation](#) and [Molham Volunteering Team](#), among others, to respond to the urgent needs of Syrian refugee communities affected.

and the Syria House

In London, the Asfari Foundation supported [Madaniya](#) initiative, who collaborated with UK-based Syrian Civil society organisations such as [Action for Sama](#), the [Syrian British Consortium](#), and others to open a temporary community space in Trafalgar Square, London. The space was opened following a special event on Tuesday 14 February attended by His Majesty King Charles III and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan.



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Civil Society and Political Acumen Program

The Asfari Foundation supported a partnership between the London School of Economics and Political Science, the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship, and the American University of Beirut, to design and implement the Civil Society and Political Acumen Programme.



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Through this programme, local civil society actors in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Palestine have learned and executed advocacy strategies, bringing voices from their communities and giving them agency in leading the development agenda. Participants will design influencing and advocacy strategies based on in-depth analysis of their specific contexts, addressing various power dynamics with donors and INGOs. The Foundation would then fund the implementation of the influencing strategies. The first cohort of the programme was launched in October 2023 targeting 22 participants representing 12 civil society organisations from across the Levant region.



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Supporting and Promoting Digital Transformation

In 2023, the Asfari Foundation supported 15 civil society organisations (CSOs) with Digital Transformation Grants (DTGs). This initiative echoed the Foundation's commitment to providing focused, tailored support to CSOs own utilisation of technology and innovative digital tools and provided approaches to enhance their sustainability and impact.

This funding continues to serve a critical area of need for CSOs in the Levant region. Working in collaboration with an expert technical partner, the Foundation will continue to refine and develop this support programme moving forward.



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Tabadol Programme 2023: Innovating Sustainable Models

Through the Tabadol programme, the Asfari Foundation supported 10 social entrepreneurs and provided grants to 10 civil society organisations to collaborate on nurturing social entrepreneurs and enhancing the innovative capacities of CSOs. The programme serves as a bridge between the two to exchange ideas, work together, and develop sustainable solutions.

Tabadol provides a platform for emerging change-makers to connect with established entities, fostering a dynamic exchange of knowledge and expertise. Through Tabadol, the Asfari Foundation aims to support individuals and organisations, to create sustainable change within the communities and regions they serve.



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Brussels VII Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria: Global Engagement in Refugee Education

The Foundation supported the holding of an event at the Brussels Conference in June 2023, led by Jusoor who shared research findings and insights into the educational needs of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon and emphasised the need for 21st century skills to be incorporated within education programming.

The event advocated for finding innovative and alternative solutions that guarantee access to quality education and livelihood opportunities for refugees.



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Refugee Education Initiatives: Workshop and Alternative Learning Models




The Foundation organised a learning workshop involving key partners to discuss and design alternative models to provide uninterrupted learning journeys to refugees. This initiative aimed to create clear pathways that link education to jobs, further learning, or entrepreneurship, and ensure meaningful and sustainable change. The outcomes of this learning workshop set in place the baseline for the Refugee Education Program that the Foundation will support through the next three years.

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Leadership Masterclass Programme: Empowering Civil Society Leaders



In collaboration with [Chatham House](#), the Asfari Foundation supported the Leadership Masterclass Programme tailored for civil society leaders in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. This immersive programme aimed at enhancing leadership skills and fostering positive change within communities.

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War on Gaza Response

In the early days after the war on Gaza started, the Asfari Foundation in partnership with Arab Foundation Forum actively supported a coalition of committed actors to direct vital funds to grassroots organisations, addressing the urgent humanitarian needs in the region.

This call to action was spearheaded by Taawon (Welfare Association), the United Palestinian Appeal, and the American Friends Service Committee, all of which are locally-led organisations run by and with Palestinians and who have an extensive network of partners currently in Gaza. The partner agencies have immediate access to funds and accounts, which enabled them to make urgent interventions to support the needs of Gaza's population under attack.

The Asfari Foundation has also participated in many advocacy efforts that highlight the suffering of the Palestinian people and call for an end to the war.



باقون... والأمل فينا سيدوم
We're not leaving;
our hope is too strong to waver...

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Catalyst 2030 Award: Recognition for Innovation

The Asfari Foundation received the prestigious Catalyst 2030 Award for its commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goals through systemic change and innovation.

The Foundation was nominated for this recognition by one of its partners, Yes Theatre, a Palestinian civil society organisation working in Hebron. The nomination and the award highlighted the Foundation's distinguished entrepreneurship program in addressing social issues facing local communities, and emphasising the unique partnership approach the Foundation has established with its partners in the region.



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A strategic and institutional partnership with the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship

The Asfari Foundation continued to support the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut. The Institute plays a vital role in bridging the gap between academia and practice, energising activism and reimagining the future of the region through engaging various communities and actors from civil society, youth and academia.



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A strategic partnership with the Carnegie Middle East Center and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

The Carnegie Middle East Center and Carnegie Endowment For International Peace are also strategic partners of the Asfari Foundation. The Center continues to play a vital role in producing and disseminating knowledge in the Arab region and globally, linking that knowledge to civil society and activists, and bringing together activists, researchers, decision-makers and other stakeholders to inform relevant and innovative policymaking solutions in the region.



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Asfari Foundation in a new media outlook in 2023

A pivotal moment in 2023 was the launch of the Asfari Foundation's redesigned website. The new website provided an enriched platform for community engagement, placed emphasis on accessibility, and today serves as an informative hub for the Foundation's initiatives that enables easy navigation and keeps users informed about ongoing projects and events.

The Foundation showcased partner organisations in a new video project, highlighting collaborations with Tinyhand, Door, Karam Foundation, and Galilee Foundation. The aim of this showcase was to empower communities, support Syrian youth, and champion educational and cultural initiatives.





Additionally, the Asfari Foundation launched its blog, featuring articles such as Syria's Gen Z: Citizenship and Perspectives by Anas Darkaoui, which explored the lives of young Syrians today. The blog also presented Lina Abou Habib's thought-provoking insights on hate in Lebanon through the article Backlash on Rights in Lebanon.

Through the blog initiative, we highlighted the Foundation's commitment to effective communication and impactful storytelling. We invite our partners to interact with this space and communicate with us to share their experiences and ideas through this blog.



مؤسسة الأصفري
The Asfari Foundation

In summary, the Asfari Foundation's journey in 2023 has been exemplary in its commitment to innovation, transparency, and positive impact. Through diverse initiatives and collaborations, the Asfari Foundation continues to play a vital role in addressing challenges affecting the region, joining forces with key actors locally, regionally and globally, and enabling our communities to build a better future based on the values of human rights and dignity, equality, justice and peace.