

Refugee Self-Reliance and the Global Compact on Refugees:

Unpacking Barriers and Opportunities for Success

December 2021

Refugee
SELF-RELIANCE
Initiative



I. Background

In recent years, the number of refugees has reached record levels. The rise of conflicts coupled with the effects of climate change, is perpetuating this crisis and posing a significant challenge to the nations hosting refugees within their borders.¹ Recognizing this challenge, in 2018 the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)², which provides a blueprint for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that governments and communities receive the support they need to host refugees and that refugees of different ages, genders, and diversities have the opportunity to lead safe and productive lives. Of the four objectives of the GCR, it is the second objective (Objective II), on enhancing refugee self-reliance, that has the potential to create real change in the lives of over 26 million refugees around the world.

Following the affirmation of the GCR, the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) convened in Geneva in 2019, where states and other stakeholders pledged significant financial contributions to programs aiding refugees.³ Yet, not all pledges have been fully realized.⁴ According to the recent GCR indicator report, some progress has been made toward the attainment of the GCR goals, including a much-needed increase in international financing to refugee situations in low income countries. Yet, the self-reliance and resilience of both refugees and host communities have deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a need to continue and build support for refugee self-reliance.⁵

Building on the GCR framework, the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI), the Global Refugee Youth Network (GRYN), and the Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) joined together to invite civil society actors to share input focused specifically on Objective II, enhancing refugee self-reliance. Through a multi-layer study, the RSRI, GRYN and RLRH engaged civil society actors to create recommendations that will feed into the UNHCR High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM) in Geneva in December 2021, and guide future discussions on self-reliance. The various stocktaking efforts in the lead-up to the HLOM and the meeting itself provide an important opportunity to build momentum on past achievements and identify ways forward to realize self-reliance.

Self-reliance is defined by UNHCR as the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity. Achieving self-reliance enables refugees to participate in the social and economic life of their host communities and contribute to rebuilding their countries should they be able to return.^{6,7}

This study includes three components: I.) a global survey; II.) a working session webinar; and III.) a series of key informant and group interviews among global civil society actors. The findings, described in brief in section II of this report, reveal the current gaps in achieving self-reliance and provide actionable solutions to refugee hosting States, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), donors and policy makers.

Designed and implemented by three civil society networks, two of which are led by refugees themselves, this study is uniquely positioned to provide insights regarding the complex concept of refugee self-reliance and the myriad factors that influence its achievement. This work reveals the fundamental barriers refugees of different ages, genders, and diversities still face on their journeys to achieve self-reliance.

1 <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018>.

2 <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>.

3 <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/programme-and-practical-information.html>.

4 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021_GCR-Indicator-Report_spread_web.pdf.

5 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021_GCR-Indicator-Report_spread_web.pdf.

6 <https://www.unhcr.org/44bf7b012.pdf>.

7 <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/high-level-officials-meeting.html>.

The Holistic Nature of Self-Reliance

The holistic nature of self-reliance takes into consideration all aspects that contribute to refugees' ability to live and prosper without external assistance. This approach highlights the need to not only ensure access to income and financial inclusion, but also access to education and vocational training, psychosocial well-being, health and health care, housing, social and community networks, local public services and markets, transportation, food security, and clean water and sanitation.⁸

The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) is a multi-stakeholder collaboration and serves as the global convening and learning space for refugee self-reliance. The RSRI promotes opportunities for refugees around the world to become self-reliant and achieve a better quality of life, while also advocating for the full enjoyment of their rights. The RSRI has wide membership from global civil society. It is co-chaired by the Women's Refugee Commission and RefugePoint.

The Global Refugee Youth Network (GRYN) supports young refugees to develop their capacity to help each other, lead initiatives to respond to their communities' needs, and advocate for the change they feel is important for them and their communities. One of their objectives is to develop refugee youth research skills.

The Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) is an initiative of the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University. RLRH is predominantly staffed by scholars affected by forced displacement. The Hub provides academic and professional training to displaced learners to advance an agenda for refugee-led research in the field of refugee and forced migration studies. The RLRH has a physical base in Nairobi at the British Institute of East Africa.

Methodology

The study was conducted between July and November 2021 through a series of consultations, trainings, and workshops led by the three research partners, with outreach for a global survey, key informant interviews, and group interviews through respective partner networks. The survey, other tools, and analysis were developed through a collaborative process involving the RSRI, GRYN and RLRH, while building on existing knowledge, experience, and research in the field.

