

FORCED MIGRATION

review

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**Socio-economic integration:
towards solutions for
displaced people and
host communities**



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From the Editors

The quest for socio-economic integration, for both forcibly displaced people and host communities, raises fundamental questions for all those involved in forced migration policy, practice and research about how displaced people can live with autonomy and dignity.

The authors in FMR 71 share new perspectives on socio-economic integration that we hope can lead to a concrete and transformative shift in approaches. They reimagine the role of integration in responses to displacement, at a significant time of global change marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, urgent climate-related pressures and ongoing digital transformation. Most importantly, this issue includes displaced people's voices and strategies in working towards solutions.

We have been privileged to collaborate on the theme of socio-economic integration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a key partner and to receive their generous financial support. Particular thanks go to David Khoudour, Global Human Mobility Adviser, for his input on and support for this issue. We would like to thank our core donors, who make FMR's work possible. We are immensely grateful for their generous donations over the past year.

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Each article represents a huge investment on behalf of the authors and organisations represented. We acknowledge this work and thank those who are published in FMR 71, and those who we were unable to publish on this occasion, for their commitment to sharing their insights and learning with others working in forced migration.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue. Our intention is that it will re-energise discussions around socio-economic integration and bring together those who champion integration to take these conversations forward in policy and practice.

With best wishes,

Alice Philip and Olivia Berthon
Editors, Forced Migration Review

Forced Migration Review

(FMR) provides a forum for the regular exchange of practical experience, information and ideas between researchers, refugees and internally displaced people, and those who work with them. It is usually published in English, Arabic, Spanish and French by the Refugee Studies Centre of the Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford.

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Front cover image: Iman, a Syrian woman from Jordan's Al-Mafraq governorate, received a revolving loan to fund her small home appliances shop, under UN Women's 'Spring Forward for Women' project.

Credit: UN Women/Christopher Herwig

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Foreword

Socio-economic integration: from crisis to opportunity

Asako Okai

Increasing levels of conflict and higher frequency of disasters mean forced displacement is on the rise in every region of the world. In 2022, the number of people forced to flee from their homes surpassed 100 million for the first time. Because displacement situations have become increasingly protracted, countries must commit to greater investments to help forcibly displaced people and host communities build their own livelihoods and become self-reliant. In this regard, socio-economic integration is one of the key durable solutions to forced displacement.

As emphasised by the Global Compact on Refugees and the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement,¹ socio-economic integration is an essential springboard to a more sustainable approach. In tandem with essential humanitarian assistance, development policies that focus on meaningful social and economic inclusion can rebuild the lives of those forcibly displaced, while strengthening the communities in which they reside. Humanitarian assistance is critical in the first stages of displacement to save lives and foster stability. But ending displacement situations requires more than that. National and local governments need to make integration – or reintegration in the case of returnees – a priority.

The costs and consequences of not investing in integration are too high for displacement-affected countries and communities. A system that only relies on humanitarian assistance and does not help people develop their own capabilities and contribute to the economies and societies in which they live is unsustainable. By contrast, when displaced people benefit from training and education opportunities, when they are allowed to work and create their own businesses, they can maintain personal dignity and preserve local stability. In other words, they are not just considered as beneficiaries, but as agents of development – and, in the case of IDPs, as full citizens within their own countries.

Humanitarian, development and peace actors must work jointly to support displacement-affected countries in implementing an ambitious agenda that promotes the socio-economic integration of IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers. National and local governments need to strengthen institutions and coordination mechanisms that contribute to promoting development solutions to forced displacement, as seen in the positive trajectories of Colombia, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia, where addressing internal displacement is seen as a national development priority. Governments also need to identify and remove the many legislative, administrative, or financial barriers that prevent forcibly displaced people from fully integrating into their host communities.

Successful integration also requires that public authorities and other stakeholders actively fight against the different forms of discrimination that affect IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers, including gender-based and racial discrimination. These stakeholders need to promote peaceful coexistence and social cohesion between those forcibly displaced and their hosts. People in affected communities need to feel they also benefit from the integration process. Engaging different actors from the private sector and civil society, including representatives from displaced and host communities, in both decision-making and implementation processes can contribute to strengthening the links within and between communities, while addressing the main barriers to integration.

More data and research can help policymakers and the general public better understand both the costs of inaction and the shared benefits of investing in integration and social cohesion. In this respect, this special issue of *Forced Migration Review*, which UNDP has supported both intellectually and financially, is an important contribution to the growing consensus on this topic. The authors who have shared their thoughts and experiences highlight the

challenges that socio-economic integration represents. But they also demonstrate, through concrete experiences across regions, that inclusive, gender-responsive and nationally-owned solutions to forced displacement are possible.

Asako Okai

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For more information, please visit
undp.org/crisis.

1. bit.ly/UNSG-action-agenda

Socio-economic integration – what is it, and why does it matter?

Alexander Betts

Socio-economic integration must be understood as a broad concept, encompassing the experiences of refugees in all contexts, and as an integral part of both protection and durable solutions.

Both academic and public debate tend to see refugee protection and durable solutions¹ as describing a relationship between nation-states and refugees. When a person's country of citizenship is unable or unwilling to provide the most basic rights, people flee to another state to seek surrogate protection until they are able to return home or acquire effective membership of another state.

This debate, focused as it is on the restoration of political membership, often fails to include an exploration of the important role of markets. When people flee their country, they are usually also uprooted from their employment, their property, their financial assets, their businesses, and recognition of their educational qualifications. Yet the restoration of socio-economic rights is often viewed as less important within protection than civil and political rights. Durable solutions are usually also conceptualised as a relationship between States and refugees, focusing on restoring citizenship, or equivalent forms of political membership.

States, markets, and refugees

Refugees' access to socio-economic rights and opportunities matters fundamentally for three reasons – rights, welfare, and politics. From a rights perspective, socio-economic rights make up a significant part of the 1951 Convention and international human rights law. From

a welfare perspective, research shows that refugees' psycho-social well-being as well as a range of quality of life indicators are improved by access to meaningful work, for example. From a political perspective, research also shows that host communities are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards the presence of refugees when they perceive refugees as able to make a positive economic contribution.²

Socio-economic integration is both a process and an outcome, which refers to refugees' degree of participation within local, national, and global markets. Socio-economic integration is not an alternative to protection or durable solutions; it is a necessary condition for both protection and any of the durable solutions to be effective.

Integration necessitates a role for both States and markets, and the interaction between them. States create the conditions under which participation in markets is possible, for example by upholding property rights and enforceable contracts. But markets also rely upon businesses to create opportunities: such as for consumption, production, employment, borrowing, and lending. Whilst all of these activities are present in refugee communities, they are restricted to different degrees.

Thinking intentionally about the relationship between States and markets matters particularly in a refugee context because when people flee, receiving States have often

restricted access to socio-economic freedoms to refugees, out of concern that they will remain indefinitely or compete with citizens for finite resources, triggering public backlash. Restrictions on socio-economic rights and opportunities have sometimes been further legitimated based on the 'emergency' nature of the response, and yet, even after this phase abates, legislative and practical restrictions on meaningful socio-economic participation too often remain in place.

This tension has led to an emerging conversation around how to make socio-economic integration 'sustainable'. How can refugees be supported to fully participate in local, national, and global markets in ways that retain the support of citizens over time, whether in high-, middle-, or low-income countries?

Beyond self-reliance

In the refugee policy world, 'self-reliance' has offered a starting point for talking about the socio-economic integration of refugees. It has enabled humanitarian organisations to recognise the importance of markets in refugee protection. But it also has limitations.

The idea – defined as refugees' independence from aid at individual, household, and community levels – is important insofar as it focuses on the gradual expansion of refugees' autonomy. But, self-reliance is much narrower than socio-economic integration, is usually only applied to low- and middle-income countries, and is open to critique – conceptually, politically, and practically.

Conceptually, self-reliance risks being too narrow, reducing socio-economic integration to being a relationship to aid, focusing around reducing dependency on humanitarian assistance rather than full participation in local, national, and global markets. By focusing mainly on refugees' pathway to autonomy, it offers limited insight into the wider structural barriers to socio-economic participation, such as legal rights, infrastructure, and macro-economic investment in refugee-hosting regions. Self-reliance has also often been seen as an alternative to durable solutions, whereas socio-economic integration needs to be understood as a necessary condition for protection and for each of the three durable solutions.

Politically, it is frequently deployed to serve wider interests. For donors, concepts such as self-reliance support a migration containment agenda, implying a means to support 'protection there' rather than 'protection here'. For hosts, donors provide funding which can support politicians in low- and middle-income countries to strengthen patronage networks. For UNHCR, self-reliance legitimates access to development funding without appearing to trespass on the mandates of development agencies. The appeal of self-reliance based on vested interest does not have to be a bad thing, if it encourages state commitment. The risk, though, is that the main pay-offs from self-reliance are to everyone except refugees themselves.³

Practically, initiatives supposedly seeking to promote self-reliance do not always result in self-reliance outcomes. For example, in one of the most high-profile attempts to facilitate 'self-reliance' – the Kalobeyei Settlement – after two years, fewer than 2% of newly arrived South Sudanese refugees identified as able to live independently of aid and only 6% had an independent income-generating activity. One of the main reasons for this is that 'self-reliance' programmes frequently circulate a finite pot of aid money in a slightly more efficient way, rather than addressing the broader structural barriers to expanding the entitlements and capabilities of refugees and host communities.⁴

Overall, the self-reliance debate has probably been a positive step towards expanding the socio-economic integration of refugees. However, the lens needs to be broadened, encompassing the experiences of refugees in high-, middle-, and low-income countries, regarding socio-economic integration as cross-cutting for all aspects of protection and durable solutions, and conceiving it as about the relationship between States, markets, and refugees, rather than the relationship between humanitarian organisations and refugees.

The way forwards

Refugee protection around the world is under threat. From the UK to Denmark and Australia, the right to asylum is being openly challenged. Amid structural changes in the



Refugee and host community livestock traders sell goats in Bokolmanyo refugee camp, Dollo Ado (Credit: Raphael Bradenbrink)

global economy triggered by offshoring and automation, and global recession following COVID-19, democratic politics is polarising in ways that are conspiring against both asylum and multilateral aid funding.

The challenge is even greater because, alongside declining political will, refugee numbers and needs are also growing. New drivers of displacement, notably climate change, will mean that we will face large numbers of forced migrants who fall outside the scope of States' interpretation of the 1951 Convention. As 'survival migration' – from contexts like Venezuela, the Northern Triangle of Central America, and the Sahel – increases, socio-economic integration will become even more important as a means to respond sustainably to tens of millions of people crossing borders in search of rights and opportunities.

And yet a series of opportunities exists. Across rich countries, demography and ageing populations are creating labour market shortages. Entrepreneurship and upskilling a diverse and global workforce offer a means to support economic growth. Technology is

also increasingly enabling work to take place remotely, with the internet, cloud technology, blockchain, and the metaverse changing the future of work, and how socio-economic integration will likely be defined. States are also starting to explore new forms of complementary pathways for refugees connected to socio-economic opportunities, such as work and education.

The challenge in the Global South, whether for refugees in camps or suffering economic hardships in cities, has to be to expand socio-economic rights and opportunities. The evidence tells us that access to labour markets, bank accounts, seed funding, cash-based assistance, and property rights are all likely to make refugees and nearby host communities better off.

For refugees in the Global North, socio-economic integration is no less important. Government support is crucial but so too is access to labour markets, the educational opportunities to access meaningful and fulfilling work, and timely access to banking and finance. In Europe, for instance, delays

in asylum seekers being allowed to work and restrictions on employment categories benefit no-one, and there is no evidence that they serve as a deterrent. In this context, it's not about States versus markets but about how they can work together to enable people to live autonomous and dignified lives.

In neither context, though, does socio-economic integration have to be politically unsustainable. If anything, the evidence appears to suggest that the greater the socio-economic integration and the more refugees are perceived as contributors to host societies, the more positive receiving community attitudes are likely to be.

A new and inclusive conversation is needed

A new conversation needs to take place that connects themes such as 'the future of work', technology, demography, and infrastructure to refugee protection. It needs to be a conversation that recognises the role of States, markets, and society – in which governments, business, and international organisations work together in order to reimagine socio-economic integration as an integral part of how the world responds to displaced people. And to accommodate that, what we 'measure' as a humanitarian community also needs to adapt. Self-reliance is almost certainly too narrow and restrictive a view of socio-economic integration. At the very least, better data is needed to describe and explain variation in refugees' socio-economic outcomes.

Approaches to socio-economic integration also need to take into far better account the economic strategies adopted by displaced people themselves. The author's research has revealed that very often socio-economic strategies adopted by refugees fall outside of humanitarian organisations' scope of vision. Sometimes, organisation staff are unaware of refugees' own economic activities and at other times they may not consider these activities as relevant. Cross-border livelihoods, split-family strategies, circular urban-camp movement, for example, all reveal how important mobility and transnationalism are to refugees' economic lives, and yet they are often restricted or rendered illicit by States and organisations. For example, across the Ethiopia-Somalia border,

refugees' livelihood strategies often rely upon working across and trading between the two countries. Similar dynamics can be found at the Uganda-South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo-Rwanda borders, for example.⁵ A key part of supporting socio-economic integration is to understand and then build on refugees' pre-existing economic strategies.

Socio-economic integration, appropriately conceived, is not in opposition to refugee protection or durable solutions; it is an integral part of both. The purpose of the refugee system should not just be to restore people's civil and political membership of a State, but also to restore their ability to participate meaningfully and autonomously in local, national and global markets.

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1. UNHCR promotes three durable solutions for refugees: voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement.
2. See, for example, Bansak K, Hainmueller J, & Hangartner D (2016) 'How economic, humanitarian, and religious concerns shape European attitudes toward asylum seekers', *Science*, 354(6309), 217-22 [bit.ly/European-attitudes](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1254444); Betts A, Stierna M F, Omata N, & Sterck O (2023) 'Refugees welcome? Inter-group interaction and host community attitude formation' *World Development*, 161, 106088 [bit.ly/refugees-attitude-formation](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106088)
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Opening the global digital economy to refugees

Lorraine Charles and Lana Cook

As we emerge from a global pandemic, we have seen an evolution of attitudes toward the digital economy and the promises it holds for employment opportunities. What might this frontier space of technology-enabled employment offer for the millions of refugees and forcibly displaced persons looking for livelihoods and prosperity?

There is no agreed definition of the ‘digital economy’ and the distinction between the digital and traditional economy is becoming increasingly blurred. Broadly speaking, the digital economy can be defined as incorporating all economic activity reliant on digital technology and can include jobs within and outside what we traditionally think of as the tech sector. Digital labour or jobs in the digital economy are wide-ranging, from on-demand logistics services like Uber and Deliveroo, micro-work such as Amazon Mechanical Turk and data tagging, income-generation activities on social media channels, online retail portals devoted to one-click consumption, and high-skilled knowledge workers such as researchers, web developers, virtual assistants, lawyers and accountants.¹

The digital economy has transformed perceptions of work. With regard to migration, the fact that many jobs in the digital economy are no longer dependent on physical interactions is perhaps the most significant opportunity and biggest divide created by technology. This change has led to the ‘gigification’ of jobs, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These kinds of jobs – which no longer depend on in-person interactions and which transcend geography, immigration controls and, in some cases, legal status – present an opportunity for refugees, the majority of whom have limited access to employment due to challenges including discrimination in hiring and legal barriers to right to work.

For refugees, access to the gig economy in particular holds much promise. A 2020 study found that 18% of Human Resources Directors in the UK believe that gig workers will make up 75% or more of their workforce over the next five years.² The global demand for online freelancing has been growing by 11% annually since 2018, and the global gig economy is expected to grow to \$455 billion by 2023.³

Gig work is often done without formal work arrangements, meaning that digital contractors or freelancers are engaged for specific projects and only paid for the work they deliver. Moreover, as a high proportion of gig work is facilitated by freelancing platforms such as Upwork or Fivver, freelancers do not have employment relationships with ‘employers’ (whether a company or an individual). These ‘non-traditional’ employment relationships that exist in the digital economy provide an opportunity for refugees.

According to UNHCR there are 103 million displaced individuals worldwide. Although displaced individuals flee to other countries for better life prospects and work opportunities, the majority of host countries are under-resourced, resulting in a lack of employment opportunities for both the refugee and host communities. Employment is a first step towards financial stability and self-sufficiency. Yet, given their relocation, refugees might face many structural, and systemic barriers when trying to get employed.

The integration of refugees (as well as many other traditionally excluded communities) into the digital economy has therefore expanded employment opportunities in places where local economies are unable to absorb jobseekers. Participation in the digital economy could represent a solution, as it allows for refugees’ economic integration into the global economy, which in turn facilitates their socio-economic integration into local host communities.

Challenges and opportunities

While the digital economy and specifically remote work could present opportunities for refugees to broaden their access to employment, there are multiple challenges to be faced. **Right to work:** Refugees’ right to work is enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The Convention is explicit in stating that refugees should receive the same treatment as any foreign national in the same circumstances. While this does not guarantee equal access to employment, States are encouraged to allow refugees the same rights as nationals. However, many refugee-hosting States, despite being signatories to the Convention, place restrictions on refugee employment.⁴ This is perhaps the most significant challenge that refugees face when accessing employment.

Informality of the digital economy: Digital remote work seems to overcome the challenges around the right to work as it is often performed in the informal sector, where the right to work is a grey area. In the gig economy, non-traditional employment relationships are almost always informal, meaning that the ‘employer’ is not liable to provide any benefits such as sick or holiday pay. These informal work relationships usually operate across borders with the freelancer responsible for their own taxes and benefits and without being subject to immigration controls. However, although digital work can enable greater access and better opportunities for displaced populations in ways that circumvent local employment regulations, this informality does not allow for formal legal protections for workers, leaving them at risk of exploitation.

Access to infrastructure: Even where they have the right to work, refugees often lack access to digital infrastructure and the internet due to economic insecurity or their physical location. Policymakers and legal activists are now developing frameworks that centre digital inclusion as a fundamental human right. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) stresses that “a safe, satisfying, enriching, productive, and affordable online experience, has become the new imperative for the 2020-2030 decade”. However, only 63% of the world’s population is online, leaving some 2.9 billion people without internet connectivity, with refugees disproportionately impacted.⁵ These access challenges prevent refugees from taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the digital economy.

Financial exclusion: Almost half of refugees globally live in countries with restricted access to bank accounts.⁶ Lack of identification documentation, often due to loss or seizure during the events that forced them to leave their homes, and the cost, complexity and risk involved in replacing identity documentation issued by their country of origin, is perhaps the biggest barrier that refugees face to open bank accounts. This means that refugees are not able to comply with the regulations of financial institutions around proof of identity and limits their ability to access the digital economy.

Digital skills gap: Globally, job opportunities increasingly require digital skills but traditional education systems have been slow to integrate Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and digital literacy into their curricula due to lack of qualified educators and technology infrastructure. Refugees, with significantly lower rates of higher education access and often interrupted education, are disproportionately affected by a lack of digital skills. Even if refugees are able to gain digital skills, this is often via informal education programmes or from universities in their country of origin, and there is a universal lack of standardisation and recognition of these qualifications and skills.

