

Refugee SELF-RELIANCE Initiative

TEN CHALLENGES
TO BUILD
BETTER LIVES NOW



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“*Self-Reliance is the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet its essential needs in a sustainable manner.*”¹

WHY SELF-RELIANCE?

The increase in global displacement to its highest-recorded number of 25.4 million refugees,² together with the lack of sustainable solutions for refugees, is leaving increasing numbers of people living in limbo. And they remain in this situation for ever-longer periods of time, many for decades. The majority of refugees express the desire to be able to support themselves and their families and request support to build independent lives in their new homes - whether their stay is temporary or permanent. In response, a group of agencies³ has come together under the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) to find collective strategies to promote refugee self-reliance opportunities. Their aim is to reorient longer-term assistance towards self-reliance programming and to measure the impacts of these efforts on refugees' lives.

While most refugees require humanitarian aid for some period of time (and some might require it indefinitely), many are ready to transition off of aid much sooner than current opportunities allow. Planning for eventual self-reliance should begin far earlier in the displacement cycle, with tools that support self-reliance incorporated into humanitarian aid delivery. Doing so makes it possible to evolve traditional service delivery and “care and maintenance” models and move towards leveraging refugees' capacities. The RSRI seeks to promote an environment in which refugees do not have to wait years for elusive “durable solutions” before they can support themselves and their families, while also preparing for a better future.

Launching in September 2018, the RSRI has the objective of identifying ways in which humanitarian and development programs can better assist refugees desiring self-reliance to achieve it and to live #BetterLivesNow.

BUILDING ON THE MOMENTUM

Since 2016, momentum on the concept of refugee self-reliance has been building, with several high-level inter-governmental initiatives emphasizing the need to enhance refugee self-reliance. These include:

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴ explicitly includes refugees and features goals related to employment, poverty-reduction, equality and well-being.

1. This definition was developed by the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative Community of Practice participants at a workshop in March 2017 held in Nairobi, Kenya.

2. UNHCR Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2017, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf>

3. The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative brings together agencies from the humanitarian, development, academic, donor and private sectors.

4. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development available at: sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld

- The 2016 Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the ILO⁵ promotes development-focused, employment-driven strategies to support host communities and refugees.
- The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016⁶ was adopted by all 193 UN Member States and included a commitment to “work to strengthen host countries’ and communities’ resilience, assisting them, for example, with employment creation and income generation schemes”,⁷ and encouraging support to build self-reliance and resilience.⁸
- The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR),⁹ likely to be adopted by the UN General Assembly by the end of 2018, includes objectives of easing pressures on host countries and enhancing refugee self-reliance.¹⁰ The GCR’s Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)¹¹ includes a series of commitments that, if fully implemented, would serve to enhance refugee self-reliance and includes pledges to expand opportunities for refugees to access education, health care and services, livelihood opportunities and labour markets.¹²

These recent frameworks build on the core foundation of international refugee law, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In addition to codifying the fundamental right to seek asylum, the Refugee Convention calls for favourable treatment of refugees across numerous parameters, including access to basic services and ability to pursue gainful wage- and self-employment.¹³ And before it, Article 23 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed the rights for all to work and to just and favourable remuneration and work conditions.

Despite all of these positive advances in the policy framework, the unfortunate reality is that most refugees still face enormous obstacles to providing for themselves and their families and to accessing opportunities for income-generation and for basic services and support. While the international community agrees that refugee self-reliance is a priority, there are significant hurdles to achieving this goal, including complex and restrictive policies and legal frameworks, and lack of clarity on the most effective methods to achieve better inclusion of refugees in societies and economies, particularly those facing economic challenges.

5. 2016 Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the ILO available at: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---jur/documents/genericdocument/wcms_433878.pdf

6. Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 September 2016, A/RES/71/1, available at: www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1

7. Ibid, Para. 84

8. Ibid, Para. 85

9. Final Draft Global Compact on Refugees, as at 26 June 2018, available at: www.unhcr.org/uk/events/conferences/5b3295167/official-version-final-draft-global-compact-refugees.html

10. Ibid, Para. 7

11. Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 September 2016, A/RES/71/1, available at: www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1, Annex 1, Para. 18

12. Ibid, Annex 1, Para. 13b

13. Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted 28 July 1951, available at: www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/statusofrefugees.aspx, Articles 17 - 19

The RSRI is committed to working to transform the current momentum on the concept of refugee self-reliance into concrete actions to address these challenges and to enable refugees to live in a dignified independent manner without delay. The RSRI believes that – with the necessary focus, commitment, and technical expertise – progress can be made towards self-reliance in all of the settings in which refugees are living, even when the policy environment is not yet fully conducive.