The survey was conducted among 145 civil society respondents, 21% of which were community-based organizations (CBOs) (including refugee-led organizations (RLOs), 12% national nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and 49% international NGOs. The majority of respondents were from Africa (57%) and America (10%), Asia (6%), Europe (5%), and the MENA region (2.5%), while 21% identified as "International." To complement the survey findings, key informant interviews and group interviews (groups of 3-7 people) were conducted with 28 representatives from CBOs, including RLOs, and international NGOs in Ecuador, Honduras, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Mexico.

Limitations

The study includes several limitations. Most notably, some participants did not answer all of the survey questions, which restricted the available survey data. Second, the study is not representative of all civil society actors involved in promoting refugee self-reliance but rather provides an indicative overview of trends based on those who responded to the survey and/or participated in the interviews. Additionally, while the analysis was organized around regional cohorts, 21% of respondents noted their location as "international," impeding the researchers' ability to compare trends by region and/or country.

8 <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/33/1/86/5819341?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

II. Key study takeaways: Structural challenges undermine refugee self-reliance

The study clearly reveals structural barriers affecting the ability of refugees to achieve self-reliance, including the following:

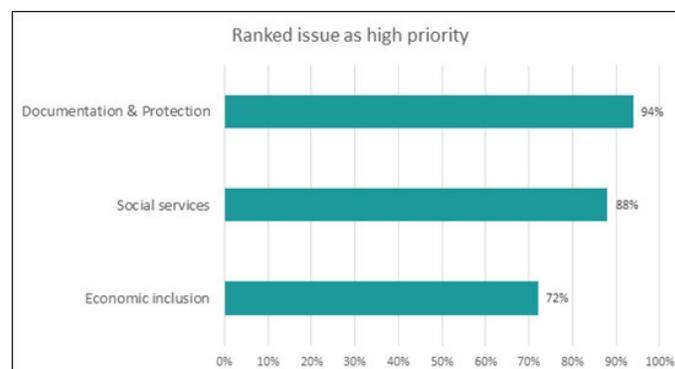
- 1. Documentation/Protection.** Governments' failure to provide refugees with identity documentation confirming their status in the host country in a timely manner, the limited duration of that documentation, and onerous revalidation requirements impedes refugees' ability to achieve self-reliance with additional barriers facing women.
- 2. Economic inclusion.** Existing laws in many host countries prohibit refugees from being employed. In many locations, public and private sector policies and/or practices limit refugees' access to bank loans, credit cards, land ownership, contractual agreements, SIM cards, and other financial inclusion mechanisms.
- 3. Access to social and education services.** The lack of inclusion of refugees, and particularly female refugees, in social services undermines refugees' ability to access education, health and social services that enable them to pursue self-reliance.
- 4. Barriers organizations face in supporting refugees to be self-reliant.** Inadequate financial investments by donors and the private sector in self-reliance, as well as inadequate inclusion of RLOs in the design and implementation of self-reliance programs for refugees constrain support for refugees' self-reliance.
- 5. Private sector engagement.** Insufficient engagement of private sector actors by hosting authorities and UNHCR to inform them on refugee rights to employment and economic inclusion results in lost opportunities in terms of accessing refugees as clients for financial services and as employees.
- 6. Holistic approaches sensitive to age, gender, and diversity, including disabilities.** Insufficient attention paid to designing holistic approaches that address diverse needs of women and girls, young people, people living with disabilities, survivors of gender based violence (GBV), LGBTQI+ individuals and people representing other aspects of diversity undermines self-reliance.⁹

According to interview participants, the COVID-19 pandemic has further limited access to almost all services noted above. This has posed additional challenges for host countries, donor institutions, and civil society to provide adequate services to refugee communities due to lockdowns, social distancing requirements and restrictions on movement in many host countries.

1. Documentation/Protection

According to study participants, the top policy area affecting refugee self-reliance is documentation. The overwhelming majority of respondents (94%) ranked documentation as their top priority, with access to social services and economic inclusion trailing documentation as the most critical policy issue. More specifically, half of respondents expressed that refugees cannot obtain valid identity documentation (such as a refugee card, residence permit, or national ID) confirming their legal right to reside in a hosting country. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Top policy areas according to study respondents



Lack of documentation limits refugees' access to basic social services.