Empowering a digital workforce

There has been a proliferation of training and education initiatives and broad pathways to digital employment for refugees.⁷ Post-COVID, this number has significantly increased. The Refugee Action Hub (ReACT) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which offers a certificate in Computer and Data Science, was established in recognition of the need for high-quality, accredited education programmes for underserved communities such as refugees.⁸ In collaboration with MIT ReACT, the social enterprise Na’amal addresses employers’ demand for soft skills in the workplace through its Human Skills for Digital Employment programme. Together, these initiatives aim to demonstrate that, with targeted education that addresses the demands and skills gaps of the digital economy, and

with recognised qualifications, mentoring and links to networks, refugees can successfully join the digital workforce.

Ahmed* is a refugee in Jordan and a graduate of the MIT ReACT–Na’amal programme. His MIT certificate plus newly acquired networks and skills allowed him to secure remote freelance jobs in website maintenance. With a UNHCR-issued refugee card as his only recognised proof of identity, Ahmed had no bank account but with the support of his networks from MIT ReACT and Na’amal, he was able to open a bank account. He now earns around USD \$1000 a month, and is continuing his education through online certifications.

Pauline* is a refugee living in South Africa and a learner in the MIT ReACT–Na’amal programme. Through MIT’s collaboration with the global talent organisation Talanta, she has secured an internship at a social enterprise committed to advancing financial inclusion. She is now learning alongside a global team, building the confidence to develop a tech career and expanding her networks, enabling greater socio-economic integration.

The role of the private sector: potential and reality

There has been a growing interest in hiring refugees. Public attention to the role that companies can play began with the commitments of several multinational companies following President Obama’s 2016 Call to Action for private sector engagement on the global refugee crisis. The Tent Partnership for Refugees, a network of over 200 major companies committed to supporting refugees, including in employment, was subsequently established. More recently, Ingka Group, led by IKEA, aims to convince 500 businesses to hire refugees. To date, though, there has been no widespread hiring of refugees in the digital economy.

The interest from employers to include refugees in their workforce, including remotely, is promising and the potential for greater engagement is significant. The fact remains, however, that companies are unable to navigate the cross-border human resources, legal and

financial processes without expert support. Guides to help companies hire displaced tech talent – such as the one published in collaboration between MIT ReACT, Na’amal, Talent Lift, World Education Services and Tent Partnership for Refugees – have begun to address companies’ needs in the hiring process but more support is needed.⁹

Hiring refugees remotely in digital jobs is not only a moral responsibility, for companies to achieve corporate social responsibility targets or to satisfy the conscience of employers that they are doing good. There is also a strong business case, as employers not only need talent but can reap the benefits of getting the right employees, instead of just hiring by location.

A call for a multinational agreement

The digital economy offers greater access to employment and socio-economic integration for refugees who do not have the legal right to work. As concluded in a report published following the 2022 Migration Summit, what is needed urgently is a multinational agreement, advanced by stakeholders including relevant UN agencies and the private sector, to allow refugees legal access to the global digital economy, even if they do not have legal access to work in local labour markets. This would protect refugees from the precarity and risks of informal work, encouraging more individuals who are currently dependent on humanitarian aid to seek employment and gain financial independence. Traditional global agreements of this kind are non-binding, and nation-states are not mandated to comply. The private sector, increasingly demanding access to new talent pools for their growth and profitability, needs to put pressure on governments to provide pathways for the recruitment of global talent, including refugees, to work remotely.

The upcoming Global Refugee Forum in 2023 is an ideal platform to promote the integration of refugees into the digital economy. While a multinational agreement would be only a partial solution toward greater access to employment for refugees, safeguards could be guaranteed and displaced persons could have access to the livelihoods on which their lives – and the lives of their communities – depend.

**To protect privacy, names have been changed.*

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Local integration, local settlement and local solutions: disentangling the conceptual confusion

Jeff Crisp

UNHCR has traditionally spoken of three durable solutions for refugees: voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration. But the organisation has now introduced the concept of 'local solutions'. What does this notion mean and does it have any value?

The notion of 'local integration' is frequently used in relation to refugees, and yet it lacks any formal definition in international law. The lack of clarity surrounding the concept is reinforced by its frequent confusion with a related but different concept, that of 'local settlement'. For the purposes of this article, local integration can be regarded as a process which leads to a durable solution for refugees, in the sense that it enables them to benefit from the permanent protection of the State which has granted them asylum.

Dimensions of local integration

Local integration is a process with three inter-related dimensions. First, it is a legal process, whereby refugees are granted a progressively wider range of rights and entitlements by the host State, including, eventually, permanent residence rights and the acquisition of citizenship. This principle is enshrined in Article 14 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which says that signatory States will "as far as possible facilitate the naturalization of refugees" and

"in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings".

Second, local integration can be regarded as an economic process. By acquiring a wider range of rights and entitlements, refugees also improve their potential to establish sustainable livelihoods, to attain a growing degree of self-reliance, and to become less reliant on state aid or humanitarian assistance.

Third, local integration is a social process, enabling refugees to live among or alongside the host population, without fear of discrimination, exploitation or abuse by the authorities or people of their country of asylum.

Local settlement

While local integration can be defined as a process that leads to a durable solution for refugees, the notion of 'local settlement' can be considered as an operational strategy that is implemented in response to large-scale refugee influxes. It was practised most widely between the 1960s and 1980s, at a time when countries in the Global South were experiencing a growing

number of such movements. Responding to those emergencies, host governments recognised the new arrivals as refugees on a prima facie basis and in many situations provided them with land where they could engage in farming and other economic activities, with the expectation that they would eventually become self-reliant.

While the local settlement approach enabled large numbers of refugees to find a safe haven from the violence affecting their countries of origin, it did not mean that refugees would be granted permanent residence rights or be offered the opportunity of naturalisation in their country of asylum. Indeed, host States in the Global South generally insisted that local settlement was a strictly temporary strategy, to be maintained only until such time as the refugees were able to return to their country of origin or could be resettled elsewhere.

The primacy of repatriation

As the preceding statement suggests, the principle of local integration may be firmly established in international refugee law but most host countries in the Global South have chosen to ignore it. Rather than facilitating their naturalisation, as required by Article 14 of the Refugee Convention, those States have made it extremely difficult for refugees to acquire the citizenship of the countries where they have found asylum. States' real priority has been to ensure that refugees go home at the earliest possible opportunity.

This approach was firmly endorsed by UNHCR and its Executive Committee, which in the 1980s and 1990s issued a series of statements that unambiguously identified voluntary repatriation as the "best" or "preferred" solution to refugee situations.¹ And they did this because the indefinite presence of large refugee populations was increasingly perceived as a threat to the economy, environment, infrastructure and security of the States that hosted them.

Donor States in the Global North were also eager to pursue the 'repatriation is best' agenda, primarily because this averted the need for them to support expensive and long-term assistance programmes for refugees in the Global South. At the same time, in terms of

their own, increasingly restrictive asylum policies, such States had an interest in promoting the notion that refugees should be expected to go home as soon as conditions had improved in their countries of origin.

The outcome of these trends was to make the local integration of refugees a very low priority on the global humanitarian policy agenda. In fact, the only major programme of this type to have been implemented in recent years began in 2007, when Tanzania granted citizenship to some 160,000 Burundian refugees who had been living in the country since 1972. In accordance with the prevailing durable solutions hierarchy, those arriving more recently from Burundi were expected, encouraged and even forced to repatriate.

Local solutions

Most recently, the longstanding confusion that has existed in relation to the notions of local integration and local settlement has been given a fresh twist by the introduction of yet another concept, that of 'local solutions'. Mentioned briefly in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees and subsequently elaborated by UNHCR and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), local solutions have been defined as "transitional arrangements aiming to assist and equip refugees on their path towards a durable solution, notably local integration"² The two organisations explain that:

"Local solutions and local integration have in common the notion of socio-economic and cultural inclusion of refugees. The main difference between the two resides in the former being a set of arrangements and tools to work towards a durable solution, while the latter is a durable solution. This permanency of the solution is the main difference between local solutions and local integration."

So what are we to make of the local solutions concept? Does it deserve to have a place in the humanitarian policy vocabulary, and what are the implications of this notion for the future of the international refugee protection regime?

First, the notion of local solutions is an entirely superfluous concept, given it has precisely the same meaning as the strategy formerly known as local settlement. It means that refugees should be allowed to remain in a host

country for as long as they need protection. It means that they should be offered the support required for them to become self-reliant. It means that they should have fair access to public services and enjoy peaceful and productive relations with the host population. But it does not mean they have any entitlement to naturalisation and citizenship.

Second, the new notion has added to the conceptual confusion that already exists in this area, especially in relation to its misleading use of the word 'solution'. Traditionally, solutions for refugees were considered by UNHCR and its partners to be 'durable' or 'permanent', in the sense that they established a lasting bond between refugees and a State that was willing and able to protect them: the country of origin in the case of repatriation, a third country in the case of resettlement, and the country of asylum in the case of local integration. But as UNHCR and ICVA explicitly acknowledged in their statement on the matter, a local solution is not durable or permanent but simply a step on the way towards a possible solution.

Third, the notion of local solutions is an opportunistic one. For many years, UNHCR did its best to avoid the subject of local integration, knowing that it was strongly opposed by many of the world's refugee-hosting countries and recognising that the mere mention of local integration could jeopardise the organisation's relationship with them. This became abundantly clear in 2002, when a new High Commissioner, Ruud Lubbers, announced a strategy entitled 'Development Through Local Integration' which was intended to engage the World Bank and other development actors in the task of providing long-term support for areas populated by large numbers of refugees. Confronted with an immediate and vociferously negative response from many refugee-hosting States, especially those in Africa, the name of the Lubbers initiative was swiftly changed to the less controversial 'Development Through Local Assistance'.

By introducing the notion of local solutions, UNHCR appears to have stepped back from its responsibility to advocate on behalf of local integration in the full and legal meaning of the concept. The new notion has also made it much easier for refugee-hosting States to claim that

they are pursuing solutions for the refugees in their territory, even when they have rejected any suggestion of introducing a naturalisation process and when their primary objective is to push for the early – and in many cases premature – repatriation of those refugees to unsafe countries of origin.

Finally, the notion of local solutions appears to have been introduced to support the claim that the Global Compact of Refugees has been a substantial success. UNHCR and its partners invested an enormous amount of time, effort and resources into the process that produced the Compact. And as soon as that process was concluded, the organisation was already describing the Compact as "a game changer," "a paradigm shift" and even "a minor miracle".³ By specifying that a major purpose of the Compact is to promote local solutions (but not necessarily to ensure that refugees can enjoy local integration in the full and durable sense of the concept), UNHCR has lowered the bar for success and enabled the organisation to misleadingly substantiate the Compact's supposedly miraculous status.

In conclusion, there is a need to acknowledge the value of the local settlement strategy. It is evidently beneficial for refugees to progressively acquire more legal rights, to improve their economic circumstances and to establish closer social relations with the host community during their time in exile. But it is misleading to replace this well-established notion with the new concept of local solutions – a concept that adds to the conceptual confusion that already exists in this area of refugee policy and which limits the ambitions of the international community in its efforts to resolve the plight of refugees.

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The role of social connections in refugees' pathways towards socio-economic integration

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Social connections are well recognised as contributing to integration. Research undertaken in Scotland offers useful, sometimes counter-intuitive insights into their role over time, plus learnings that could be explored in other contexts.

The pivotal role of social connections in refugee integration has been long recognised as one of the key domains of the UK government's Indicators of Integration framework, and has been widely explored by academic, practice and policy literature.¹ Social connections emphasise the importance of relationships between people to the process of integration, as these relationships can facilitate (and in some cases constrain) access to, use and exchange of resources. Social connections are also core to a sense of belonging and well-being for both refugees and other groups.²

Drawing on social capital constructs, the different forms of social connections have been categorised into three domains: social bonds (trusted relationships, often but not exclusively with groups and family members with a shared ethnicity and nationality), social bridges (with people outside our immediate social circle or who are different from us) and social links (with state institutions).³

The authors' work has explored the role of social connections in refugees' pathways towards social and economic integration in Scotland. The findings of their ongoing partnership project with the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC), the Bridges Programmes and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) show how refugees' social connections change over time and that these relationships, each with differing levels of contact, trust and reciprocity, can serve multiple functions in promoting pathways to integration.⁴ This research also sheds new light on the wider social worlds of refugees, including friends, faith groups and other informal contacts that are essential in promoting social and economic integration.

In this article, the authors review key findings from their research that enhance knowledge of

the role of social connections in integration processes. They also highlight areas that could be further explored in Scotland and in other geographical and socio-economic contexts.

Variations in scale and purpose over time

Research participants' accounts show that the same social connections should be understood as part of a continuum; they can have different purposes and the emotional and practical function(s) of these relationships may change over time. One example of this fluidity is the role of specialist refugee-supporting organisations. Most interviewees discussed the role of these organisations' in assisting refugees with practical issues, including access to clothing and other essential resources, signposting to other organisations, and providing key information for refugees to understand their entitlements and navigate processes and statutory services. Crucially, for many participants this assistance had begun before they had been granted leave to remain (permission to stay, usually for an initial period of five years as refugees or beneficiaries of humanitarian protection) and was particularly valued at that early stage. Participants emphasised that staff also provided emotional support and enabled further connections to counter feelings of isolation. As one participant said:

"When you come to this country, there is nobody, and you don't know anybody, you're just alone... And she [caseworker] takes this loneliness from me, every week she calls us and she ... tried to do something. And she did. ... She did everything for us."

In many cases the support provided by these organisations and other social connections had a positive impact on peoples' well-being. Social connections contributed to participants' ability

to identify and work towards their longer-term employment, educational or housing goals, while at the same time strengthening their confidence.

Friends and informal contacts

Organisational and professional support plays a key role but is not by itself enough to achieve social and economic integration. Participants also mentioned friendships and other types of informal relationships as important in helping them to settle in Scotland. These connections, which in many cases were described as trusted and reciprocal relationships, show the central role of informal connections in fostering social support and well-being. These social connections are particularly important when refugees may be reluctant to engage with mainstream services due to lack of trust in and fear of authorities.⁵

Participants described friendships with a diverse group of people, including from communities with a shared nationality, Scottish people and people from other ethnic groups. These relationships were established in different parts of the city and reflected a wide range of interests and needs (such as families with children, spaces for worship, and football). For one participant in Glasgow, a women's group had been the first place where she had met other adults outside the home after the birth of her child. The group became a space where she could take part in different activities and share the difficulties of her circumstances at that time:

"I looked forward to going there to meet people because I was just with the baby and my son. We cook, we talk, we talk about the struggle, how we cope. We just have fun, really, being together."

Her experience illustrates that the refugee experience is grounded not only in exceptionality – in finding solidarity in her struggle with immigration systems – but also in everyday connections around shared circumstances and interests, such as being a new mother.

Importantly, interpersonal relationships provided emotional and material support and information which promoted a sense of belonging and supported refugees' pathways towards outcomes such as employment and education.

However, some participants recounted their hesitation to build friendships with people from a similar national or ethnic background. This was due to a lack of trust stemming from their experiences of persecution pre-migration or during their journeys to the UK, a perception that some diaspora community members in the new country context were prone to gossip or judgment, or prejudice that they had experienced in disclosing their refugee status to longer-established co-nationals. This illustrates the importance of avoiding assumptions; shared ethnicity and nationality should not automatically be assumed to be sources of belonging for individuals whose experiences of inclusion and exclusion have been shaped by intersecting and overlapping identities.

Faith communities and groups

Faith groups and places of worship are an important part of pathways to integration. For some participants, churches and mosques were places where they could go when they felt sad or when they needed to cope with problems. However, places of worship go beyond serving religious and emotional needs. One participant explained that she worshipped at a local mosque but also volunteered in a church-run coffee shop; she enjoyed the work and was able to practise her English. Several other participants highlighted the diverse roles that places of worship served as part of their pathways to integration.

One research participant taking English classes with WEA stated that the church community was a source of support, and that she appreciated that at church "we are all equal in that space". God was the participant's greatest source of emotional support, with faith and faith-related connections playing a primary role in her life in Glasgow. At the same time, the place of worship had a social function, as she met friends from different countries as well as members of local communities. These relationships are both emotional and functional; some participants emphasised the practical support received during the asylum process and beyond, ranging from letters of support for immigration cases, to contacts and access to employment, as well as material goods such as furniture and clothing. There



Social connections mapping exercise with participants in Glasgow, where participants discussed scenarios such as finding employment and then mapped individual and organisational connections (Credit: MISC Team)

is a clear opportunity to develop and build on such findings, including the role of faith and faith-based groups and their influence on refugee integration in different contexts.

Barriers to independence and integration

The authors' current and past research with recently recognised refugees in Scotland indicates that new refugees retain a strong determination to maintain independence, contribute to wider society and have agency over their choices.⁶ However, structural and institutional failures in the delivery of rights have led to increased dependency. Some of these relate to policy areas controlled by the Westminster government in London but others are within the purview of the devolved Scottish government (housing, education and certain areas of social security) and efforts must continue to address these. Existing structures such as the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy could be used as a springboard to agree and implement concrete policy and practice

recommendations that engage the statutory, voluntary and private sectors as well as local communities across Scotland.

Some participants talked about positive relationships that they had been able to build directly with statutory agencies, in some cases through innovative community-based service provision. One participant had not only benefited from the support of a local authority-led homelessness project but had gone on to become a volunteer there and undertake a related course of study. However, certain statutory bodies (including those that control social housing allocations and access to financial support through the welfare state) can be inflexible; any connections that refugees have with these bodies are out of necessity only.⁷ In these cases, refugees aspire to free themselves from relationships of dependency through finding employment that enables them to provide for themselves and fully participate in society on their own terms. These insights (re) confirm the multi-directionality of integration

as a process that engages not only refugees but all sectors and members of society in a process of adaptation.

The importance of mapping and discussion

The fluid nature of formal and informal social connections depends on where refugees are within their asylum process, the structural barriers they face, and the specific and ongoing needs they have in their individual pathways towards integration. These pathways do not fully rely on specific service providers, nor supporting organisations which facilitate integration outcomes. In some cases, 'unexpected' connections can play an equally important role.

Insights from refugee-sector practitioners highlighted the valuable role that mapping and discussing social connections can play when developing personalised integration plans with recently recognised refugees. These conversations were a way to move away from a solely problem-solving relationship towards a more holistic process of integration planning. At the same time, mapping social connections served as a reminder to explore alternative routes and contacts to support beneficiaries (such as contacting a specific church). However, some practitioners regretted that they were not able to include these discussions in their appointments with every client, with their capacity to do so limited by a high workload and the time needed to navigate the continuing barriers to essential services.

These findings have relevance beyond the scope of this project and Scotland alone. Exploring the role of social connections can also contribute to understanding processes of integration in other geographical contexts. This could be particularly relevant where social and economic integration remains focused on integration outcomes in relation to specific goals (such as employment) but where less attention has been given to the social relationships and networks that enable access to some key resources that facilitate those outcomes.

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Six years after the Jordan Compact: the effect of labour market policies on Syrians' economic integration

Meriem Ait Ali Slimane and Shereen Al Abbadi

Enabling self-reliance through the right to work is essential for refugees' socio-economic integration. The impact of the Jordan Compact presents an interesting case study for policymakers.