Seizing the opportunity that the GCR provides, the RSRI will operationalize its vision by promoting measurement of self-reliance, developing the evidence for impact and which programs and models work best, and advocating for appropriate funding and enabling hosting environments. Through such activities, the RSRI aims to transform humanitarian response from one of *providing for* to one that also *opens up opportunities and protects dignity*. The aim is for effective self-reliance models to be the norm, rather than the exception, when planning assistance for refugees.

TEN CHALLENGES

Members of the RSRI are challenging themselves – and other policymakers, practitioners and private citizens, including representatives of governments, multilateral organizations, funders, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, research and academic institutions and civil society – to take the following 10 practical steps towards making self-reliance opportunities a reality for refugees.

MEASURING THE IMPACTS ON REFUGEES' LIVES

1. Build the evidence-base for effective practices that support refugee self-reliance;
2. Refocus the definition and measurement of success from project deliverables to improved outcomes for refugee families;
3. Harmonize and streamline techniques for measuring refugee self-reliance.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMING TO SUPPORT REFUGEES' SELF-RELIANCE

4. [Re]Design aid programs to more effectively support holistic refugee self-reliance outcomes;
5. Create and support cross-sector and multiyear funding tools for programs that foster refugee self-reliance;
6. Increase the availability of safe, dignified income-generating opportunities for refugees;
7. Reduce barriers for refugees to participate in labor markets;
8. Increase refugees' access to financial institutions and services

PROMOTING AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH REFUGEES & HOST COMMUNITIES CAN THRIVE

9. Increase support to host communities and promote strategies that mutually benefit these communities and the refugees they host;
10. Promote positive views of refugees and the contributions they make to their host countries and communities.

MEASURING THE IMPACTS ON REFUGEES' LIVES

Despite many years of agencies promoting self-reliance strategies, there have only been limited attempts at rigorous measurement of their success. This results in the lack of an evidence-base on what amounts to successful self-reliance programming that could be adapted and replicated in other contexts and scaled-up. Success of traditional humanitarian efforts tends to be measured according to sector-specific outputs or outcomes over the course of a six-month or one-year project cycle, rather than according to the longer-term outcomes related to refugees' ability to support themselves.

The development of common indicators helps to chart global progress, compare outcomes between different locations, identify the most effective programs, diminish duplication of effort, and help direct limited resources to the most effective self-reliance program strategies. It allows forward-thinking hosting authorities, donors, policy makers and implementers to set self-reliance as the overarching goal for their efforts and measure the success of their work through longer-term outcomes for refugee families.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMING TO SUPPORT REFUGEES' SELF-RELIANCE

While there has been an expansion of refugee livelihoods programs, funding has often been too short-term and single-sector-focused to support successful programs that have longer-term impacts. The RSRI aims to raise broad awareness of refugees' desire for self-reliance and to engender a movement that attracts new philanthropic resources, private capital investments, public goodwill, sustained policy attention, and ultimately influences program design, host country policy environments and donor funding structures and priorities.

The RSRI believes that self-reliance should not be seen solely in relation to livelihoods activities. Measuring self-reliance through multi-sector indicators is an important part of a wider strategy to encourage holistic and collaborative programming and policy.¹⁴ There are many different ways to achieve the goal of self-reliance opportunities for refugees and the RSRI aims to identify service models that are effective and promote their expansion.