The right to be recognized as a person before the law is one of the most basic human rights. Having a legal identity enables someone to hold other rights under law and access a range of basic services such as health and education.¹⁰

The issuance of identity documents for individual refugees is the primary responsibility of the government of the host State.¹¹ Without documentation, refugees cannot access most services and are vulnerable to harassment. The process of registration, documentation, frequent renewal and validation often involve complicated bureaucracy that is difficult to navigate, takes time away from income-generating activities for refugees, and prevents them from accessing basic social services until their documents are renewed. As noted by respondents, it can take years for asylum seekers to obtain documentation of their status as refugees and in the interim they have temporary residence permits that must be renewed every few months; this leaves them in limbo, as no employer wants to hire someone in this type of insecure situation. Validating the research, webinar participants noted that language barriers, poor internet access, lack of documentation from one's home country, centralized locations to obtain the documentation that require many refugees to travel, and prohibitive costs further complicate refugees' ability to secure documentation. In other instances, when refugees are able to access documentation many critical businesses such as banks and prospective employers do not recognize the refugee identity as valid documentation.

Additionally many refugees also struggle to access basic civil registration services, such as registration of births, marriages, divorces and deaths, which can have long-term negative impacts on self reliance. For example, without birth registration, children may not be able to claim a nationality, access schooling or other services. As an example, a Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), survey of 580 households representing over 3,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, found that thousands of children lacked basic identity and civil documents, impacting their ability to claim a range of rights and protections, including nationality, and endangering their access to education and other services if they choose to return to Syria.¹² Studies from around the world reinforce the same messages heard from refugees in this study, that access to individual documentation of their identity and their status in the host country is the key policy issue impacting refugee self-reliance.



Documentation is one of the power points for self-reliance.

- CBO Leader



If you really want to address documentation and provide some solutions, you can start with the most basic thing — transportation... So they [refugees] have taken the time to go the distance, get the transportation that's needed, they arrive to where they have been told to go and then they're told they do not have the required documentation. That's a big issue.

- INGO Leader in Jordan



If UN provides them with proper documentation, it would be helpful for refugees. The UN is only giving appointment cards and people are waiting for years – 2, 3, 4 years for the next step. The police don't accept the appointment card. If it takes someone 3 years to get the picture letter from UNHCR, imagine how they survived for 3 years without any documentation and financial help.

- CBO Leader in Malaysia



¹⁰ <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/icla/final-syrian-refugees-civil-documentation-briefing-note-21-12-2016.pdf>.

¹¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/registration-guidance/chapter5/documentation/>.

¹² <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/icla/final-syrian-refugees-civil-documentation-briefing-note-21-12-2016.pdf>.

2. Economic inclusion

As stated by the UNHCR, economic inclusion contributes to the self-reliance and resilience of refugees, helps them avoid aid-dependency, and supports them to prepare for their future.¹³ Despite these benefits, the 2021 UNHCR global survey noted that 62% (roughly) of refugees live in countries with restricted access in practice to formal employment. For instance, in Bangladesh, refugees registered before 1992 and undocumented Rohingya refugees have no formal right to work.¹⁴ Even in countries that recognize refugees' legal right to work, such as Kenya, work permits are nearly impossible to obtain. In some countries, while the right to work exists, employees are unaware of refugees' rights and refuse to provide employment opportunities.¹⁵ Survey respondents in Uganda and Peru noted that refugees face discrimination due to employers' lack of awareness of their rights. In other countries, refugees are restricted to working only in certain employment sectors. In many contexts, refugees also face legal barriers when requesting to own or operate a business.¹⁶ Of survey respondents, a majority observed that refugees cannot work without a work permit or cannot easily obtain a work permit. As a result of barriers to legal employment or entrepreneurship, many refugees are forced to work illegally, often underpaid and in dangerous conditions with no legal protection.

This study further validates the failure of host countries and the private sector to make key financial services accessible for refugees. Amongst survey respondents, a vast majority claimed that refugees are unable to access financial services, including access to credit cards and bank loans; cannot open a bank account; and are unable to use mobile money. Indeed, a 2021 research study shows that refugees living in Kenya are no longer allowed to register for their own mobile money (M-PESA) accounts, while in Jordan, only a few banks have agreed to open accounts to refugees.¹⁷ Even in countries with supportive legislation, like Canada, banks and other financial institutions may delay or deny services because they do not recognize or understand refugee documentation.