The issues affecting refugees' socio-economic integration are complex and multifaceted, requiring a whole-of-community approach. These factors include access to work, mobility, financial services, education, health, housing and social integration services, as well as issues related to social cohesion and tensions with host communities.

The right to work is essential for refugees' socio-economic integration and, according to a recent study of 51 countries, 40 of them have laws or policies that allow at least some refugees to access the labour market. Jordan hosts one of the highest numbers of refugees in the world, of which Syrians constitute a significant share.¹ Jordan allows Syrians to work and has implemented a number of progressive measures, although these policies do not apply to refugees of other nationalities.

This article examines labour market policies affecting Syrians in Jordan since the adoption of the Jordan Compact in February 2016 and assesses their impact on refugees' labour market integration.

The effects of labour market policies

Jordan has introduced the following policies relating to Syrians' right to work:

February 2016: The government granted Syrians the right to work in all occupations open to foreign workers and offered work permits free of charge.

June 2016: Flexible work permits in agriculture were introduced. While still processed by the Ministry of Labour, innovations in implementation meant permits were delivered directly by agricultural cooperatives

rather than having to be obtained from employers.

September 2017: Flexible work permits in construction were introduced and delivered through the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions.

December 2020: Flexible work permits allowing a change of employer in all occupations within each economic sector were introduced.

July 2021: Flexible work permits become valid across all sectors, provided that Syrian workers remain in one 'major occupation group' (services and sales, skilled agriculture, forestry and fishery, craft and related trades, plant and machinery, and elementary occupations such as cleaners or physical labourers).²

The Compact has had a transformative effect on Syrians' labour market integration. Between 2014 and 2021, the Syrian unemployment rate fell from 60% to 33% and their labour force participation (percentage of the total working-age population that is in the labour force) went from 29% to 35%.³ Additionally, the number of Syrians working – formally and informally – has doubled since 2014, reaching about 150,000 in 2018, and 162,000 in 2021. Each time a new progressive policy has been implemented, there has been an immediate increase in the number of work permits issued to Syrians. These policies have resulted in an increase in the yearly number of work permits issued to Syrians, from 5,000 in 2016 to 62,000 in 2021.

By the end of 2021, Jordan managed to formalise almost 40% of Syrian workers through issuing work permits. While the most important

and urgent need is for refugees to access work and achieve self-reliance (whether formally or informally), work formalisation yields additional benefits. Holding a work permit is associated with a sense of safety and stability. ILO's qualitative research suggests that Syrians holding work permits earned more than those without permits.⁴ However, as indicated by a recent assessment by the ILO and FAFO, access to the labour market does not necessarily come with decent work and workers' protection.⁵

The Compact and the successively implemented policies led to an increase in Syrian employment, whether formal or informal. It gave Syrians the ability to enter labour markets and access jobs, and it allowed employers to overcome a reported reluctance to hire Syrians by providing a legal framework under which to recruit them.

The special case of Syrian women

For women, the trend has also been positive, although it took more time to boost their participation in the labour force. The share of work permits issued to Syrian women increased from 2% in early 2016 (pre-Compact) to 18% in the first half of 2022. Syrian women's participation in the labour force increased from 4% to 6% between 2016 and 2021 and their unemployment rate decreased from 47% in 2017 to 35% in 2021.

Social norms, transport and family caring responsibilities stand in the way of more women participating in the labour force. To address this, the government is running communication campaigns to inform women of working options available to them, in an attempt to address the gender bias in accessing work.

This shows that progressive policies and communication strategies – combined, no doubt, with generally deteriorating economic conditions – have encouraged Syrian women to seek work and enabled them to be more successful in finding employment.

The benefits of data-informed policy

Public opinion can affect immigration policies, including perceived competition for scarce jobs.⁶ This was a core concern when designing labour market policies for Syrians in Jordan,

when it was unclear whether and how Syrians could displace Jordanian workers.

New data from the Department of Statistics (Labour Force Surveys with disaggregated data for Syrians) and the Ministry of Labour (work permit databases) allows for comparisons between the occupations of employed Syrians and Jordanians. The vast majority of employed Syrians are in one of the 'major occupational groups' listed above. When comparing the occupations of employed Syrians and Jordanians, their skills levels rarely overlap and Syrians tend to work in different sectors and occupations to Jordanians.

This finding – that there is no or only minor competition between refugees and host communities – was critical in giving policymakers the confidence to open the labour market to refugees in an increasingly flexible and tailored manner. Collecting and processing these granular data, as well as including them in dialogue with policymakers, has resulted in the development of increasingly effective policies to enable refugees to work and to formalise their work.

Another important finding from the data helped design and fine-tune refugee policies. It was found that the actual sectoral distribution of Syrian workers is different from the distribution of work permits. While almost 50% of work permits were issued in agriculture, fewer than 5% of Syrian workers worked in agriculture. This discrepancy showed that the flexibility provided by work permits in agriculture, and the relative ease of obtaining them, allowed Syrians to request this type of work permit and then work in other sectors and professions. Regardless of their work permit status, 65.5% of employed Syrians were working in manufacturing, construction or wholesale retail and trade in 2019.

Humanitarian aid is still needed

Despite all this progress towards Syrians' access to the labour market and their increased socio-economic integration, it is worth highlighting the continued need for humanitarian aid. The Jordanian economy has been growing at an average of 2% a year since 2010 and is not creating enough jobs for all working-age people. About 80% of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the poverty line. The COVID-19

crisis has worsened this situation, with dire consequences on the health, education and well-being of refugees.⁷

Humanitarian aid for refugees is still needed but paradoxically is decreasing, as funds are diverted to other crises. The World Food Programme announced in 2021 that 21,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan would no longer receive cash assistance due to a lack of funds. It is important to continue to support countries hosting refugees, and to do so for all refugee nationalities. Syrians constitute the vast majority of refugees but other nationalities are also in need of humanitarian aid and economic self-reliance.

Lessons for policymakers

From the past six years of design and implementation of labour market policies to improve the self-reliance of Syrians in Jordan, we can draw the following lessons.

Data collection: The political economy of labour market policies and refugees' integration is complex. However, granular and frequent collection of labour market data, disaggregated by nationality, can help dispel potential fears related to competition with host communities.

Evidence-based policies: Data-informed policy dialogue and policy design contribute to better and tailored policies for the targeted population. To be effective, these policies require continual monitoring, with adjustment as necessary, on paper and in terms of implementation.

Delivery mechanisms: These mechanisms need to be adjusted and customised so that policies are properly implemented. For instance, increasing the diversity of channels by which refugees can apply for and obtain a work permit helps them access job opportunities.

A dual approach: Refugees and migrant workers should be treated differently. Generally, the former come to the country for humanitarian reasons with their families, whereas the latter come alone for economic reasons. Their relative numbers need to be put into perspective, as do

the jobs they occupy in the labour market, and their impact on the economy (notably through the multiplier effect stemming from refugees spending their income in the community). If room is made for migrant workers, it can also be made for refugees, with additional benefits in terms of local consumption and savings.

Humanitarian aid alongside progressive policies: Both need to be pursued in order to consolidate and broaden the socio-economic integration and self-reliance of refugees of all nationalities. Countries hosting refugees have their own vulnerabilities and fragilities, and it is premature to expect socio-economic integration to be achieved through progressive policies alone. Humanitarian aid needs to continue if refugees are to achieve a reasonable standard of living.

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How schools and other public services in the US can promote refugee integration

Cyril Bennouna, Ilana Seff and Lindsay Stark

Services and policies need to be more thoughtfully designed to enable young refugees' social and economic integration. This requires a better understanding of what constitutes sustainable integration and what factors promote it.

For adolescent refugees who have been resettled, the education system can be a fundamental part of adjusting to a new society.¹ Beyond simply facilitating academic advancement, school systems – when equipped with the right resources – can nurture the types of relationships with peers, teachers and other trusted adults that bring about sustainable socio-economic integration.

Since 2017, the authors have been undertaking a multi-sited, mixed-methods study: the Study of Adolescent Lives after Migration to America (SALaMA). This study has engendered reflections on what constitutes sustainable integration and what factors promote it.² The study's objectives include assessing the mental health and psychosocial well-being of high school students who have been – or whose parents have been – resettled to the US from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The study also aims to identify these students' daily stressors and the support mechanisms available to them.

The study data reflect the lived realities of refugee families from the MENA region across vastly different settings; from the relatively small city of Harrisonburg, Virginia, to the richly populated cities of Chicago, Illinois, Austin, Texas, and the Detroit metropolitan area in Michigan, a historically common site of resettlement for Arab refugees and other immigrants. SALaMA has not only produced novel learnings about the needs of this growing sub-population and the school systems that welcome them but has also generated invaluable insights into the ways refugee students and those who care for them can be supported in a manner that promotes enduring inclusion and well-being.

In this article the authors offer four overarching reflections that they hope may guide

practice and inform policy debates on refugee integration.

1. The hazards of measuring deep processes with shallow indicators

Too often, researchers and practitioners evaluate integration using readily measurable indicators, such as majority-language acquisition, school enrolment and employment rates, or the openness of integration policies. While these are necessary data for tracing the trajectory of resettled refugees and other displaced people, and for making comparisons across contexts, they are insufficient for understanding the meanings, mechanisms, challenges and lived experiences of integration. Even when the main objective is to assess degrees of integration at the population level, such measures are insensitive to some of the most important dimensions of adjustment to a new society, such as a sense of safety and belonging, access to and use of trustworthy and responsive social services, or degree of psychosocial well-being.

SALaMA has uncovered wide variation in outcomes on each of these dimensions, highlighting the severe limitations of a variable such as school enrolment as a catch-all indicator of educational integration. Many participants identified school support measures that promoted their academic success and sense of inclusion. Others reported experiences of discrimination and racism, feelings of exclusion or marginalisation, and a lack of support for their academic advancement. Some struggled while others thrived, and most experienced multilayered combinations of both – gradients of integration that are entirely lost in many conventional measures. While there are impressive efforts being made to enhance the multidimensional



Arabic language students engage with their teacher at the London Academy of Excellence Tottenham (LAET) (Credit: Rob Anderman and QFI)

measurement of population-level integration,³ those responsible for serving resettled refugees would benefit from more granular, detailed data on the quality, depth and challenges of refugees' adjustment processes.

These details matter. In an analysis of two school districts, for example, the authors found that foreign-born students, and especially those from the MENA region, had significantly higher levels of suicidal ideation, and that a sense of school belonging protected students against this risk.⁴ Such findings are alarming. If sustainable socio-economic integration is about providing opportunities to achieve equitable life chances or capabilities, then we need to know more, at the very least, about what it is that makes some refugees question their will to live.

Beyond simply drawing greater attention to the importance of mental health, this research indicates a need for a more holistic view of integration; one that takes more seriously the meaning that refugees make of their resettlement experiences and aspirations and one that does not assume that superficial public service and labour market participation inherently equate to sustainable integration.

2. Public service participation does not inherently enable integration

Even when public service systems are relatively well-resourced and employ policies that support equity and inclusion, they may inadvertently produce harmful stressors that undermine refugee well-being and sense of belonging. In contexts where, for example, educators punished students for using Arabic in class, this not only created stress for the students but ignored evidence that dual-language education is beneficial to newcomer learning.⁵ Official school district statements of inclusion also rung hollow when US-born students called their Muslim peers 'terrorists' with impunity, or when educators and classmates singled girls out for their decision to wear or not wear a hijab.⁶

These findings underscore the vital importance of true cultural responsiveness in public service provision, where providers should learn from students and adapt to their needs and preferences as equal community members.⁷ The cultural responsiveness of public services, such as schools and health centres, should be a core indicator of integration among host communities.

3. The misunderstood power of enclaves

One implication arising from the authors' research in the Michigan city of Dearborn, which has a large and multigenerational concentration of Arab-Americans, is that refugees may benefit from resettling in areas with large concentrations of people with a shared ethnicity.⁸ Rather than delaying integration (as some studies suggest and as many integration policies take for granted), living in Dearborn empowered refugee students to learn English while receiving comforting support from fellow Arabic-speaking peers and educators. Studying alongside other newcomers as well as second- and third-generation Arab-Americans enabled newcomers to adapt to the norms and procedures of Michigan's education system while still recognising meaningful aspects of their religious and ethnic identities in the school climate.

In this context, refugee students tended to fare just as well academically and psychosocially as their US-born peers. Without exaggerating the protective and promotive effects of ethnic enclaves as such, these findings can be taken as further evidence that the quality of public services – and especially their ability to promote a sense of recognition, inclusion and belonging – are at least as important for sustainable integration as the overall availability of public services.

4. The impact of the pandemic

No recent event has highlighted the need for high-quality, inclusive and responsive services for integration as profoundly as the COVID-19 pandemic. Students described losing access to valued school resources during and after the pandemic, from arts classes to in-person therapy. Students with previously minimal exposure to information technology (IT), or who had only recently arrived in the US, struggled to engage in virtual learning altogether. Nearly every student from the MENA region interviewed by the authors lamented the social isolation they endured during remote learning.⁹

One student said, "I can't communicate with my friends because of COVID"; as a result, he relied on online video games for social interaction. For students already affected by conflict,

displacement, family separation and the challenges of resettlement, such drastic interruptions of their new routines and support systems could have especially harmful mental health effects. A female student said that the mental health of many of her classmates "started going down because they haven't been outside; they haven't been doing stuff that they like to do".

For many students, the initial isolation transformed into full-fledged withdrawal later in the pandemic, with some unable to get out of bed, leave their room or eat. Shifting classes to online modalities ensured educational continuity but resulted in fewer available therapeutic resources to support MENA students' psychosocial well-being. As schools and other services continue to readjust to in-person engagement, carefully designed interventions will be needed to reignite the feelings of belonging that may have dimmed in the absence of quality, in-person services.

SALaMA data collected during the pandemic underscored the positive role schools can also play in supporting adjustment and belonging among students' families. School providers in Chicago, for example, reported that students whose parents or other caregivers lost their jobs sought out trusted adults at school to help fill out unemployment applications. Such anecdotes demonstrate that when students remained continuously engaged with supportive schools during the pandemic, they were able to leverage these relationships to access safety nets for their families.

A two-way process in practice

As much as the academic literature has recognised that integration is a two-way process in theory, many policies and programmes still operate as though refugees are the only ones who do, or do not, integrate. Public service systems, and the receiving community more broadly, not only promote integration but are an essential part of it. Truly responsive schools and other public services learn from refugees and grow with them. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed alarming tears in our fabric of care; it should also remind us that what makes integration sustainable is the strength of the seam that binds us all together.

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No financial inclusion without basic economic rights

Swati Mehta Dhawan, Kim Wilson, Hans-Martin Zademach and Julie Zollmann

Without access to basic economic rights, refugees will not be able to build self-reliance. Case-studies from Kenya and Jordan show that providing financial services is not sufficient if rights are absent.

Between 2019 and 2020, the authors conducted qualitative research in Kenya and Jordan to understand the financial lives of refugees.¹ The aim of this research was to understand how refugees integrated financially into the host economy, how they managed their finances, and what role financial services played in this integration. The research focused on those who lived in non-camp situations and had been in their host countries for three to eight years.²

In both countries, instead of starting with the question of what financial services refugees might need, the authors looked at refugees' financial histories, livelihood journeys and financial risk management strategies to understand what factors supported or hindered their desired financial outcomes. This offered insights into the context within which

refugees have a need for and use financial services.

One finding was that financial services did not lead to fulsome (by which the authors mean robust or profitable) livelihoods for refugees but that fulsome livelihoods led to increasing demand for a range of financial services. The authors concluded that efforts to boost financial inclusion can only have their desired impact when they build on host governments' policies that give refugees economic rights, opportunities, documentation and a clear pathway to a certain future. Unless these are ensured, livelihoods fail to progress and there is no demand for financial services beyond those required to receive humanitarian transfers, international remittances, and small savings or credit to secure basic needs of food, shelter and medicine.

Livelihood progression and the demand for financial services

Humanitarian actors assert that once refugees are integrated into the financial systems of the host country and have access to affordable financial services, they can build sustainable livelihoods, reduce dependence on humanitarian aid, and improve self-reliance. This theory of change often assumes a natural step-by-step progression in refugees' livelihoods but this was not the case for a majority of our study's respondents. Their livelihood progressions and hence the need for financial services depended on the degree of economic inclusion that their host country offered.

Let us consider the scenario of a welcoming host economy where refugees are allowed to fully participate in the local labour market. During the initial phase after arrival, refugees will depend on charity and on support from friends and family in the country or overseas. At this stage they need financial services to access humanitarian cash assistance or remittances more efficiently. As they acclimatise and build new information networks, they can find entry-level jobs. Where a context is favourable, refugees demonstrate linear upwards progressions in their livelihoods. They might go from cleaning tables at a restaurant to taking orders, or from working at a hair salon for low pay to becoming a freelancer commanding higher wages. As their incomes increase and diversify, they demand an account (bank or mobile) to receive income and keep savings, a payments account for personal or business payments, micro-credit to start or expand a business or build a new skill, and savings groups to build lump sums.

In the above scenario, offering timely and appropriate financial services at each stage of livelihood progression makes sense. However, a majority of our participants were stuck in what the authors call the 'survival-livelihood' phase, earning a meagre income from entry-level, often informal and seasonal, jobs or small home-based businesses. Their income was barely enough to cover basic needs and even a slight financial shock led them into debt. Their financial priorities were to smoothen consumption – that is, to balance their spending as incomes fluctuated – and to

better manage financial shocks. To this end, most depended on informal credit from their social networks of friends and family, or on charity and humanitarian assistance. As their livelihoods did not progress, the demand for formal financial services flatlined.

In sum, the demand for financial services evolves only when refugees' sources of income grow, strengthen and diversify over time. Hence, it is crucial to remove the barriers to refugees' livelihood pursuits, while strengthening the supporting factors. Only then will financial inclusion efforts – such as through national policies and financial literacy – result in the positive impact intended.

Barriers to sustainable livelihoods

In Jordan, the government introduced several reforms to allow Syrian refugees to access jobs and set up businesses. However, Syrian refugees could only work in certain labour market sectors, which were characterised by low-wage and seasonal jobs. Our participants faced bureaucratic processes and delays in accessing work permits or registering businesses.³ Refugees coming from countries other than Syria (our study covered Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and Somalia) had to work illegally as work permits were expensive. To add to this, most could not provide valid passports or were hesitant about official security checks and the risk of detention, as most had overstayed their entry visas. Having a work permit also meant that they would have to give up their refugee status, which jeopardised the possibility of resettlement.

In Kenya, the government adopted restrictive policies for refugees in the wake of several al-Shabaab terror attacks. In 2012, the government made it mandatory for all refugees to reside in camps and by 2014 it was a criminal offence for refugees to travel outside of Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps without permission. Our respondents in Nairobi were unable to progress their livelihoods; they were denied work permits and faced constant harassment and discrimination. Those living in the camps felt stuck as they were not able to move and trade freely or leave the camp to build a new life as skilled professionals, in Kenya or abroad. Refugees faced long waiting

times to process or renew their documents. Although they were allowed to work in theory, in practice work permits were rarely issued. And in 2015, the government restricted refugees' access to telecommunications and financial services, barring them from registering for a SIM card or an account with M-Pesa (a mobile phone-based payments and micro-financing service), both of which are necessary for economic integration in Kenya.

