

Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative

Executive Summary

The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative is a joint effort by a coalition of organizations, government agencies, foundations, research institutes and other partners focused on promoting opportunities for refugees to become self-reliant and achieve a better quality of life. The aim of this initiative is to reach five million refugees with self-reliance programming in five years, and ultimately help usher in a needed paradigm shift in refugee response. The coalition is building three mutually reinforcing strategies to achieve its goals, including **programming**, **measurement**, and **advocacy**, with the aim of building an evidence base for effective programming, and promoting successful refugee self-reliance strategies among key decision-makers and responders.

The Global Refugee Crisis

Today there are over 66 million people forcibly displaced, including 22 million refugees – the largest number ever recorded. The average length of displacement is now 20 years and growing. Eighty percent of refugees are hosted in developing countries and 60% now reside in urban areas rather than camps. As the numbers grow, solutions shrink. In recent years fewer than 3% of refugees worldwide have been able to access any “durable solution”: repatriation; permanent resettlement to a safe country; or legal integration into the country of first asylum. Humanitarian aid budgets are spread impossibly thin and the prevailing response to refugee crises is a band-aid approach. An annual average of \$25 billion is spent on short-term emergency aid.

These realities necessitate changing the traditional humanitarian assistance model. Keeping refugees dependent on un dependable, often erratic, handouts and ‘care and maintenance’ approaches is neither financially sustainable nor dignified. Assisting refugees to responsibly graduate off of international humanitarian assistance, so that those resources can be re-channeled to places and persons most in need, must be how we collectively move forward. Refugee households want the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families – to work, to use their skills, and make decisions about their finances, their lives, and their futures.

Recognizing this, the former UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, noted that, “Millions are trapped in dependency on short-term aid that keeps them alive but falls short of ensuring their safety, dignity and ability to thrive and be self-reliant over the long term.”¹ Building on this call to action, the Sustainable Development Goals² now include refugees in their agenda (the Millennium Development Goals did not) and, in so doing, broaden the

¹ <http://reliefweb.int/report/world/one-humanity-shared-responsibility-report-secretary-general-world-humanitarian-summit>

² <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

framework of possibilities available for refugee self-reliance. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was signed by all member states at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2016, also called for “measures that foster self-reliance”³ for refugees. Both this landmark declaration and the Global Compact on Refugees that will be adopted at the UNGA in 2018 also call for broadened partnerships, including non-traditional partners, and “joint responses” among a wide range of actors working across institutional mandates.

The Goals of the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative

This Self-Reliance Initiative is an example of such broadened partnerships and joint responses, aligning disparate actors around common approaches. It ties into the global priorities by creating a new forum for learning, action, and collaboration through three interlocking priorities - programming, measurement and advocacy - the goals of which are:

- **Programming:** Reach five million refugees in five years with programming geared towards self-reliance outcomes. The Initiative aims to identify effective program models, support and replicate them.
- **Measurement:** Create and validate a measurement tool, the Self Reliance Index, that charts refugee progress towards self-reliance and develops an evidence base for effective program approaches, which can be used to influence policy makers, funders and responders.
- **Advocacy:** Raise broad awareness of refugees’ desire for self-reliance and 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.

Initiative Scope

This initiative is geared toward the 80% of refugees surviving in developing host countries around the world. Among the ten top hosting countries, for instance, are Turkey, Lebanon, Uganda, Jordan and Kenya.

Coalition Members

The coalition, otherwise referred to as the Refugee Self-Reliance Community of Practice, is made up of 18 entities including: 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.

³ http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1 (Annex I, para. 13 (b))