14. Refugee Studies Centre Research in Brief, Refugee Self-Reliance: Moving Beyond the Marketplace, October 2017, available at: www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/refugee-self-reliance-moving-beyond-the-marketplace

PROMOTING AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES CAN THRIVE

Self-reliance programming is unlikely to be successful for refugees if they are resented by the host community and perceived as receiving preferential treatment. Alongside refugee self-reliance programs, investments are also necessary to support host communities. The 2018 Aurora Humanitarian Index reports that in 12 countries surveyed, only 40% of respondents believe that refugees bring new entrepreneurial and economic skills to their host countries and 76% believe that refugees should be helped to repatriate once conflicts are over.¹⁵ The GCR includes a commitment to design programs and projects “in ways that combat all forms of discrimination and promote peaceful coexistence between refugee and host communities, in line with national policies”.¹⁶

THE WAY FORWARD

The launch of the RSRI is the culmination of many years of accumulated experience and research about how to overcome obstacles and turn refugee self-reliance into a reality. The RSRI will serve as the focus of a global conversation on self-reliance that will drive action on globally agreed commitments. Using proven models and measures of refugee self-reliance, RSRI aims to provide a pragmatic way forward for promoting positive policy environments. We call on all stakeholders to join us and to sign on to the RSRI’s Pledge to Increase Self-Reliance Opportunities for Refugees, in order to move forward together with refugees to achieve #BetterLivesNow.

15. 2018 Aurora Humanitarian Index, available at: auroraprize.com/sites/all/themes/clives/versions/1/inc/image/ENG%202018%20Aurora%20Humanitarian%20Index.pdf Pages 34-36

16. Final Draft Global Compact on Refugees, as at 26 June 2018, available at: www.unhcr.org/uk/events/conferences/5b3295167/official-version-final-draft-global-compact-refugees.html Para. 84

ABOUT THE REFUGEE SELF-RELIANCE INITIATIVE (RSRI)

Building Self-Reliance

The RSRI aims to help 5 million refugees to access self-reliance programming in 5 years (2019-2023).

The RSRI will work to ensure that:

- Indicators for self-reliance are integrated into practitioner, government and donor frameworks and used for program and environment analysis
- Programming approaches for self-reliance are tested, expanded and shared
- Donor resources for self-reliance programming are increased
- Policy environments for refugees to achieve self-reliance are improved.

Background to the RSRI - Redefining 'success' of refugee assistance

In June 2016, a global Community of Practice (CoP) was convened of more than 15 organizations,¹⁷ with the aim of finding practical ways forward towards enabling refugees to meet their essential needs in a sustainable manner in their temporary or permanent homes.

The CoP first worked to find common agreement on the definition of self-reliance and how to measure it with the objective of assessing the success (or failure) of interventions in contributing to refugee self-reliance. Using the definition and tools for measurement, forward thinking hosting authorities, donors, policy makers and implementers can set self-reliance as the success metric for interventions.

Following a workshop in Nairobi in March 2017, the CoP developed a measurement tool – the Self-Reliance Index - an “open source” set of indicators for assessing refugees’ ability to access shelter, food, health care, education, employment, resilience, safety and social capital, and to what degree this access is based on the refugees’ own income.¹⁸ This tool has been pre-tested in Jordan and Kenya in January 2018 and piloted in Mexico, Jordan and Kenya beginning in June 2018.¹⁹

Members of the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative Community of Practice:

Asylum Access, Christian Aid UK, Danish Refugee Council, HIAS, the IKEA Foundation, International Rescue Committee, the Joint IDP Profiling Service, Mercy Corps, Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, RefugePoint, Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat, Samuel Hall, Save the Children, Trickle Up, UNHCR, US State Department/PRM, the West Asia and North Africa Institute, and the Women’s Refugee Commission.

17. The CoP was convened by RefugePoint and the Women’s Refugee Commission.

18. The Self-Reliance Index built on several tools including the Vulnerability Assessment Framework, UNHCR’s livelihoods indicators, Samuel Hall’s Multi-Dimensional Integration Index, the Joint IDP Profiling Service indicator library, RefugePoint’s Self-Reliance Measurement Tool, WRC’s Well-Being and Adjustment Index.

19. The SRI was pre-tested in Jordan by Mercy Corps and in Kenya by RefugePoint and the International Rescue Committee. The SRI pilot is being carried out in Mexico by Asylum Access, in Jordan by Mercy Corps and in Kenya by RefugePoint.