In both Jordan and Kenya, refugees were unable to fully integrate into host economies unless they had a secure legal status such as permanent residence or had acquired citizenship (by the process of naturalisation). This uncertainty discouraged refugee investment in long-term skills and assets, and led to limited self-reliance and prolonged dependence on charity. In such a scenario, there was no incentive for refugees to save or borrow money to invest.

Making financial inclusion work

1. Fix the foundations first

Financial inclusion policies must build on host government policies to facilitate refugee integration. In Jordan, this means opening up additional labour market sectors for refugees which are appropriate to their skills; facilitating access to documents such as work permits, business licences and driving licences; easing business registration; and ensuring legal protection in case of joint ventures with Jordanian partners. Equally critical is the need for governments and humanitarian organisations to provide a clear pathway towards long-term solutions, either through resettlement or through local economic integration by providing a legal status that allows for increased rights.

In Kenya, refugees need the freedom to work, move and use mainstream finance. The government and humanitarian organisations need to rectify the delays and opacity in refugee management processes, including issuance and renewal of documents such as refugee identity documents and work permits. Similar to Jordan, in Kenya refugees want clear pathways to a stable future in Kenya or abroad. A potential solution could be to explore legal

pathways for migration through skills partnerships with third countries such as the US or Canada. Eligible refugees could be trained to develop and be certified in skills needed in these countries and be able to access legal migration pathways.

2. Allow access to mainstream financial infrastructure

In both Jordan and Kenya, refugees had to conduct their financial transactions using separate, closed and limited-purpose systems, which do not result in financial inclusion. In Jordan, humanitarian organisations and the government nudged refugees into using mobile wallets (digital wallets accessed using a mobile phone), for which the service ecosystem was still nascent and faced operational issues. Non-Syrian refugees in Jordan could not access a mobile or bank account due to lack of documents.

In Kenya, where access to the ubiquitous M-Pesa was necessary to sustain a livelihood, refugees had been blocked from registration since 2015. They could only access a highly restricted form of M-Pesa used to distribute assistance to refugees in camps and which did not allow them to deposit or keep money, send or receive transfers, or request credit.⁴ In response to such exclusion, refugees accessed critical financial services using borrowed identity documents. Far from being creative workarounds, such adaptations increased our research participants' precarity and undermined the integrity of the financial systems. Instead of building separate financial systems for refugees, they should be allowed to access existing mainstream financial services and popular channels for financial transactions.

3. Broaden understanding of inputs beyond financial services

Once the research project team set their sights on the aim of improving the financial outcomes of refugees, they found that the framework of 'financial health' is better suited to understand the broader range of conditions required.⁵ For this project, a refugee is defined to be financially healthy when they can do the following after having been in the host country for four to five years: a) meet basic needs of food,

shelter, medicine and education; b) comfortably manage debts; c) recover from financial setbacks; d) access lump sums to invest in assets and opportunities; and e) continually expand their planning horizons.

Examining the financial lives of refugees in Kenya and Jordan revealed that financial services played only a minor role in improving their financial health. Instead, other non-financial inputs such as social networks, language skills, mental health support and feelings of personal security were equally critical. Based on this, the authors highlight two recommendations for practitioners.

The first is to broaden support for refugees, particularly women, to build social networks and friendships. These networks provide: critical information about jobs, housing and refugee rights; finance for setting up businesses; informal loans to meet basic needs at times of insufficient income; and avenues for raising emergency funds for health expenses. This could be, for example, setting up mixed-group interactions between host and refugee women to encourage skills swaps (traditional skills such as cooking or handicrafts, professional skills, and language skills) or assigning female mentors from the host community to help refugee women navigate the economic and social systems in the host country.

The second is to expand and strengthen the role of community-based organisations (CBOs) – a critical but often under-utilised player in the refugee support ecosystem. CBOs are grassroots organisations led by host or refugee communities and faith-based groups. In both Kenya and Jordan, the authors saw that they provided timely financial and non-financial support to their refugee members, irrespective of nationality and race. Given their close proximity to the community and their adoption of dignity-enhancing practices (such as calling refugees ‘members’, not clients), they were better able to respond to the ever-changing needs of refugees. Humanitarian organisations could forge deeper partnerships with CBOs and build their own technical and financial capacities to improve service delivery. Furthermore, CBOs could expand to include services such as professional psychological counselling, language training, mixed

group networking, small business capital and paralegal services.

Conclusion

Only when the broader problem of economic and political ‘exclusion’ for refugees is addressed will any efforts towards their ‘inclusion’ in the financial sector have the positive impact envisaged by the international community. Although Jordan and Kenya are applauded for using innovative digital financial services to financially include refugees, such efforts have not resulted in improved livelihoods and self-reliance. It would be far more effective to start by addressing refugees’ lack of economic rights while at the same time strengthening existing mechanisms that support refugee livelihoods, mainly social networks and CBOs. Livelihoods would then be able to progress, and as a result the demand for financial services would evolve.

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Transforming a refugee camp into a marketplace: lessons from Kenya

Luba Shara

Donors, humanitarian agencies, development finance institutions and host countries are looking to the private sector to play a key role in supporting refugees to integrate into host communities.

The private sector has a critical role to play in integrating refugees into local economies. Attracting private firms to refugee-hosting areas, however, remains a challenge. Despite the launch of many private sector-related initiatives,¹ little is known about what a commercial firm needs in order to start operating in a refugee camp or settlement, how models to facilitate their involvement should be adjusted depending on the type of refugee-hosting area, and which industries would be most willing to invest.

Start by answering why and how

When discussing the participation of the private sector in enhancing the socio-economic integration of refugees, most policymakers focus on two key questions: why the private sector should be involved at all and how to make the investment a success.

There are four main reasons why the private sector's involvement is important. First, and most importantly, is job creation. Despite the efforts of many humanitarian agencies and local governments to branch out of their core mandate to provide livelihood activities, it is the private sector that creates the bulk of meaningful and sustainable employment.

The second reason is the opportunity for local informal micro-enterprises to join larger companies' value chains (that is, the full life-cycles of a product or process, from material sourcing to recycling). Despite the presence of vibrant micro- and small enterprises, most refugee camps and settlements are excluded from accessing markets outside of the camps or settlements. By connecting the local micro-entrepreneurs to the already established value chains, larger companies can create a diverse ecosystem of local firms that would be more likely to grow and to hire more people.

The third reason is the improvement in existing labour market-oriented skills and the development of new skills. In refugee camps and settlements, many refugees have completed training sessions organised by NGOs and development agencies. However, with such trainings not linked to a specific employer, this has seldom led to sustainable jobs. Compared with other actors, private firms are better equipped to deliver training sessions focusing on skills that firms need.

The fourth reason is that businesses can play a role in encouraging local and national governments to remove legal and regulatory obstacles that have traditionally hindered refugees from becoming self-reliant; such as access to work permits, movement restrictions, and 'Know Your Customer'² limitations. For example, movement restrictions often result in refugee traders having to buy inputs (resources to create goods and services) at a higher price because they cannot access markets, and refugee documents are frequently not recognised by Know Your Customer regulations, which results in significant obstacles to refugees' financial inclusion.

The second question posed by policymakers – of how to make investment work – is arguably the least researched and understood question. This article highlights the key considerations necessary for policymakers, donors and development finance institutions (DFIs) to successfully attract private firms to refugee camps and settlements. It draws on lessons from implementing the Kakuma Kalobeyi Challenge Fund, a project aimed at supporting private sector investment and unlocking the economic potential of refugees and their hosts in the Kakuma–Kalobeyi refugee-hosting area in northern Kenya.

Tailor the private sector response to the refugee setting

Each refugee context is different. Although Jordan and Kenya have large refugee camps, Al-Zaatari in Jordan has a mostly homogeneous population, while Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya is home to more than nine nationalities. Refugees in Jordan mainly receive monetary support, whereas refugees in Kenya and the East and Horn of Africa usually receive in-kind assistance. While Ukrainian and Venezuelan refugees, for example, have primarily migrated to urban areas, the refugee camps and settlements in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda are in remote, economically underdeveloped and often logistically hard-to-reach rural areas.

To better understand which private firms would be most suitable to engage, refugee settings can be divided into four broad categories:

Urban friendly: settlements located within or close to large urban centres or business hubs; generally, the legal and regulatory environment is conducive to private sector investment, and the local community is supportive because of close linguistic, cultural or business ties.

Urban unfriendly: settlements located within or near large urban centres or business hubs but without favourable legal rights; refugees are typically employed in the informal sector or hired illegally.

Rural friendly: settlements located in rural areas that enjoy a relatively supportive legal or regulatory status; refugees have routine daily exchanges with the local host community, often sharing land and coexisting in relative peace.

Rural unfriendly: settlements located in remote, economically underdeveloped and difficult-to-reach areas, with refugees experiencing multiple barriers to employment or freedom of movement.

Identifying the refugee setting is important to understand what kind of private firms might be interested in being involved. For example, when considering setting up even a

small production facility in or near a refugee camp, one needs to think about the logistics of transporting inputs into an area and products out, the presence of cold storage facilities and the safety of running operations. It is far more difficult to set up such a facility in a remote area than in an urban environment.

Overall, there is limited literature available on the effect of the private sector on refugees' livelihoods either in cities or rural areas. As the Kakuma Kalobeyei Challenge Fund operates in a remote area of northern Kenya, this article primarily provides insights for rural refugee settings.

Conduct market research to identify comparative advantages

For the private sector, entering a refugee-hosting area is not materially different from entering any new market. The business will need to understand the market size and the characteristics of the key target groups – their income and consumption levels, and consumer preferences. Where relevant information is not readily available, it will be necessary to conduct a market study to collect it.³

Consider your first meeting with a large pharmacy chain in Kenya to discuss entering the Kakuma refugee-hosting area. The firm is likely to request information on the area's population, the number of pharmacies and hospitals, available insurance schemes, the portion of discretionary income spent on medicine, and the free medical services offered by UNHCR and its implementing partners.

Treat the refugees and their hosts as one marketplace. The traditional division of refugee-hosting areas into refugee camps and separate hosting communities often does not reflect the reality on the ground, where the two communities interact daily despite possible legal and regulatory restrictions. When considering inviting commercial interests into the area, it is important to have information about the whole market – refugees and their hosts.

How much concessional support is needed?

Private businesses often donate generously to humanitarian causes, especially during times of crisis. However, corporate social responsibility is insufficient to motivate businesses to

start commercial operations in refugee-hosting areas. Investing in refugee camps and settlements is risky, requiring blended ‘concessional finance’ (financing provided by donors or third parties on terms below market rate and blended with DFIs’ own-account financing). The blended concessional finance incentivises firms to enter the market by decreasing the investment risks and improving the commercial conditions for investors).

Given that refugee-hosting areas often have no real market rate, determining the appropriate amount of concessional support is not an exact science. A good starting point is to assess the project against the Blended Concessional Finance Principles⁴ developed by a group of DFIs to ensure the effective use of concessional resources in private sector projects. It is important to a) avoid market distortion or crowding out private capital, b) catalyse market development, c) address market failures (for example, market power being concentrated in the hands of a few wholesalers) and d) promote high standards in corporate governance, environmental impact and social inclusion.

The potential commercial viability and sustainability of the project is especially important to consider. Without a medium- or long-term horizon of profitability (or at least of breaking even), most firms would not view the project as worth attempting.

Most firms will require substantial non-financial support

Most private firms require substantial logistical and practical guidance. For example, firms considering investing in the Kakuma refugee-hosting area typically ask how to fly to Kakuma and where to sleep there, how to hire refugees and whether it is legal, and how to access electricity, water and land. In the East and Horn of Africa, refugee camps and settlements are located far from the key urban centres. The travel logistics are complicated and require detailed explanation and additional efforts. A well-organised initial scoping mission for a private firm to the refugee-hosting area might positively affect its decision to enter the market.

While countries’ laws often grant refugees the right to work, businesses might need legal

assistance to overcome the considerable barriers preventing refugees’ participation in the workforce. This is especially true for medium-sized and smaller firms that might not have resources to hire legal help.

Due to communal land ownership in many refugee-hosting areas, leasing or buying land is a complex undertaking, especially to build permanent structures. Firms will need assistance from local government actors to obtain necessary permits and to negotiate with the community. The process of obtaining access to land might delay the launch of commercial projects but will ensure consent from the local community and support from local and regional government.

In addition, most refugee camps and settlements in the East and Horn of Africa are located in historically marginalised border regions. Standard operational risks are intensified by challenges such as inter-community conflicts over grazing pastures and frequent droughts. The level of understanding of how the private sector works is low, and this is exacerbated by high expectations from the local community which often sees private firms as an extension or replacement of humanitarian organisations or government agencies.

As such, each new engagement in a refugee-hosting area should be evaluated against the ‘do no harm’ principle. In other words, any commercial project needs to consider how its activities could exacerbate existing tensions and grievances, either between refugees and hosts or within refugee or host communities. Most private firms will need assistance to navigate these challenges. It is worth conducting an in-depth fragility analysis to better understand the refugee-hosting area’s political economy, list all key stakeholders and decision-making groups, assess existing market distortions and market opportunities, and explain land allocation processes as well as security dynamics and management. The outcomes of this analysis need to be embedded in the project’s design and implementation.

To summarise, to interest private firms in starting operations in refugee-hosting areas, it is important to look at the type of refugee setting; obtain the necessary market-related data and information about the area’s

comparative advantages; determine the level of minimum concessionality and potential for commercial viability; and, finally, assist the firm with navigating local regulatory, political and fragility challenges.

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1. Researchers identified 170 private sector-led initiatives in the refugee sector across the Middle East and Africa. The Bridgespan

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2. Know Your Customer is the process of verifying a customer's identity to prevent banks from being used for money laundering activities.

3. IFC (2018) *Kakuma as a Marketplace: A Consumer and Market Study of a Refugee Camp and Town in Northwest Kenya* bit.ly/kakuma-market-study

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Public-private initiatives for local integration: evidence from Afghanistan and Kenya

Nassim Majidi and Camilla Fogli

Public-private partnerships are laying the foundations to enable sustainable and ethical value chain approaches to be used in displacement-affected communities.

In recent years, a considerable number of private initiatives have emerged which point to a growing interest and commitment from investors and corporate partners to support and co-design socio-economic interventions that support displaced persons in the areas where they live. However, migration actors have not yet fully tapped into the potential of the private sector to complement humanitarian and development interventions.¹

Working on the assumption that forcibly displaced persons – if properly supported – can be strong economic actors and agents of change in local markets and communities, socio-economic integration interventions generally aim at fostering displaced persons' self-reliance and empowerment. However, such approaches often have limited impact as they tend to comprise aid-based, short-term programming implemented by development and humanitarian actors who frequently lack specific knowledge of local market contexts and dynamics.

Moreover, traditional approaches to forcibly displaced persons' livelihoods tend to focus on strengthening the supply side of the labour market, by improving the employability and skill sets of displaced people, but rarely address or engage with the demand side. In other words, popular approaches do not take into account

what labour, products and services are actually needed in the local context.² The involvement of private partners can support public actors to steer intervention strategies towards investments and actions that are grounded in market systems assessments and their needs, and can thus contribute to better identify long-term and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

One way to merge the efforts made on both sides is through what are commonly referred to as public-private partnerships (PPPs). By bridging the gap between the competencies and responsibilities of the private and public sectors, such partnerships can leverage the capability of the private sector to meaningfully contribute to socio-economic integration at the local level. Although such interventions appear promising, there is to date a lack of concrete evidence on what works and what does not work, what needs to be done to ramp up efforts focusing on private sector solutions and, most importantly, what is the actual impact on the lives of refugees and host communities.³

This article examines the role of PPPs in sustaining value chains (that is, the full lifecycles of a product or process) in communities affected by displacement. It draws on evidence from two initiatives targeting locally sourced products in Afghanistan and Kenya, investigating the



Employees sorting and packing mulberries in the Ziba Foods factory in Kabul, Afghanistan, in March 2022. (Credit: Ziba Foods)

impact of these initiatives on the inclusion of underrepresented groups such as displaced women, and on building the resilience of individuals and communities.

The potential of PPPs in the agricultural sector

In low-income countries, a major challenge for the agricultural sector is to progress towards market-based systems that take into account current trends around the demand for food, raw materials and labour. Even with these elements taken into account, such systems require a high level of coordination among all actors in order to develop and deliver products that meet market needs but also ensure food security, environmental sustainability and inclusion of smallholder farmers. In contexts of limited public resources and expertise, public and private partners' agendas overlap, creating a critical space for the establishment of PPPs for value chain development.⁴ By bringing together the operational and economic efficiency of the private sector with the role of public actors as promoters of social interests, these partnerships can provide financing and capacity building, and can mitigate some of the risks associated with the agricultural sector.

Evidence from Afghanistan: the impact on integration

The Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI), a UN programme run by the International Trade Centre

(ITC) and funded by the EU, exemplifies how PPPs can support companies in creating sustainable value chains while positively impacting displaced communities on the ground. The EFI connects artisans from low-income countries with socially and environmentally conscious consumers on the global market. Its support for people in displacement-affected contexts in launching and running their businesses helps create jobs and build skills and wealth for marginalised groups. For example, in Afghanistan EFI partnered with Ziba Foods, a mission-led snack food brand that produces sustainably grown nuts and dried fruit from local Afghan farmers.

Although not directly targeting forcibly displaced people, the company works closely with communities in both urban and rural displacement-affected contexts. By only hiring a local workforce and by collaborating with small-scale and family-led farmers in rural areas, Ziba Foods aims to improve the livelihood possibilities for an increasing number of individuals and families, especially by supporting businesses owned by women. Over the last six years, the company has positioned itself as a reliable and fair partner in the trade of tree nuts and dried fruit, creating trust among the local communities. In return, this trust allows Ziba Foods to stimulate change towards more ethical and sustainable processes in the way partners operate, including decent conditions for workers. This has positive implications on

creating more inclusive agricultural value chains, especially for women. With female staff and managers making up 85% of the workforce, Ziba Foods is contributing to increasing the number and quality of jobs for women working in the agribusiness in Afghanistan, and directly enhancing their economic and social position within local communities. By providing women with a safe working environment where they can interact socially outside the family context, the company also contributes to lowering the risk of their marginalisation and thus strengthening social cohesion, including for displaced women who may otherwise encounter fewer opportunities to meet and socialise with peers.

Thanks to the support and guidance provided by the EFI's network of experts, Ziba Foods has brought local products to internationally recognised standards and accessed regional and international markets. This achievement not only paves the way for other business opportunities and future initiatives but also helps bolster the reputation of Afghan agricultural products and the farmers behind them, contributing to a narrative shift around how to support economic growth in conflict- and displacement-affected areas.

Evidence from Kenya: setting up the process

In Kenya, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched the Refugee Agricultural Value Chains for Economic Self Reliance (RAVES) project in 2020, funded by the IKEA Foundation and to be implemented in Turkana County which as of June 2022 hosted around 42% of the refugees and asylum seekers living in the country.⁵

Groundnuts were identified as a potential crop for sustainable income generation and nutrition security for both the host and refugee communities in the area, as groundnuts are relatively drought-tolerant and rich in protein, have a longer shelf life than fresh vegetables and are in high demand. Implemented in close collaboration with public and private actors, the project aims to create a viable agribusiness that is evidence-based and demand-driven. Through an integrated approach, the project intends to cover the entire value chain, from training local farmers to constructing two

water pans in the same area for irrigation, plus developing a county-wide production and marketing strategy.