Refugees are still seen as an economic burden and not as a contribution to the country. We need a real integration solution. The organizations do not have the capacity to be able to cover the seed capital of those who apply to their ventures, and can contribute to the country's economy. - INGO Leader



13 <https://www.unhcr.org/5bc07ca94.pdf>.

14 <https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/KNOMAD%20Study%201-%20Part%20II-%20Refugees%20Right%20to%20Work%20-%20An%20Assessment.pdf>.

15 <https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/17431IIED.pdf>.

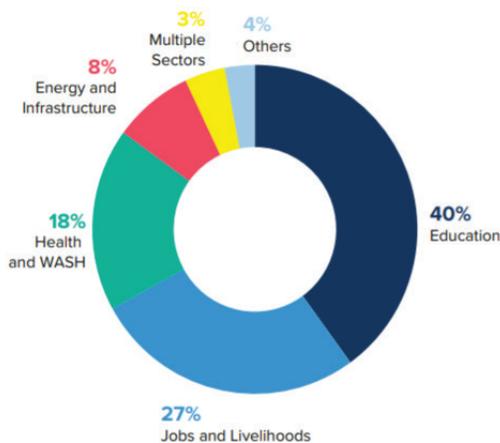
16 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/refugees-right-work-necessary-insufficient-formal-employment-refugees>.

17 <https://sites.tufts.edu/journeysproject/files/2021/04/Reckoning-with-Reality-FIND-High-Level-Findings.pdf>.

3. Access to social and education services

While numerous GRF pledges address expanding access to critical basic social services for refugees (See Figure 2), survey responses underscored the lack of access to these same key services, while at the same time noting their importance.

Figure 2 (source UNHCR 2021 GCR Indicator Report): Proportion of GRF pledges toward Objective 2, disaggregated by sector, August 2021.¹⁸



When asked to prioritize interventions critical to support refugee self-reliance, survey respondents ranked elements of economic inclusion as three of the top five priorities along with support in attaining documentation and easy to access free or low cost basic health care. Interviewees further reinforced the importance of health care stressing the inclusion of essential mental health resources. At the same time, survey respondents noted that a majority of refugees are not able to obtain free or low-cost mental health care, while 70% of respondents remarked that refugees do not enjoy access to low-cost basic health care services. In education, the situation seems to be more encouraging; almost half of respondents said refugees may attend secondary education on the same terms as the host community, indicating real progress against stated pledges. As for tertiary education, 70% said that refugees do not have access to tertiary education on the same terms as host country citizens, although improvements are being made with recent reports indicating that enrolment levels for higher education has increased to 5%, up from 1% a few years ago, a modest but important improvement.¹⁹ However, gender parity in education among refugees falls far short of education globally.²⁰



COVID increased the state of crisis among vulnerable people. Support networks were suspended due to 'healthy distance' issues, which complicated the support of people in migration. Migrant shelters were unable to meet their objectives, and vaccination for refugees has been complicated due to documentation issues that were suspended as well. - INGO Leader in Mexico



¹⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/global-compact-refugees-indicator-report/>

¹⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/612f85d64/unhcr-education-report-2021-staying-course-challenges-facing-refugee-education>

²⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/global-compact-refugees-indicator-report/>

4. Barriers organizations face in supporting refugees to be self-reliant

Five years after the launch of the Grand Bargain — a shared commitment of donors and humanitarian agencies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action — (launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016), civil society organizations are still facing barriers related to the access of sufficient resources and funds.²¹

The top three barriers highlighted by respondents are:

1. **Lack of access to funding.** The organizations struggling the most to receive adequate funding are CBOs and RLOs, which are either overlooked or left out due to complicated funding requirements by donor institutions, partly due to their relatively smaller size or informal character. In fact, less than 0.5% of humanitarian assistance funds reached RLOs in 2020.²²
2. **Length of grants (short grant cycles).** Some respondents noted that the short grant cycles, often just a year, commonly used by the UNHCR do not match the needs on the ground. Self-reliance projects require funding over multiple years to be well implemented.
3. **Inadequate knowledge about funding opportunities.** Limited knowledge about funding opportunities may have contributed to the absence of resources delivered to CBOs and RLOs.