The overall goal is to enable farmers from Loima and Turkana West sub-counties and refugees in Kalobeyei settlement to produce groundnuts for Insta Products, a local company specialising in manufacturing low-cost nutritional products for emergency feeding programmes. Through a PPP, Insta Products targets 1,500 farmers, of which 30% are refugees, and is projected to bring in KES 96 million (Kenyan shillings) annually to Turkana County (approximately USD 791,000 at time of writing). By ensuring that local farmers are equipped with the necessary skills, access to high-yield seeds and good connections to industry-relevant markets, the initiative aims to transform groundnut production in the area, while also improving nutrition and living standards of local communities including refugees.

Building resilience

Building resilience at the local level starts with awareness-raising among the communities involved. By engaging with farmers and their families from the outset, Ziba Foods highlights the importance of spending time with communities to understand internal dynamics and specific needs. Ongoing training sessions and local assessments are key to enabling farmers to fully understand the scope of the project, the requirements and modalities of work and what it means to be organic at an international certification level. The same applies to Insta Products, which together with FAO is investing significantly in capacity building and training farmers on international quality and food security standards, with positive implications not only for the quality of production but also for the well-being of local communities. Building resilience also means enabling local communities to cope with unforeseen challenges and external shocks. Given how limited the window of opportunity is for harvesting tree nuts and preparing for the new crop, and how a lack of resources at the right time can hinder the entire process, Ziba Foods provides farmers with capital in advance.

Risks encountered in the agricultural sector include climate change-induced shocks. This is

the case in Kenya, where the current drought and water situation has impacted recent harvests. To avoid local farmers suffering income loss and local communities facing food scarcity, and to prevent further crop shortages, Insta Products is investing in a local seed system to secure high-quality seed at affordable prices. In addition, they are working with local partners on a monitoring mechanism, which organises farmers into registered groups and supports them in planting at appropriate times, thereby avoiding the risk of having to harvest during the rainy season.

Conclusions

Public-private partnerships have the potential to radically transform the response to forced displacement contexts. They can foster an enabling environment for socio-economic integration and strengthen the resilience of host communities by involving multiple actors in solutions. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the two cases analysed above:

The importance of systemic thinking: While designing solutions and interventions, it is crucial that a systemic perspective is adopted that can connect public and private actors' objectives and operations. Enhancing the competitiveness of local products in specific value chains creates economic value for the entire community – including displaced people – and ultimately contributes to the realisation of sustainable development goals at the local level, such as food security, inclusive economic growth and job creation.

Effective partnerships need a clear but broad vision plus flexibility: While there is a need for partnership agreements to have a clear vision and to align all actors' interests, objectives and priorities, a broader scope and flexibility are also key elements. The added value of PPPs, compared with aid-based funding initiatives that focus on a very specific or narrow set of targets, is to provide comprehensive support that is tailored to the company's specific needs and can change over time.

It is not just about the money: PPP frameworks and related interventions need to provide

comprehensive support beyond monetary investment. Through expert guidance and capacity-building activities, such programmes can help small businesses thrive and improve their performance in all areas, such as standardised operations, market analysis, product placement, and improved marketing strategies and internal monitoring systems.

Need to invest in ecosystem-building: PPPs should provide access to networking opportunities and stimulate the emergence of an enabling environment for future collaboration and business opportunities beyond the partnerships' immediate scope.

Context-specific knowledge is key: As there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model, PPPs should help small local companies to fully understand the context in which they operate and the communities with which they engage. Only in this way can private actors succeed in setting-up solid, sustainable businesses from which the whole community can benefit.

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Addressing challenges to integrating refugees in the Turkish labour market

Özlem Gürakar Skribeland

Turkey's large refugee population faces major challenges in accessing legal employment. Several legal measures could improve their situation.

Turkey has been home to around four million refugees and asylum seekers for the past few years, with more than 3.6 million Syrians and approximately 320,000 persons of other non-European origin (mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran). Syrian refugees in Turkey are subject to a temporary protection regime on a group basis (temporary protection beneficiaries) while refugees of other nationalities can apply for one of the following types of status: (i) refugee, (ii) conditional refugee or (iii) subsidiary protection beneficiary. In accordance with Turkey's geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugee status is reserved for persons who seek protection in Turkey as a result of "events occurring in Europe", and very few fulfil that requirement. Subsidiary protection, on the other hand, provides for a comprehensive set of rights but that status has also been given only to a few people so far.¹ As such, in practice, the main protection status available to Turkey's non-European refugee population (aside from Syrians) is conditional refugee status.

Both refugees (that is, those from Europe) and subsidiary protection beneficiaries have a general legal right to work in Turkey. However, given that few have received those statuses, this article will focus on the situation for conditional refugees and temporary protection beneficiaries. Rather than a general right to work, these two groups have only a right to apply for a work permit (this has been the case since 2016).²

Challenges to accessing legal employment

Informal employment is the norm for Turkey's refugee population, and that comes with low pay, exploitative conditions, and fear and risk of deportation. There are no publicly available data on how many conditional refugees and temporary protection beneficiaries have been

issued work permits. However, studying the work permit statistics published annually by the Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security (which are fairly detailed and include a breakdown based on different criteria) provides a valuable insight into these two groups' lack of access to legal employment.

Firstly, an important consideration is how many and what type of permits are issued each year. The total number is relatively low and temporary work permits are the norm.³ Temporary permits are linked to specific employers and can initially be issued for one year only. It is then possible to apply for a first extension of up to two years, and additional extensions of up to three years each time. However, if the person changes employer, a new initial permit is required (valid for one year only). This system makes it exceedingly difficult for conditional refugees and temporary protection beneficiaries to enjoy stable access to legal employment; they must constantly struggle to be legally employed and try to stay with the same employer, which makes them very dependent on their employers.

Secondly, knowing that temporary protection beneficiaries are from Syria and conditional refugees are mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, it helps to study the breakdown of permits granted based on country of origin. The statistics reveal, for example, that approximately 27,000 permits have been issued to Iraqis, Afghans and Iranians between 2016 and 2020. Given that these are temporary permits with short validity, some of them must be permit extensions issued to the same person in different years. It should also be recognised that many of those who received these permits were likely coming to Turkey regularly and for the purpose of seeking work rather than protection. Yet, even if all of them were refugees and asylum seekers, this would still constitute

a small proportion of the refugees and asylum seekers of other non-European origin currently in the country (320,000 persons).

Finally, studying the breakdown of permits issued in different provinces reveals additional insights. After registering with the authorities, each conditional refugee and temporary protection beneficiary is assigned to a province. They are then required to reside there and can normally work only in that location. This means that their employment opportunities depend on where they are assigned, which puts both groups at a clear disadvantage in relation to all other foreigners seeking access to the Turkish labour market.

On top of this, conditional refugees are further disadvantaged because they are subject to Turkey's so-called satellite city system whereby they are appointed to one of 62 (out of 81) Turkish provinces that have been designated satellite cities.⁴ Importantly, the long list of satellite cities excludes the key big, industrial and touristic cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Bursa, Izmir and Antalya, which offer greater employment opportunities and where – unsurprisingly – a significant proportion of recent years' work permits were issued.

Temporary protection beneficiaries too are further disadvantaged because of a quota applicable to their employment whereby, as a general rule, the number of temporary protection beneficiaries employed in a workplace may not exceed 10% of the Turkish citizens employed there. The relevant legislation does not apply a similar quota for conditional refugees, and it is unclear whether the latter are subjected to quotas in practice. The 10% quota does not apply to the employment of other foreigners in general, either. Considering that in some provinces temporary protection beneficiaries are highly concentrated, this quota would be even more challenging for Syrian refugees in those provinces.⁵

Proposed legal measures

In short, three elements of Turkey's refugee law regime limit refugees' access to legal employment. These are (i) the work permit requirement applicable to both conditional refugees and temporary protection beneficiaries, (ii) the 10% employment quota applicable

to temporary protection beneficiaries and (iii) the freedom of movement restrictions which affect both groups, including in particular the satellite city system applicable only to conditional refugees. Amending Turkish law in all three respects could improve refugees' access to legal employment and could address concerns about unlawful discrimination raised by the differential treatment of different refugee groups.

Giving conditional refugees and temporary protection beneficiaries blanket permission to work for as long as they are recognised with this status could go a long way. Alternatively, the application process could easily be turned into a simple form-filling formality whereby everyone who applies is given a permit. In that case, the permits should not be linked to particular employers. As the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) also observed, linking work permits to specific employers increases the vulnerability of already vulnerable worker groups, which includes refugees.

Research shows that refugees in Turkey tend to move to bigger towns in search of job opportunities. When they do so, they lose their legal status; not only are they then unable to access their rights but they also risk deportation as irregular migrants. This makes them even more vulnerable in Turkey's informal sector. Lifting the internal freedom of movement restrictions on these two groups as well lifting or changing the 10% quota could therefore also considerably improve access to legal employment.

Turkey has obligations towards the refugees living in its territory. Obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) relate both to the right to work in Turkey and to rights at work; the latter depends on the former, among other things. While the right to work under the ICESCR does not impose upon Turkey an obligation to achieve immediate results, it does require that steps are taken to progressively achieve the full realisation of this right.

Measures such as the legal steps discussed here will only go so far on their own; they need to be accompanied by many other measures on many different fronts if refugees

are to be integrated into the Turkish labour market in line with international human rights law. While working towards integration, we also need to bear in mind the conditions of the Turkish labour market more generally, including the high rate of general and youth unemployment and the strong culture of informal employment. It is not only refugees and other migrants who face precarity and rights abuses in Turkey's large informal labour market.⁶

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1. A 2018 parliamentary report stated that 15 people had received subsidiary protection status. See bit.ly/subsidiary-protection. The current number is not publicly available but can be assumed to be very low.

2. See Law No. 6735 on International Workforce, Regulation on the Work Permits for Temporary Protection Beneficiaries, and Regulation on the Employment of International Protection Applicants and International Protection Beneficiaries.

3. See bit.ly/CSGB-permits for statistics from 2009-2020. See p. 6 for permits issued between 2011-2021.

4. Asylum Information Database (2021 update) *Country Report: Türkiye*, pp. 89-90 bit.ly/satellite-cities

5. See the ratio of registered Syrians under Temporary Protection to the total population of each province at bit.ly/temporary-protection

6. See the CESCR's Concluding Observations for Turkey (2011) at bit.ly/CESCR-turkey

Barriers to socio-economic integration in India

Hamsa Vijayaraghavan

The lack of defined systems of asylum management in India and other South Asian countries means that those in need of protection have been left without any legal avenues for integration.

South Asia both produces and hosts refugees, and many of the over 2.5 million refugees in the region are in protracted situations. Countries in the region are signatories to a number of instruments that safeguard the right to work and labour rights, such as Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization's Recommendation 205 and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (which contains a provision legally binding States to safeguard everyone's right to gain a living through work). However, none of the countries in the region has signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor have they enacted legislative frameworks for asylum management. As a result, refugees hold no official legal status and cannot work legally, access education or financial services, or buy property.

Against this backdrop, in India – as in neighbouring countries – refugees have to find employment in the informal economy, where they are not paid fair wages and where they usually work in exploitative conditions with

no certainty as to wages or labour protections. It is notable that vast sections of the populations of countries in the region live below the poverty line and work in below-par conditions, and that refugees, who are undocumented and hold a tenuous legal status, end up at the very margins of these already vulnerable groups. This article examines the failures of integration in the region and in India specifically, and the way forward for this large group of excluded persons.

Impact on regional frameworks on integration

In India, there is no specific law that regulates asylum. The Foreigners' Act of 1946 does not recognise refugees as a specific class of foreigners requiring international protection and rehabilitation. As a result, they have no socio-economic rights that could allow them to access livelihood opportunities within the country and they are vulnerable to detention and deportation. Although the government manages refugees from India's neighbouring countries (apart from Myanmar), UNHCR

manages refugees from all other countries, conducting refugee status determination and establishing protection mechanisms for 'mandate refugees'¹ and other persons of concern.² As a result, there are two different systems for refugee protection in the country, each with their own set of rights and avenues for integration.³ The result is a curious mix of good and less desirable practices in the treatment and integration of refugees within one country.

Tibetans have been seeking asylum in India since 1957 and have traditionally received a warm welcome from the Indian government (though more recent arrivals have not been extended some of the advantages of their predecessors). The Indian government published a policy in 2014 which clearly states that Tibetans have a right to work, including in state government jobs, and to purchase land and own businesses and property.⁴ Tibetans are issued documentation by the government, which allows them to access socio-economic rights (equal to those enjoyed by citizens) and facilitates their integration. Similarly, though somewhat less favoured, are Sri Lankan Tamils, who first arrived in 1984 and have since largely integrated into the southern state of Tamil Nadu due to rehabilitation policies announced by successive governments in the state. Unfortunately, there has been some rollback on this in recent years, with Tamils reporting arbitrary arrest and lack of employment avenues, but even so their situation continues to be largely better than that of UNHCR mandate refugees, who have in practice witnessed a deterioration in their protection situation.

UNHCR mandate refugees tend to be concentrated around New Delhi, where UNHCR has its only operation in the country. Their only documentation is the UNHCR Refugee Card which has very low recognition among national and local authorities, and as a result their access to socio-economic avenues is severely curtailed. They cannot open bank accounts, or obtain driving licences or even, at times, a SIM card for their mobile phones. In recent years, this situation has worsened due to the requirement for an Aadhaar Card, a kind of national identity card that has become

a prerequisite for access to almost any kind of facility or service and which requires the applicant to possess certain documentation – which refugees do not have access to. As a result, refugees are now completely excluded from anything that requires the card, such as bank accounts or taxpayer identity numbers, which has further denied them access to formal employment.

In terms of access to services such as education and health, the Indian government has not restricted access to these on paper. Refugee children can access free primary education up to the age of 14 years in government schools, and refugees can access free health care in government health centres and hospitals. However, in practice, the lack of documentation poses hurdles here as well. Furthermore, higher education and tertiary medical care remain inaccessible. Higher education is not available as a matter of right and refugees who wish to pursue higher studies have to enrol as foreign students in private colleges where the fees are usually prohibitive. Refugees are usually relegated to the bottom of the waiting list for more prolonged or specialised medical care in India's overburdened health-care system.

The fact that refugees have no avenues for livelihoods in India contributes to their lack of resources to access these services, creating an intergenerational barrier that successive groups of refugees are unable to overcome. There are instances of the private sector filling some of these gaps, but these are few and small in scale. Some private universities extend scholarships to refugees and there are examples of social enterprises employing refugees and providing them with a decent living wage and work conditions. However, larger issues of access (including to education, vocational training and the right to work) that can truly bring about a move towards self-reliance for refugees are often overlooked.

The Global Compact on Refugees in India

In December 2018, the UN General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). The GCR recognises the development challenges posed by large-scale refugee situations and the need for inclusive development

in refugee-hosting areas to build the resilience of local and refugee communities, and it includes a call to enhance refugee self-reliance as one of its four core objectives. India has signed the GCR, as have other countries in South Asia, implying an acceptance of its push towards economic integration. This commitment requires signatories to take measures to expand opportunities for refugees to access education, health care and other services, livelihood opportunities and labour markets, to make the best use of their skills and capacities, and to invest in building human capital, self-reliance and transferable skills as an essential step towards enabling long-term solutions. However, in India, as elsewhere, to go beyond a theoretical commitment all of this requires policies that include the issuance of recognisable documentation and with a definite set of rules that confer and regulate rights and security.

Conclusion

While it is true that South Asian countries have traditionally been more hospitable to refugees than their resources would seem to permit, it is also true that the lack of defined systems of asylum management have engendered

protracted refugee situations whereby those in need of protection have been left without any legal avenues for integration. As a result of this, refugees – in spite of familiarity on cultural, religious and often linguistic grounds – are unable to assimilate and achieve self-reliance. The first step towards the achievement of GCR objectives around integration and self-reliance would be to announce some kind of legislation or policy, even if limited in scope, that allows forcibly displaced populations to access at least some livelihood opportunities, as this would allow them to take initial steps towards achieving stability and rebuilding their lives.

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1. A mandate refugee is a person who is determined to be a refugee by UNHCR acting under the authority of its Statute and relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). UNHCR (2017) *A guide to international refugee protection and building state asylum systems*, Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 27, available at bit.ly/UNCHR-mandate-refugee
2. UNHCR includes refugees, asylum seekers, stateless people, IDPs and returnees under this term.
3. For further discussion by the author on refugee recognition challenges in India see bit.ly/FMR-shanker-vijayaraghavan
4. The Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy, 2014, No. 11/2/2014-RHS/MD, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, FFR Division bit.ly/Tibetan-rehabilitation-policy



Afghan refugee artisan at work in New Delhi, India. (Credit: Niyati Singh (MAP))

“We are well able to stand on our own if we are given the opportunities”: perspectives from affected populations in Uganda

Mulemangabo Bisimwa

Persons affected by forced displacement undoubtedly know what solutions are best for them, yet their voices and ideas are rarely included in policy discussions at national levels.

As the world’s forcibly displaced population increases, more refugees are trapped in protracted situations,¹ with limited prospects for repatriation or resettlement to a third country. Sustainable socio-economic integration as a durable solution has not been facilitated by most host governments and humanitarian agencies, especially in the Global South. In the East African region, there are Somali, South Sudanese, Rwandan and Congolese refugee communities, particularly in Kenya and Uganda, who have been living in refugee camps and settlements since the 1990s.

Listening to refugees and host communities about their concerns and their ideas for possible solutions is important to inform policy, programmes and the overall refugee response. However, this is rarely done, and in cases where efforts have been made to integrate refugee voices the existing systems and structures have not been effective in achieving positive change.

The author has drawn on stories shared by and conversations with refugee community leaders, as well as his personal experience working on the refugee response in Uganda, to show how integration has tended to be based on short-term livelihoods interventions that are seldom effective in building resilience to shocks. He also highlights high-level policy recommendations for sustainable socio-economic integration.

Ugandan strategy for self-reliance and refugee integration

Uganda’s government has historically followed progressive refugee policies compared with neighbouring countries. Freedom of movement and access to employment are the key refugee rights enshrined in its 2006

Refugee Act. The majority of refugees reside in open settlements rather than in restricted camps and approximately 7% of the refugee population lives in urban areas. Over the past two decades, in collaboration with humanitarian and development partners the government has continued to build on its Self-Reliance Strategy launched in 1999 to improve standards of living for refugees and host communities.²

This strategy is largely premised on providing access to land for food production whereby, on arrival, refugee households in the settlements are allocated land plots of about 30m² for subsistence farming. In contrast, urban refugees or self-settled refugees have no access to land (whether for agriculture or for any other purpose) and humanitarian assistance such as food distribution or cash transfers is only given to settlement-based refugees.

In the spirit of enhancing and improving the socio-economic integration of refugees, the government made a deliberate move to pay special attention to refugee-hosting districts by integrating its Settlement Transformation Agenda (STA) into the country’s National Development Plan II. One of the landmark initiatives by the UN and World Bank to support the STA was the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) strategy, a framework aimed at promoting the resilience of refugees and host communities.³ Uganda is also implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) to protect refugees and facilitate integration through supporting hosting districts to empower refugees to become self-reliant.

However, despite these well-intentioned initiatives, the self-reliance strategy has not lived up to expectations⁴ and refugees experience

significantly worse socio-economic outcomes relative to host communities.⁵

What solutions do affected populations propose?

The concerns and stories of community leaders from different settlements reflect their belief that socio-economic integration has only partially been achieved and that more remains to be done. In monthly community feedback sessions and interviews, “We are well able to stand on our own if we are given the opportunities”, was often repeated by refugee community leaders.

Even since community leaders have been included in national policy consultation mechanisms such as the CRRF Steering Group (CRRF-SG), their suggestions for solutions are rarely heard or considered, partly due to the limited time allocated to presentations at CRRF-SG meetings.⁶ Below are some of their reflections:

“We are not given time to share our concerns and solutions at the steering group meetings. We need more time, otherwise we are not relevant in those meetings.” (A refugee representative to the CRRF-SG)

“To be able to successfully integrate, refugees need more than just access to documentation. If our documents are not recognised by institutions that offer services, then we are better off not having the documents. I wasn’t able to swap my telephone line because my refugee ID card could not be accepted as a valid ID...” (A male urban-based refugee community member)

“I have been residing in this settlement for over seven years. I see the same persons benefiting from the skills trainings every year. The selection of beneficiaries is not done well. Community leaders are not consulted. These interventions can only be helpful if the right beneficiaries are selected.” (A female settlement-based refugee community leader)

Most community leaders proposed solutions beyond the provision of basic socio-economic rights, instead calling for more inclusive and sustainable socio-economic integration. Their ideas can be summarised in two main policy recommendations:

1. Implement a phased approach to the refugee response

Community leaders are calling on host governments to work closely with UNHCR and development partners to implement a more structured phased approach to the refugee response. This approach would have three major phases: the emergency phase, the recovery phase (three to five years after arrival in the host country) and the self-sufficiency phase (six years onwards). During emergency situations, affected populations would be given life-saving multi-sector emergency services and humanitarian assistance. During the recovery phase, focus would shift to more sustainable livelihoods interventions including skills development and access to self-employment opportunities. During the self-sufficiency phase, refugees would be given opportunities to access the local labour market, business services including access to credit, travel documents for greater mobility, and permanent residency or citizenship, to enable them to more meaningfully contribute to the development of their host countries.

This approach reflects research in the field of forced migration, which reveals that when given the opportunity to exercise their socio-economic rights, refugees become less dependent on humanitarian assistance, thereby building their resilience. For example, when they have the right to engage in gainful employment, they use their skills to start business enterprises that create jobs not only for fellow refugees but also for members of the host community, and in this way increase the host country’s tax base.⁷

2. Include refugees in government development programmes

Humanitarian and development partners should advocate for refugee inclusion and access to key government development programmes, including tertiary education and employment programmes. This will require recognition of refugee documentation by all government and private institutions. Because refugees are an integral sector of the population within a country’s territory, host governments should be the primary actors responsible for hosting, protecting and providing assistance



The Chairperson of the Refugee Welfare Council III listens to a submission by a Council member representing persons with disabilities during a consultative meeting in Nakivale refugee settlement. (Credit: Junior Maarifa, RWC III, Nakivale)

to them. The abdication of State responsibility towards refugees and host communities means that UNHCR and international humanitarian agencies have to fill the gap, which may lead to unsustainable interventions.

To better incorporate refugees' voices and suggestions, host governments and UNHCR should set up national level engagement and feedback mechanisms that provide space for meaningful participation. This would require building the leadership capacity of refugee representatives through training sessions in advocacy and communication, so they are able to represent their communities in local and national fora. One such mechanism has been successfully established in Uganda; at the quarterly Refugee Engagement Forum meetings international organisations such as CARE International have been given slots to train refugee representatives on advocacy skills. These sessions are largely practical,

allowing leaders to support their respective communities to advocate for improved service delivery and engage with local implementing organisations. However, there is limited participation at national level policy discussions due to poor planning and communication. For example, the agenda for CRRF-SG meetings is frequently disseminated at short notice, not allowing enough time for refugee representatives to consult community members and consolidate their inputs. Additionally, response actors should start involving refugee community representatives in programmes and policy discussions from the initial design phase rather than simply organising consultations during implementation.

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Resilience against all odds: socio-economic integration of IDPs in Burkina Faso

Amédée Bamouni

Of the almost 2 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in Burkina Faso, most have been settled in reception sites but others have chosen to integrate into host communities. This article explores the determining factors that have led to their successful integration.

The onset of a humanitarian crisis

Burkina Faso was first hit by a terrorist attack in 2016, marking the start of a series of attacks in the country. The ensuing security crisis has resulted in more than 2,000 civilian and military deaths and almost 2 million people being internally displaced, alongside widespread closures of schools and health centres.¹ In addition, public services have been withdrawn from high-risk areas, and economic activities, particularly livestock farming, agriculture and trade, have slowed down.

To respond to the crisis, the Burkinabe government, in collaboration with UN agencies and NGOs, has provided for the basic needs of thousands of IDPs. However, as the situation continues, many NGOs are considering the need for a longer-term approach to supporting IDPs, notably by providing capacity building in order to foster socio-economic integration. Almost 28,000 households out of more than 242,000 IDP households across the country have chosen to settle directly among local communities.² The author met with families who have successfully integrated into host communities in the north-central region of Kaya, to see how they are rebuilding their lives and to analyse the factors that have contributed to this success.

Rebuilding life in a new community

Sawadogo Sambo braved a 117km journey by cart from Kelbo to Kaya with his wife, mother and five children, having lost his father and younger brother in terrorist attacks. Sambo hoped to seek help from his uncle in Kaya but was disappointed to find this uncle in a similarly destitute position. Sambo sought help from government social services but had to find work to support his family while he waited for support. He said:

"At the beginning, my family and I went two or three days without eating and several days without washing. We owe our salvation to my uncle's neighbours who were the first to help us with water and often food, and then to the social services who gave us food, mats and clothing."

Sambo rented a small house of 10m² to shelter his family and received support from the NGO Alliance Technique d'Assistance au Développement (ATAD, Technical Partnership for Development Assistance). Under the UNDP-funded project 'Socio-economic opportunities for empowerment and social cohesion', ATAD supported Sambo to start a business making and selling leather goods such as bags, shoes and belts. He can now afford to own a

motorbike, rent a bigger house, take care of his family and send his children to school.

The solidarity of host communities

Ouedraogo Yousouf and his family fled terrorist attacks in Bouroum three years ago. As some of the first IDPs to arrive in Kaya they received more initial support than Sambo. They were welcomed and settled into a reception site called ‘the 38 villas’, known as the heart of local communities in Kaya. They received food, survival kits and even a cash transfer of 4,000 FCFA³ (6.4 USD at the time of writing) per family member each month. As well as this aid, Yousouf earned income working as a motorbike mechanic.

“The first [IDPs] were moved into the social housing that the Kaya town hall granted because it was not thought that this crisis would last”, said a government social worker and manager of the 38 villas site, which now houses more than 25,000 IDPs. He stated that to promote social cohesion the government social services received support from the NGO ACTED to organise awareness-raising sessions, sharing information on solidarity and peaceful coexistence both with host communities and IDPs, to help them accept each other and live well alongside one another. For this purpose, a cohesion committee was set up, composed of host populations and IDPs, to smooth over any incidents and carry out joint community activities. In addition to the 38 villas site, many host community members have given their land for the settlement of the IDPs; in return, they receive aid and cash transfers.

Having received a cash transfer, Ouedraogo Saidou, a host community member, gave three houses to accommodate IDPs. For him, the IDPs are his brothers and they do everything together; they go to church, to the mosque, do the gardening and go to the market together, and they support one another in death and in marriage. Ouedraogo Rasmané, an IDP representative for the 38 villas site, shared that “an old IDP died in the host site and it was the host populations who helped us to dig the grave”.

The role of local leaders

Alongside around 20,000 other IDPs, Ouedraogo Wendyam arrived in the

commune of Boussouma having been forced to flee due to terrorist violence. According to the Prefect of Boussouma, the interventions of the Dima of Boussouma and the Canton Chief⁴ of Louda were crucial in receiving and settling the IDPs. These local leaders first offered up their own land to IDPs and then invited their people to do the same. The Canton Chief welcomed the first IDPs in his own school and asked the Conseil Villageois de Développement (CVD, Village Development Council) to use around 120 empty houses in his area. He also drilled a borehole in the IDP settlement area for water and provided food. The head of the Louda CVD said:

“The Chief instructed us to open all the empty houses, including those that were padlocked, to note down the material that was there and to move in IDPs. He also told us to inform the entire population that no IDPs would be turned away.”

UNHCR expressed its gratitude to the Canton Chief by gifting him a large white sheep, as is the local tradition, for all the efforts he made to welcome, settle and integrate IDPs. All IDPs in Boussouma commune have received help from the host population. Today, Wendyam has opened a shop and has been given a plot of land where he lives with his wife and his children, who are all at school. “Like me, all the IDPs who live here feel at home, everyone tries to work to support themselves”, Wendyam said.

One staff member in Boussouma social services shared that the joint efforts of government administrative services, NGOs and humanitarian organisations were also crucial, particularly through the messaging around social cohesion communicated to both the IDPs and host communities. As part of its Soonré project,⁵ a local NGO HELP organised a day of socio-cultural activities – including singing and dance, football, a women’s cycling race and community meals – to promote social cohesion and integration in Songdin, a village in Boussouma. Thanks to these efforts, Boussouma commune is one of the best examples of IDP social integration within a host community in Burkina Faso.

Factors that determine successful integration

A durable solution for IDPs, whether return, resettlement or local integration, is successful when IDPs “no longer have specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and they can enjoy their human rights without discrimination”.⁶ Based on the author’s experience in Kaya, he considers four factors as essential to the successful integration of IDPs into host communities.

First, any process of successful integration must start with a welcoming and solidarity-based approach taken by host communities upon the IDPs’ arrival. Second, the engagement of local opinion leaders is highly important given their influence on the host community. The third determining factor is the willingness of the IDPs to rebuild their lives. Their determination, dedication and commitment are evident in successful examples of socio-economic integration. The fourth factor is aid and support from government services, NGOs and humanitarian organisations, which aim to strengthen social cohesion and improve living conditions for both IDPs and host communities.

A key lesson learned from internal displacement in Burkina Faso relates to coordination: all actors should work together towards local integration or resettlement in contexts where displacement situations may become protracted. This allows IDPs to rebuild their lives quickly, with capacity-building support from humanitarian actors in particular.

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1. <https://reports.unocha.org/fr/country/burkina-faso>
2. According to the permanent secretariat of the national council for emergency relief and rehabilitation (SP/CONASUR), as of February 2022.
3. FCFA is the Franc of the Financial Community of Africa, formerly the Franc of the French Colonies in Africa.
4. Dima is the name given to the great Mossi and Gourmatché kings in Burkina Faso, of which there are five. A canton is a local district in Burkina Faso.
5. In the traditional Mooré language of the majority ethnic group in Burkina Faso, soonré means new dawn.
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UNHCR expressing its gratitude to the Canton Chief of Louda for his support to IDPs, with the gift of a large white sheep. (Credit: Amédée Bamouni)

Integrating Afro-descendant and indigenous internally displaced women in Colombia through their own cultural practices

Gina Paola Escobar Cuero

Supporting Afro-descendant and indigenous internally displaced women to develop initiatives based on their particular culture could contribute to their integration and to host communities.

Colombia has one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world, with approximately nine million people displaced by decades of internal armed conflict, of which four million are estimated by the government to be women. Contrary to other countries, Colombia's IDP population has largely settled in urban areas rather than camps and depends almost exclusively on governmental assistance. Although the country has a solid legal framework for the provision of assistance and is well-regarded in comparison with other nations suffering from internal displacement, the assistance provided to internally displaced women is often inaccessible, insufficient or unsuited to their needs.

This article discusses some of the findings of research conducted in the cities of Cartagena and Villavicencio between 2014 and 2019. It highlights the importance of considering the particular needs of Afro-descendant and indigenous women, as well as their process of resilience in attaining better integration outcomes. The research revealed that a) governmental assistance is not achieving its intended aims and b) focusing on these women's process of resilience when distributing assistance may be a way to foster socio-economic integration. Resilience refers to a process resulting from an interaction between the characteristics of an individual and their social ecology (environment), and resources which are supplied in a culturally meaningful way.¹ This process helps women to give a new meaning to their experience of displacement, and to move from victimisation to active agency in the reconstruction of their life.

In Colombia, internally displaced women very often assume the role of household

providers and face various risks, as well as discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity and displaced status. Consequently, efforts to improve socio-economic integration should take into account the particular culture of Afro-descendant and indigenous women and their unmet needs. Initiatives based on their areas of expertise (such as handicrafts, alternative medicine and knowledge of agriculture) may be more sustainable than training them to undertake unfamiliar tasks which require skills and abilities that they do not necessarily possess (such as professional or specific language skills). By building initiatives based on their culture and know-how, policymakers can help foster a culture of entrepreneurship rather than one which encourages internally displaced women to take jobs which are either foreign to their culture (such as cleaning houses or washing clothes), or which are unstable and short-term, or badly remunerated and exploitative.

It is essential to acknowledge the specific needs of Afro-descendant and indigenous women to understand ways in which they could better integrate. As part of the research, it was possible to notice that many of these women lack housing, a 'Territory' (a piece of land where minority groups coexist in accordance with their particular socio-economic structure), and opportunities to generate an income. These unsatisfied needs compromise women's resources and expose them to other risks such as malnourishment, violence and enduring hardships due to their displacement. In this sense, it is important to provide women with sustainable income-generating opportunities and to support their involvement in associations or organisations where they can

build a support network in order to improve their socio-economic situation.

The role of urban agriculture and greening initiatives

Considering that Afro-descendant and indigenous women have a special relationship with nature, initiatives based on urban agriculture or greening initiatives can cover those needs for food security, traditional medicine, and opportunities for income generation. In one community of returnees called *El Salado*, women demonstrated being able to contribute to the economy of their village by focusing on collective work and developing economic initiatives of their own. The women's first productive project was a communal garden in which they cultivated corn and sesame seeds. They then accessed more land and continued working with crops. Through this project, they were able to better integrate by actively engaging in a sector that had traditionally been only for men, as well as providing their community with an alternative means of income.²

Greening initiatives contribute to empowering not only women but the whole community. Urban agriculture constitutes a form of community entrepreneurship for social development generated through the work of community initiatives, together with institutional support.³

The Afro-descendant and indigenous women interviewed for this research expressed wanting to work with the land in order to produce their own food and so be able to feed their children. They were aware that by having a space to cultivate food, they could even collect some of the products and sell them to the host community. Some were already trying to survive by offering traditional medicine services and making traditional food, but they all lacked external support to enable these activities to improve their socio-economic stability. For instance, one non-profit organisation that supports displaced indigenous women in Villavicencio – the Corporación Indígena Indígena desplazados de la Orinoquía Amazonía Colombiana – has ten indigenous food production centres to commercialise, but the organisation has not found the resources to create a micro enterprise and thus expand its activities.

Supporting integration using cultural insights

The ability of Afro-descendant and indigenous groups to develop initiatives themselves based on their cultural knowledge, in agriculture or other areas, can also support their integration and bring value to host communities. As stated by an indigenous leader interviewed during this research: by "...having a territory, we could harvest and sell to Cartagena. We could grow *cañaflecha* [a plant] and make handicrafts and sell them here". The relationship of indigenous and Afro-descendant groups with nature and their work with plant seeds can also have a positive impact on the local environment, given that women in both groups take on the role of creating and tending to gardens that are used to cultivate a wide variety of vegetables, fruits and medicinal plants for household consumption.⁴

Promoting the socio-economic integration of Afro-descendant and indigenous internally displaced women requires policymakers to have a greater understanding of their context and culture, their unsatisfied needs, and their community-led initiatives, in order to provide relevant assistance and resources that lead to sustainable solutions. Only with this approach will it be possible for women in these groups to promote their role as active agents, increase their resources and by doing so, take steps to enhance their resilience. Furthermore, ideas for income generation involving green initiatives, because of the relationship of Afro-descendant and indigenous women with nature, certainly constitute a viable option for their socio-economic integration in Colombia.

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Socio-economic integration of Syrian women in Turkey: benefits and challenges of the cooperative model

Boel McAteer and Deniz Öztürk

Women's cooperatives can help enable the socio-economic integration of Syrian women in Turkey and address gendered barriers to the labour market. Obstacles remain, however, if the cooperative model is to be sustainable in the long term.

The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees calls on States and other stakeholders to promote and enable sustainable, productive employment and decent work for refugees. In Turkey, which hosts 3.7 million Syrian refugees, the Syrian refugee population has had the formal right to work since 2016 but the majority of this population remains in the informal labour market.

Labour force participation is particularly low among displaced Syrian women in Turkey: 18.6% in 2020.¹ Much of the internationally funded livelihood support is focused on the socio-economic integration of Syrian women. However, a large proportion of women-centred livelihood programmes simply aim to reach women in order to satisfy internal gender quotas, and lack a clear connection to gaps in the Turkish labour market. Interviews conducted with staff members of international and non-governmental organisations providing livelihood support to Syrian refugees in 2017-18 revealed that the programmes are designed in this way as many Syrian women have caring responsibilities within their families that prevent them from participating in full-time job training or placements.² Moreover, interviewees explained that when livelihood support is designed based on a gender-blind analysis of labour market demand in Turkey, it tends to target sectors dominated by men.

In order to avoid livelihood programmes being largely focused on men, organisations have adapted the activities they offer to ensure that at least 50% of recipients of livelihood support are women. Since the formal activities provided for women, however, are designed to offer flexibility and target sectors culturally perceived as 'female', they tend not to provide secure and reliable income. Refugee women who are sole providers for their children and need to work are therefore more likely to seek

and find employment opportunities which do not involve internationally funded livelihood support.³

Examples of livelihood activities provided specifically for Syrian women include vocational training in areas such as hairdressing or make-up, craft production and sales, often without a solid business model behind them. This has led to livelihood support for women often placing an emphasis on social cohesion over income generation, making it different in nature from the support provided to Syrian men, which usually aims to create economic self-sufficiency and labour market integration. Some NGO staff providing livelihood support for women are critical of the lack of connection to the Turkish labour market and wary of making false promises to those who wish to integrate economically in Turkey. As one international NGO worker explained:

"You need a business-minded person who actually understands how to identify a market and a production line. If we have these wonderfully painted plates but it takes three days to make a single plate that's really bad. [...] At some point I said ok, this is a really stupid activity because they come and it costs them [a small sum] for the bus and for them it's a lot, they skipped their lunch because they can't afford even a simit [Turkish bread]. [...] It gets them out of the house, but then it should be called a social activity. It would be a social community space or a very different heading, like psychosocial well-being or something. But if you put it in the category of livelihoods or income generation, you are putting pressure on that mindset. [...] It's really unfair to the women because they have this expectation."

Women's cooperatives

In recent years, women's cooperatives have emerged as a form of livelihood support for Syrian women that attempts to both provide

a social space for women and establish a sustainable connection to Turkish labour markets. They began to flourish in Turkey in 2019 and are found in several provinces, focusing on a wide range of work including soap-making, handicrafts, agri-food, cleaning services and restaurants.

Cooperatives incorporate the logic of corporations and communities, aiming to provide both a social space for integration and a viable business model for the products being produced.⁴ They are member-owned, member-controlled and member-benefiting enterprises that provide goods or services to satisfy their members' economic, social and cultural needs. Categorised as social enterprises, cooperatives are driven by a shared set of values and principles. First, the principle of ownership implies that members are equal and jointly own the cooperative enterprise. Second, cooperatives adopt a democratic decision-making governance structure whereby each member has one vote and members participate in setting policies and making decisions. Third, cooperatives are intended to benefit their members both through economic production activities and through providing education and training.

A closer look at one such project provides important insights. This particular women's cooperative in south Turkey was established by an international organisation in 2020 and implemented in collaboration with a local metropolitan municipality. The project aimed to create livelihoods for refugee women by helping them gain relevant skills and facilitating interactions with the host community. The social cooperative was founded with 37 Syrian, Persian, Afghan and Turkish women producing and selling agricultural products. It is currently focusing its efforts on open-field agriculture, greenhouse cultivation, mask sewing, visor production, cultivated mushroom production and the drying of fruits and vegetables.

Interviews with Syrian women who are members of this cooperative demonstrate that many are motivated to attend to earn an income but are restricted in terms of a) which forms of paid labour are available to them and b) the settings in which they feel culturally comfortable. The focus on needing money to survive

was evident in the refugees' original reasons for joining the cooperative. When one member, Derifa, explained why she had started working in the cooperative, she repeated the Arabic word *majbur*, which means 'having no other choice'. Another woman, Batoul, similarly described a sense of obligation by referring to the material needs of her family. It was the living conditions in Turkey that motivated her to seek work even though her family initially opposed the idea.

Most of the interviewees described how difficult they found it to start working and their feeling of bringing shame to their families by working outside the home, even though they did so to provide for their families. The fact that the cooperative was a women-only space where they could earn money in a more flexible setting than a full-time job enabled these Syrian women to participate. These are the same gendered factors that NGO workers have identified as enabling women to access livelihood support but with an added emphasis on the importance of earning money. Most of the refugee women lacking prior work experience also described their fear about the outside world. The welcoming and supportive atmosphere in the cooperative helped alleviate their fear about work, although anxiety about other places of employment remained. For example, Derifa described being afraid to work elsewhere as she would not know "what kind of environment I am going to face at other workplaces".

By offering refugee women a working space where they feel safe and happy, particularly for those who have never worked outside the home before, cooperatives can function as a stepping stone for Syrian women into other forms of employment. Many interviewees described a sense of belonging as well as a sense of personal strength and independence, feeling valued and valuable as financial contributors within their families. Some of them spoke of plans to use their experience with the cooperative to access future employment opportunities or open their own business. There were also examples of changing gender dynamics within households as women felt more able to stand up to their husbands than they did before. As Kaylah said:

“My life has become more valuable. I feel freer, stronger and more secure. I used to feel worthless as I was living the life of others but not my own. Now, sometimes we have fights with my husband, and I wave my debit card to him [laughs] and tell him ‘I am strong’.”

Many of the women referred to the cooperative as a family and a place where they could go for help and support. It also enabled interactions between Syrian women and members of the Turkish host community who also participate in the cooperative. Refugee women described widespread prejudice held by local women in their neighbourhoods and emphasised how the shared space of the cooperative enabled Turkish women to understand refugees’ living conditions and empathise with them. One interviewee described it as “feeling like one family inside and foreigners outside”, which suggests that social inclusion in Turkey is still a far-off goal. This was echoed by another interviewee called Amal, who highlighted the separateness of Turkish and Syrian communities outside the cooperative. The cooperative has provided a space where women from both sides listen to each other and try to communicate despite the language barrier that separates them elsewhere:

“The [Turkish] people here listen to me and slowly try to chat with us. This project has at least given us a chance to get to know each other, and an opportunity to chat. It has broken the prejudice a little. [...] We share ideas woman to woman and learn new things from each other. This job [at the cooperative] has changed us.”

Towards longer-term success and sustainability

The key to a successful cooperative model rests on integrating cooperative principles into both daily activities and strategic decisions while keeping all members involved. Syrian women should therefore be able to shape these enterprises according to their needs, but in Turkey this is challenging given that non-citizens are not legally allowed to serve on the boards of directors of cooperatives.

Within such a gendered labour market, it is challenging for cooperatives as models of livelihood support to balance the factors enabling socio-economic integration with

real opportunities for earning income – that is, to avoid falling into the trap of providing support that heavily comprises social activities with little income-generating potential. Salaries within the cooperative considered here came from the project budget rather than a sustainable production line, providing the participating women with only about 35 Turkish lira (approximately 2 USD) per day. What is more, there was no sustained focus on women’s rights and no equal sharing of responsibilities. Refugee women mentioned that they were responsible for production while the Turkish women oversaw sales, which created very different positions within the cooperative with different levels of voice in decision-making. To build a stronger organisational identity, working collectively for the common purpose should be underlined for all value chain activities (that is, all activities along the full lifecycle of a product), including income-generating activities.

It is crucial that the principles of member centrality and democratic governance are embedded in the operation of cooperatives, and it must not be assumed that the existence of a cooperative model is in itself enough to contribute to equality and inclusion purely because of its basic principles.⁵ Additionally, in order to be successful, cooperatives need to be a part of a value chain that allows sales to take place. A crucial component of this is cooperatives being embedded in local communities and working as part of a global movement to strengthen ties with other cooperatives through local, national and international structures. This structural element helps cooperatives find suppliers, customers and employees to ensure their activities are sustainable.

The experiences shared by the women in our interviews demonstrate that women’s cooperatives can help enable the socio-economic integration of Syrian women in Turkey. Enabling factors include the provision of flexible working hours and childcare, women-only working spaces, and opportunities for interaction with host communities. However, to remain sustainable as a support model for the socio-economic integration of refugee women, cooperatives need to actively apply the principles of member centrality and democratic

processes, and they must offer incomes that are supported by reliable production and value chains, not anchored purely in the aid economy. Without these important elements, women's cooperatives will risk suffering from the same problems that have plagued much of the other livelihood support provided for Syrian women in Turkey, where social cohesion is prioritised at the expense of critical income generation and where the voices and needs of Syrian women risk being overlooked in the process.

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Boosting donor engagement to achieve refugees' socioeconomic inclusion

Samuel Davidoff-Gore and Camille Le Coz

The international donor community has already moved towards integrating a development approach into its response to protracted refugee situations. Donors now need to enhance their engagement with local, national and regional partners to overcome the remaining obstacles to the sustainable socio-economic inclusion of refugees.

In 2015, the arrival of 1.3 million refugees in Europe led international donors to unlock billions of euros to respond to forced displacement in the Middle East, as well as in Africa and other parts of the world. The EU, for instance, set up four funds to support interventions facilitating refugee access to education, livelihoods and health care.¹ Other global actors like the World Bank Group and UNHCR took part in this transition, with dedicated financial instruments and new operational approaches, such as the Window for Refugees and Host Communities and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).² In 2018, following the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees, a range of host countries such as Ethiopia, Jordan and Costa Rica committed to revising their policies in order to make it easier for refugees to access services and formal employment. In turn, donors pledged to support these reforms. Since then, new

programmes have built on previous attempts to better integrate humanitarian and development approaches in refugee contexts and have generated a range of methods for supporting refugees' socio-economic inclusion.

Putting these integrated approaches into practice has been tricky, however, with many initiatives yet to produce transformative effects. Host governments continue to enforce policies restricting refugees' rights to move, to work, and to access basic services, thereby placing barriers on the road to self-reliance.³ The effects of these obstacles have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on funding, as well as on refugees' vulnerability, their access to care and protection, and their acceptance by host communities.⁴

Despite these setbacks, the Global Refugee Forum to be held in December 2023 offers the opportunity for donors and other

humanitarian and development actors to reset these efforts. Doing so should involve a) taking stock of what has gone wrong and how international partners can improve strategies and programmes, and b) mobilising a new round of funding pledges. Both elements are essential as we emerge from the pandemic and in the context of a global food crisis, with low- and middle-income countries experiencing weaker economies and with increased pressure on official development assistance. Donors could bolster their effectiveness by increasing and enhancing their engagement with policymakers and civil society at regional, national and local levels. This means conducting more comprehensive consultations in the design phase of programmes, striving for robust partnerships throughout implementation, and setting up participatory feedback mechanisms to inform future refugee policies and donor proposals. But taking these three steps requires significant investment and presents its own set of constraints.

Limitations of programmes

Four main obstacles have prevented the successful design and implementation of initiatives to promote the socio-economic inclusion of refugees. First, these initiatives can be disconnected from the actual needs of refugee and host communities. Skills programmes, for example, may target occupations with insufficient labour demand and not take into account the experience refugees already have. In addition, interventions that continue to predominantly target refugees have generated resentment among host communities, especially as the two groups tend to have similar needs. These challenges typically stem from programme design processes that are not sufficiently informed by local stakeholders and lack a nuanced view of the context.

At the same time, local civil society and refugee-led organisations (RLOs) usually have to respond to project requirements that may have been developed without their consultation, and have limited opportunities to propose projects that are more locally relevant. This disconnect and lack of a sense of ownership by local communities can ultimately undermine programme sustainability.

Second, donors and development actors have not prioritised sustained advocacy and dialogue to reform those policies that block refugees' socio-economic inclusion, like restrictions on movement or limited access to the formal labour market. Policy advocacy takes significant diplomatic capital, sometimes more than donors may be willing to expend. This is especially true in countries like Lebanon and Pakistan, where refugee-related issues are extremely sensitive. Besides, many donors and development agencies had not engaged with recipient countries on refugee issues before 2015. It has taken time for these actors to develop their contacts within host country governments. This has proved very challenging in countries like Kenya where it has sometimes been unclear which department was responsible for refugee affairs.

On top of that, donors are limited by the size and duration of their support. Some recipient countries, which have welcomed development funding, have questioned the long-term commitment of their international partners and expressed frustrations with the slow pace of budget disbursement. In response to these uncertainties, countries have delayed acting on their pledges. For example, Ethiopia's commitment to the labour market integration of refugees and Jordan's promise to grant work permits to Syrian refugees have seen slow progress.

Third, the ambitious goal of achieving refugees' socio-economic inclusion requires long-term investments that are difficult to reconcile with donors' funding cycles. Development actors always need more time than humanitarian agencies to initiate interventions and reach a formal agreement with recipient countries to define their scope of activities. Getting the buy-in of government partners on such a framework is even more time-consuming for development programmes supporting refugees, as this is a new way of working that is rarely politically palatable to host countries at the outset.

These time constraints have hindered the ability of implementing partners to achieve long-term progress. Instead, they have often emphasised immediate outputs. For example, livelihoods programmes should ideally

include mentorship that goes beyond initial training, as well as start-up capital for aspiring entrepreneurs and job placement efforts. But in many cases, these programmes only focus on vocational training, which ultimately limits the number of refugees and host community members able to benefit and to build sustainable livelihoods. In Uganda, some local organisations have conducted follow-up mentorship on their own accord; this only occurs on a small scale, however, due to their limited resources.

Fourth, progress has been hampered by the lack of coordination among donors and implementing partners. Since 2018 in particular, there have been more efforts to set up secretariats, task forces and working groups in host countries, including to implement the CRRF. However, these structures have not played the strategic and political roles that were intended. In many refugee situations, donors (and sometimes recipient governments) do not have a full overview of refugee and host community support programmes, and needs assessments, monitoring reports and lessons learned are not shared between donors. This has led to some duplicative programming, with over-saturation of certain types of interventions and over-targeting of certain populations. In the end, siloed information limits the ability of donors to engage strategically and to build complementary, rather than competing, programmes.

Points of leverage to boost donor engagement

One way to address these challenges is to build stronger partnerships with local, national and regional actors. This involves reaching out to new stakeholders and holding consultations to include all actors in strategic planning, programme design, implementation and learning. Such an approach, however, requires navigating a series of obstacles.

At the national level, having a presence of donors and their partners in-country and coordinating closely with the central government and non-government counterparts will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of national priorities and sensitivities. This is the prerequisite for more effective advocacy to

improve refugee policies. These engagements will also help align donor priorities with national development plans and, in return, influence broader development-related conversations so that they reflect the opportunities and challenges associated with the presence of refugees. Eventually, this knowledge will inform programming and ensure that future interventions are more rooted in national policies. That should prevent resources being spent on programmes which would have no hope of success because of political impediments.

Efforts should also be made to understand local dynamics at the sub-national level, where donors and their partners need to engage with community leaders, civil society and RLOs, and local authorities. Concretely, donors would benefit from needs assessments that are more thorough, especially by research organisations that have an in-country presence. In parallel, donors from headquarters and country embassies would gain from spending time in the regions targeted by their programmes in order to have a better understanding of local issues and perspectives. These engagements can also be useful in identifying new networks of implementing partners. However, exchanges with community leaders are time-consuming – and it is important to take into account the fact that the refugee representatives engaging with international agencies may not reflect the full diversity of experiences within their communities, and thus some specific needs could be neglected.

Finally, engagement at the regional level is essential for learning across refugee contexts, connecting actors working at different levels of governance, and maintaining momentum for political reforms. This includes supporting regional fora where these conversations take place, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East African Community and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), as well as other transnational networks such as those for cities or RLOs. In parallel, donors and implementing partners need spaces where they can discuss how to improve the way humanitarian and development actors work together. There has already been progress on partnerships between UNHCR and the World Bank Group,

and also, more recently, between other international organisations including UNICEF and the International Labor Organization.⁵ These partnerships could provide a blueprint for other donors and implementing partners.⁶

Constraints to overcome

Four constraints affecting these engagements arise from how donors allocate resources and approach programming. First, these efforts are all resource-intensive, especially as local actors need to be compensated for their time advising donors. The budget allocated to consultations, research and project design is money not spent on concrete activities for refugee and host communities. Still, this initial investment should pay dividends later as donors can draw on these resources and relationships for future programming. This will avoid repeating a new round of quick consultations at the inception of each new initiative.

Second, donors may have to compromise on programme design when integrating local expertise. This may result in activities or strategies that run counter to their initial preferences but that ultimately offer greater opportunities for addressing communities' needs. For example, refugee and host community leaders may suggest that initiatives target areas that have not previously received much attention and are potentially in greater need of support.

Third, donors may have to overcome funding timelines that are tied to their government's political and budgetary cycles. As these timelines are often legislatively determined, policymakers could think creatively about how they can make longer-term commitments, and how to insulate these pledges from political shifts mid-programme.

Finally, in order to further localise their programmes, donors and implementing partners need to acknowledge the potential for failure. This will allow them to fund organisations that may be less experienced and activities that may be more experimental. Not all donors, however, are able to take these risks, especially smaller development agencies that need to demonstrate the effectiveness of their funding in case they jeopardise their own budget. To overcome this, donors could reframe what they consider to be successful outcomes and ensure

they systematically share lessons learned about their programmes.⁷

As the 2023 Global Refugee Forum approaches, donors and their partners need to initiate these conversations at home and in refugee-hosting countries. Only by doing so will they be able to map out a new route towards refugees' socio-economic inclusion and mobilise the next round of funding pledges.

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1. The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis, the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and a global fund encouraging innovative approaches to responding to forced displacement (Lives in Dignity).

2. See World Bank 'IDA18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities' bit.ly/IDA18-window; UNHCR 'Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework' bit.ly/CRRF-refugee-response

3. For example, at least 55% of refugees live in countries that significantly restrict their access to work. Ginn T, Resstack R, Dempster H, Arnold-Fernández E *et al* (2022) *2022 Global Refugee Work Rights Report* bit.ly/refugee-work-rights

4. Tanner J, Mugerá H, Tabasso D, Lazić M and Gillsäter Björn (2021) *Answering the Call: Forcibly Displaced During the Pandemic* bit.ly/displacement-pandemic; Banulescu-Bogdan N (2022) *From Fear to Solidarity: The Difficulty in Shifting Public Narratives about Refugees* bit.ly/public-narratives

5. See for instance the Dutch-funded Partnership for improving Prospects for host communities and forcibly displaced persons bit.ly/ILO-host-communities and the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement established by UNHCR and the World Bank <https://www.jointdatacenter.org>.

6. See also: OECD resources relating to adapting development strategy and financing to the reality of forced displacement, including *Financing for Refugee Situations 2018-19* bit.ly/OECD-fragility-resilience and the *Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Report 2021* bit.ly/UNHCR-global-compact

7. The EU Lives in Dignity facility, for example, has attempted to take risks as well as evaluate and disseminate lessons learned. See Lives in Dignity Grant Facility (2022) *Incentivizing through the Granting Process: Some Examples and Lessons Learned* bit.ly/LID-grant-facility

Engaging development actors in supporting the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced persons in Southern Africa

Gloria Muhoro

UNHCR in Southern Africa has been collaborating with development actors to support the socio-economic integration and durable solutions for displaced people in the region. Various considerations and lessons emerge from this work to date.

Since 2019, UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Southern Africa has been working with development actors across Southern Africa to build long-term support for the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced persons. During this time, UNHCR has engaged development partners such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the EU's Department for International Partnerships, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. UNHCR's role has mainly been as a facilitator and a catalyst for the engagement of other actors. Five lessons have emerged from this work, namely: an enabling policy environment, advocacy on inclusion, unlocking private sector investments, access to sustainable energy solutions for displaced people, and the development of data and a robust evidence base.

Policy environment

First and foremost, there needs to be an enabling policy environment that supports refugee self-reliance. Self-reliance cannot occur without provision for the fundamental rights of refugees. The tracking done by UNHCR of movements of registered asylum seekers and refugees in Southern Africa has shown that these movements are triggered by several factors, including lack of access to employment and livelihoods due to restrictions imposed by some countries. In the region, 11 countries have made reservations to the 1951 Geneva Convention which impact fundamental rights of refugees, including access to employment, labour rights, education, freedom of movement, property rights, and right of association. Advocacy is needed to ensure the lifting of

these reservations, some of which are being reconsidered by several countries in the region, as reflected in policy commitments made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

UNHCR's progress towards socio-economic integration in Southern Africa has been largely thanks to a strong, supportive and enabling environment. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Republic of the Congo, UNHCR has engaged with the World Bank through the Refugee Policy Review Framework to systematically review refugee policies and the regulatory environment, including looking at access to national systems and economic opportunities, and from a gender perspective. These assessments have provided opportunities for development actors to engage in policy dialogue with the two countries to advocate for more favourable policies, regulatory environment, rights and recognitions that ensure durable solutions, including self-reliance for refugees and adequate support to their communities. In Mozambique, the government has expressed explicit interest in the local integration of refugees, which has provided the necessary goodwill and political buy-in for the expansion of development programmes to support refugees and their host communities.

Advocacy and dialogue

Secondly, it is crucial for development actors to advocate with host governments and other stakeholders for the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons in government systems and in development plans and projects. This advocacy lends a stronger voice to calls for the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons. For example, in the DRC, mobilisation of World Bank funding through the IDA18 Refugee Sub-Window for

Refugees and Host Communities and the IDA19 Window for Host Communities and Refugees, as well as political advocacy on inclusion, has been essential to expand social protection systems to include forcibly displaced persons. In the Republic of the Congo, World Bank financing through the Refugee Sub-Window has helped to increase the size of the national social registry in Likouala to include both refugee and host community households. With 76% of refugees globally living in situations of protracted displacement and less than 1% realising a durable solution in the short term, inclusion in strategic government systems such as social protection represents a pragmatic way to bridge emergency assistance and progress towards durable solutions.¹

Private sector involvement

Thirdly, the involvement of the private sector is extremely important. The private sector can promote refugee entrepreneurship, which creates a sustainable source of income, supports additional investments, creates jobs and provides products and services relevant to the needs of refugees and their host communities – all of which are crucial to socio-economic integration. However, a significant barrier to private sector development in refugee-hosting areas in Southern Africa is the lack of familiarity that the sector has with operating within refugee communities. The private sector still lacks information on business opportunities in areas affected by forced displacement. For example, it tends to be assumed that refugees are in host countries temporarily, are dependent on aid, and lack financial or other assets. The reality, however, is that many refugees worldwide are in a protracted situation, for five or more years in their country of asylum.² UNHCR is therefore exploring partnerships with development actors that address the specific challenges to private sector engagement in refugee-hosting areas.

In Mozambique, for instance, UNHCR works with the AfDB to catalyse the growth of small enterprises by facilitating displaced people's access to finance, providing entrepreneurial skills development, ensuring quality inputs, reducing post-harvest losses, and facilitating access to markets. In the DRC, UNHCR is also

working with the AfDB to create a conducive environment to support private sector development and enhance socio-economic inclusion in the Grand Kasai and other areas hosting forcibly displaced persons.

Access to energy

Fourthly, in addition to being an important objective in itself, access to energy is a critical bridge between short-term humanitarian responses and longer-term development goals. It is also a catalyst for social cohesion and socio-economic integration. Sustainable energy access is a key factor in achieving 125 of all 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.³ However, displaced people are rarely included in national or international policies relating to energy access. Furthermore, due to competing demands, energy is not always prioritised in humanitarian assistance, which takes a severe financial and ecological toll on refugees and host communities. In Southern Africa, most displaced populations have limited or no access to electricity and a majority of those living in camps burn biomass such as firewood for cooking. This creates competition for finite natural resources, which often triggers tension between refugees and host communities, hindering integration. It also negatively impacts local ecosystems, upon which forcibly displaced persons and their hosts often rely for their livelihoods.

Development investments can be useful in removing the commercial barriers to entry for the private sector in order to facilitate access to energy in displacement settings. In Mozambique, for instance, the AfDB funded the Mozambique Energy for All Project to increase the number of electricity connections within the country, including in refugee and IDP settlement areas, and directly address the affordability barriers for energy provision for vulnerable groups. Provision of clean, sustainable, reliable energy should provide significant benefits relating to protection, gender equality, food security, water, sanitation, health, opportunities for income-generating activities, education, livelihoods and environmental protection. However, while this project addresses the supply side of energy provision, complementary measures are needed to increase the

economic empowerment and self-reliance of the end users, for them to be able to afford energy access and use. This could be in the form of loan guarantees, investment in livelihood interventions, pay-as-you-go models for renewable energy solutions, and microfinancing.

Evidence base

Finally, we need to improve the evidence base for what works and what does not work in designing effective, durable solutions to forced displacement. Empirical, analytical evidence on best practices in strengthening the socio-economic integration of refugees in the region is a critical tool, but is currently limited.

UNHCR has evaluated its engagement with humanitarian and development actors since 2019 and is now implementing the evaluation recommendations and seeking to generate new learnings from successful cases of refugee inclusion. To improve the availability of data in the DRC, the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement is financing a socio-economic survey of internally displaced persons in the Grand Kasai, to inform future programming for government, development and humanitarian actors. In the Republic of the Congo, the Center is also financing an evaluation to assess the impact of the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the national Lisungi Safety Nets Programme, in order to generate data on best practices on the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons in national social protection systems.

Additional roles and contributions

It would be remiss to talk about the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced persons in Southern Africa without mentioning the significant role of regional economic communities. UNHCR's cooperation with the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) cuts across areas including: disaster management, mitigation and response; regional mechanisms governing freedom of movement, regularisation of stay, access to work rights for refugees; and alternative pathways for skilled migrants. SADC Member States and UNHCR have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that commits Member States to address the social,

economic and political issues in the region that affect the root causes of forced displacement, refugee protection, provision of humanitarian assistance and the search for durable solutions, including socio-economic integration.

In addition, many development actors have adapted their work to develop policies and tools that support long-term, comprehensive solutions to the forced displacement crisis. The World Bank's Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) strategy (2020-2025) is enhancing its effectiveness in supporting countries to address the drivers and impacts of FCV and to strengthen resilience, especially for the most vulnerable populations. The AfDB's Strategy on Addressing Fragility and Building Resilience in Africa (2022-2027) places the Bank at the centre of Africa's efforts to address fragility and pave the way towards resilient and inclusive development. The International Finance Corporation is also leveraging its unique comparative advantage to identify private sector solutions and opportunities for refugees and their host communities. Within UNHCR, there has also been an institutional shift towards supporting a whole-of-society approach and increasing engagement with development actors to support durable solutions for displaced people.

Building effective synergies between humanitarian and development actors takes time and effort. This is because the mandates of humanitarian and development actors often differ, as do their budget cycles, instruments, technical jargon, internal processes, speed of operating and business cultures. Nonetheless, these partnerships are crucial to supporting long-term durable solutions, including the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced persons.

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The views expressed here are personal and do not represent the official position of UNHCR.

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Measuring and facilitating self-reliance

Kellie C Leeson, Amy Slaughter and Dale Buscher

With durable solutions available only to a very small proportion of the global refugee population, self-reliance programming and the measurement of self-reliance outcomes are increasingly important topics in re-thinking the quality and sustainability of socio-economic integration.

The self-reliance of refugees is a policy objective as old as the international refugee regime itself, although it has received varying degrees of attention over the years. UNHCR has defined self-reliance as “the ability of individuals, households or communities to meet their essential needs and enjoy their human rights in a sustainable manner and to live with dignity”¹. The concept is closely linked to that of socio-economic integration, while eschewing the latter’s connotation of permanence and thornier issues such as citizenship, which might not be politically viable for host countries and communities.

Over the past several decades, self-reliance has largely been viewed through an economic lens and manifested chiefly as livelihoods programming. These programmes were typically designed and implemented as a means to assist refugees to learn skills, occupy their time and earn some income to supplement humanitarian assistance. However, for the increasingly large portion of refugees hosted in cities rather than camps, there is often little or no aid available and income is required not just to supplement assistance but to fully support oneself and one’s family.

The release of UNHCR’s *Operational Guidelines on the Minimum Criteria for Livelihoods Programming* in 2015 contributed to a progressively sophisticated approach to livelihoods and economic inclusion, requiring market assessments and a clear linkage between vocational training and employment (including self-employment) opportunities. However, a significant gap still exists in measuring the impact of these programmes. Outcomes are defined as changes to income, assets and savings; these are indeed vitally important for economic programming but they fall short of examining whether refugees’ lives actually improve or if outcomes are sustainable.

In 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) – the first global policy to elevate the self-reliance of refugees as a core aim – was affirmed by the UN General Assembly. The 2019 Global Refugee Forum, a pledging and stocktaking forum on implementation of the GCR, resulted in some 1,400 pledges by donors, refugee-hosting governments, private sector companies and NGOs, with 128 pledges focusing specifically on jobs and livelihoods for refugees. These changes in the policy and operating environment indicate a sea-change in how refugee self-reliance is viewed and prioritised, and yet the indicator framework for the GCR again focuses on proxy and narrow measures of self-reliance, such as access to work and freedom of movement, rather than more complex and holistic measures of the concept.

Given the increasingly urban and protracted nature of displacement and the growing sense that refugee self-reliance is a critical component of policy and programming responses, RefugePoint and the Women’s Refugee Commission began developing approaches to measure refugee self-reliance in an effort to inform both programme design and resource allocation. Building on their initial work, the two organisations brought together a community of practice in 2016 – which has now evolved into the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) – to deepen the humanitarian and development communities’ understanding of self-reliance and collective action towards facilitating it, starting with the creation of a common measurement tool.

Development of the Self-Reliance Index

The Self-Reliance Index (SRI) is a new tool for practitioners and donors to measure whether programme participants are moving towards self-reliance and if so, which interventions

work best to achieve it. The SRI helps move discussions around self-reliance beyond a narrow focus on livelihoods and economic outcomes towards a more holistic view of self-reliance that includes both economic and social well-being.

The SRI was conceived as an easy-to-use tool to measure whether a household is sustainably meeting its basic needs over time.² Typical refugee and humanitarian interventions are sectoral in nature (such as health, food, and water, sanitation and hygiene). The SRI aims to provide a common platform to capture data provided by different actors across all sectors, in order to identify both the areas in which refugees are faring well and areas to target for support.

In electing to develop a simple, multi-sectoral tool, the development team recognised the implicit trade-offs involved. Many sectors, such as food and health, have well-established, comprehensive measurement tools that are accepted as the industry standard for those sectors. The SRI does not replace those tools; it may be used in conjunction with them or as a standalone tool to provide a broad overview of a household's circumstances.

The SRI was developed through an inclusive and on-going iterative process. The initial stages included a literature review, mapping tools that measure related concepts, convening a community of practice, and expert input and testing during the pilot phase with the assistance of over 40 academic and practitioner partners, plus refugee focus groups and key informant interviews. The final soft-launch phase from August 2019 to January 2020 focused on further tool and score refinement, as well as reliability and validity testing.³ Today, the SRI 2.0, launched in May 2020, is being used by 34 partners in 25 countries and by key donors, including the US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration and the EU-UNOPs Lives in Dignity Grant Facility.

Conceptual framework

The SRI 2.0 now includes 12 domains, four of which (Housing, Food, Education and Health Care) focus on a household's ability to meet its basic needs: that is, the core of self-reliance. The next four domains (Employment, Financial

Resources, Assistance and Debt) focus on the resources needed to secure basic needs and on factors that either safeguard these basic needs or threaten them. The final four domains (Savings, Safety, Social Capital and Health Status) are indicators of sustainability; they measure conditions and assets that may allow refugees to protect their resources and to weather shocks, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will be able to continue meeting their basic needs.

In developing the SRI there was a constant tension between including the fewest domains possible to ensure ease of use and capturing sufficient information to gain a solid understanding of self-reliance. This required setting aside some household information (however important) that was deemed peripheral to that understanding. Creating a universal tool also required language that was broad and flexible to allow for use in a variety of contexts. Some early domains were dropped, such as psychosocial well-being, where it was felt that the measurement of this did not correlate with refugee households' progress towards self-reliance and individuals' scores were impossible to aggregate at the household level. The domains of Assistance and Debt were later inclusions, deemed necessary as the former assists refugees in meeting basic needs but does not indicate progress towards self-reliance, and the latter impedes progress towards sustainable self-reliance.

Each domain contains response options that correspond to a score from one to five. Individual domain scores may be used to flag needs requiring targeted interventions, while the aggregate score of all domains comprises the 'index' that gauges the household's overall level of self-reliance. The aggregate score allows service providers to establish thresholds for targeting programme beneficiaries, setting more objective eligibility criteria for their programmes, and identifying when households have reached a level of self-reliance where service providers can responsibly withdraw.

Responding to questions and concerns

In considering how self-reliance may be expanded, it is important to understand why self-reliance has not historically been pursued

by the humanitarian and development communities as a high-profile or widespread goal for refugees. Four categories of concerns and critiques emerged from the literature and in discussions around self-reliance and the SRI. Gaining a better understanding of these is essential to finding areas of agreement among stakeholders.

1. Philosophical concerns

Some scholars and advocates assert that the concept of self-reliance is a fallacious, neo-liberal western construct that serves the goals of capitalism and reducing humanitarian aid. They argue that self-reliance is not an appropriate or achievable goal for every person and point out that self-reliance at its best is a fluid, temporary state and that all people experience greater and lesser degrees of self-reliance throughout their lives. The RSRI, under which the SRI tool is housed, supports the expansion of opportunities for refugees to become self-reliant. It does not, however, endorse enforced self-reliance or withdrawal or reduction of aid in situations where it is still vitally needed. Furthermore, while the cautions are well noted, few alternative visions have been put forward for moving beyond the status quo for millions of refugees stuck with no solutions and little, if any, humanitarian aid.

2. Socio-economic versus legal integration

Another common critique of self-reliance is that it risks allowing host states to avoid upholding refugee rights. A 'rights first' approach is arguably what has been tried since the signing of the 1951 Refugee Convention and, despite decades of vigorous advocacy, has failed to adequately secure better legal protections for refugees in many host countries. This approach has also entrenched an overly binary paradigm in which either durable solutions are secured or indefinite aid is provided, without sufficient consideration of the grey areas in between, or of how refugees should survive in the long term while awaiting elusive solutions. The more pragmatic focus of self-reliance (helping refugees live better lives in the near term) is not incompatible with – and indeed must complement – policy-based approaches to secure basic rights and social protections.

In many contexts, we can make progress on socio-economic integration even in the absence of ideal legislative frameworks.

3. Programming and funding realities

Even where there is agreement on the goal and tactic of self-reliance, programming and funding realities have prevented broad uptake of the approach. Primary among these are the entrenched divisions between humanitarian and development work, including differences in funding streams, project timeframes and in the variety of agencies and implementing partners involved. Concerted efforts have been made to overcome these divides. While there are positive developments in this regard, including the increased engagement of development actors in refugee solutions, progress has been slow. Even within the humanitarian sphere, long-standing sector-based specialisations and siloed funding streams have hindered the creation of holistic cross-sectoral approaches.

4. Lack of evidence

A final obstacle to broad uptake of self-reliance approaches has been the lack of a strong body of evidence for what works best in terms of programme design. The RSRI is intended to remedy this. It gathers stakeholders in real time to share best practices, tools, successes and failures. It has also outlined a collective learning agenda to assess what works best, with whom, where and why. The evidentiary concern is expected to be greatly reduced in the next few years as results emerge from current innovations.

Looking forward

The shifts towards self-reliance approaches observed among agencies, host countries, donor countries and other funders are all signs of a paradigm change in the refugee field. Ten years ago, it was hardly possible to have an open conversation about self-reliance in most refugee situations in countries of asylum. The lack of legal local integration opportunities was cited as an insurmountable obstacle and the conversation stopped there. Meanwhile, refugees were trying to make it on their own – many of them getting by through their own

ingenuity and determination, and others with some support. A decade later, there is reason for optimism. The visibility and endorsement given to self-reliance by the GCR provide encouragement to expand approaches while simultaneously recognising the need to address systemic issues and immediate quality-of-life issues.

Self-reliance is not a panacea for today's refugee crises nor an appropriate goal for every refugee in every situation, but it is certainly an important tool in the toolbox of refugee response. The SRI is unique in providing practitioners with a clear picture of what self-reliance (and the absence of it) looks like at the household level, on which programming decisions may be based.

The SRI tool is designed by and for practitioners to capture the most vital household information and is intended to efficiently and easily assess gaps. The SRI does not attempt to measure the enabling and constraining factors in the host environment that impact a household's ability to improve its self-reliance. Other tools are available for that, such as DARA's Refugee Response Index and the Refugee Opportunity Index under development by the Refugee Investment Network.⁴ Beyond informing programming interventions and resource allocation, the SRI's insights should shed light on the systemic barriers to household achievement of self-reliance and thereby better

inform inclusive policy and advocacy efforts. As we learn as a community, further iterations and new tools will advance these efforts, generating further learning and evidence, and allowing practitioners to continually improve our services and support refugees to rebuild their lives.

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A Congolese refugee in Nairobi who earns about \$50 profit per month from his retail shop after covering his living expenses. RefugePoint provided medical care, food and rent support, livelihoods training and a business grant before he 'graduated' from the agency's services. (Credit: Alexis Felder)

Free audio content on forced migration

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FMR 71 is available online in two formats: the full-length **Magazine** and a six-page **Digest**.

The Digest provides an overview of the issue feature theme and a list of all articles with weblinks and QR codes.

You can view both formats of FMR 71 online, as well as all FMR back issues, at www.fmreview.org/issues.

You can also use our search function to find topics of interest to you in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.



Keep up to date with all FMR's news

There are lots of ways you can stay in touch with FMR! To receive our new calls for articles and full digital versions of FMR, sign up to our mailing list and follow us on social media:



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Writing for FMR

Interested in seeing your article published in FMR? We welcome article proposals on any aspect of contemporary forced migration – that is, relating to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers and stateless people. You can find our current calls for articles on our website at www.fmreview.org/forthcoming.

If your topic fits with the call then please send us a proposal which follows the detailed guidance we provide at www.fmreview.org/writing-fmr.

Supporting FMR

All the money needed for Forced Migration Review is raised from generous donors across the world. We value all the financial support we receive, whatever the size of donation.

As an individual you can give to FMR via our donor page www.fmreview.org/online-giving.

If your organisation or institution would like to give towards our core costs, please do get in touch with the FMR team. Your support will be acknowledged in the issues of FMR published in the year of your gift.

We would also love to hear from you if you would like to contribute to support a specific issue of FMR, or a particular feature theme.

Partnering with FMR

Suggest a feature theme: Is there a topic you think we should cover in FMR? We welcome all suggestions. Please do get in touch with ideas for future issues.

Include FMR in a funding bid: Want to enhance an application for funds or the impact of a project by incorporating an issue of FMR into your plans? We have partnered with organisations and academic projects in this way. Please contact the FMR team to discuss potential collaborations.

Volunteer your time: Joining the International Advisory Board, promoting FMR content on social media, helping with fundraising... If you have some time to give, please do let us know how you might be able to help.

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Advisors serve in an individual capacity and do not necessarily represent their institutions.

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FMR 72 - Ukraine: Insights and Implications

To be published in September 2023

The war in Ukraine has caused forced displacement on a scale and at a speed not witnessed in Europe since World War II. The crisis has overturned long-held assumptions that forced displacement is a challenge of the 'Global South', and drawn many new actors into responding to the needs of displaced people, both within Ukraine and in refugee-hosting countries. This has generated a great deal of learning and necessitated innovation and adaptation, as well as the development of new kinds of partnerships and funding models.

FMR 72 seeks to reflect on both the insights and lessons learned from the immediate response, and on the profound implications of the Ukraine crisis for the international refugee and asylum system. We hope to publish the issue in English, Spanish, Ukrainian and Russian, funds permitting.

Although the call for proposals is now closed, there are still opportunities to partner with us on this issue. Do you or your organisation work in Ukraine or with people displaced by the conflict? Would you be able to contribute financially to this issue so that we can publish more articles? Would you like to be involved in organising an event related to themes of the issue? Please contact the Editors if you'd like to discuss these options.



An entryway to an apartment building decorated in the colours of the Ukrainian flag. (Credit: Marjan Blan/Unsplash)