In general, funding for self-reliance efforts is insufficient and hard to access. Short term grants - often a year or less - force organizations to provide one-off interventions and undermine organizations' efforts to implement coherent, multi-faceted programming that supports longer-term more sustainable journeys to self-reliance.

As both survey and interview participants emphasized, this situation is even more dire for RLOs, which receive less than 0.5% of available humanitarian funding.²³ Many donors, UN agencies, and INGOs have policies in place that impede funding organizations that are not formally registered in the country of operation. In some countries, RLOs are not able to register without involving a member of the host community; in others, they are not able to register at all. And yet, RLOs are often the most trusted organizations in a refugee community. As was witnessed around the globe in the last two years, RLOs have remained active and committed to supporting self-reliance in their communities, even when other actors were not able to be present. Throughout the pandemic, RLOs have provided critical support when other resources were inaccessible to refugees.^{24,25}



Localization of funding for integrated projects supporting refugees. More grants should be channeled to qualified refugee-led organizations who have the capacity to implement projects. - CBO Leader in Uganda



²¹ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/grand_bargain_final_22_may_final-2_0.pdf

²² <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2020/>

²³ <https://asylumaccess.org/campaign-to-support-refugee-led-organizations/>

²⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/refugee-led-organizations-osf-asylum-access/>

²⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2021/3/605cbddd4/awards-honour-refugee-led-response-covid-19-pandemic.html>

5. Private sector engagement

When asked whether the private sector can play a helpful role in supporting refugee self-reliance, 90% of respondents strongly agreed. Focus group interviews with CBOs reinforced the important role the private sector could play in supporting self-reliance, and in some ways already is, through the facilitation of training and employment opportunities for refugees. However, respondents provided many examples of missed opportunities for banks to provide refugees access to financial services such as basic bank accounts, financial loans, and financial training opportunities.



The situation has stayed the same, there are no big changes. I've been here since 2014 and I haven't seen any changes. The opportunities are getting less. There used to be training and courses from international organizations, from international organizations... But currently there are none. They have stopped because they say that they don't have the budget to support refugees in this way. - CBO Leader



6. Need for holistic approaches sensitive to age, gender, and diversity

Eighty percent of pledges made to the GRF do not mention gender, and yet women and girls are more likely to be in poverty and to face additional barriers in achieving self-reliance.²⁶ Key informants noted that women, girls, members of the LGBTQI+ community, and people living with disabilities face additional challenges in achieving self-reliance. Key informants noted that in many refugee communities, women's voices and rights are not well recognized and as a result they miss out on, and are excluded from, self-reliance activities and opportunities. In fact, the majority of CBOs and RLOs are led by men²⁷. Key Informants also noted that there is a need for holistic approaches that meet people where they are and provide the services they need to achieve self-reliance. For example, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence need mental health and sexual and reproductive health services that help them heal from trauma and pursue self-reliance. Key informants also stressed that most refugee girls and young women cannot access adequate sexual and reproductive healthcare, including contraception, yet the ability to make decisions about when to have children is critical for self-reliance.



Self-reliance is not only about being financially stable - but inside ourselves our own journey of growing and development and self esteem. Self-reliance should engage all people who don't have a voice - like women and girls...it is like accepting ourselves and being our own best friend and that is self reliance. - CBO Leader



²⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/global-compact-refugees-indicator-report/>
²⁷ <https://undocs.org/S/2021/827>

III. Recommendations and solutions

During the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, 31% of the pledges made by states and others were in support of Objective II: Enhancing refugee self-reliance. Of these, the greatest proportion of these pledges focused on strengthening or enhancing self-reliance through education (40%) followed by jobs and livelihoods (27%). Additional support was pledged toward local integration solutions, together with health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and energy and infrastructure.²⁸

Although numerous pledges were made toward expanding access to these basic services, study respondents indicated that much more is needed to broaden the access.

The following recommendations are centered around five key policy areas crucial to supporting self-reliance among refugees:

1. Easing refugee access to documentation
2. Improving economic inclusion
3. Increased engagement of refugee-led organizations (RLOs)
4. Increasing funding for civil society organizations supporting refugees and
5. Developing age-, gender-, and diversity-sensitive self-reliance programming.

Each policy area includes recommendations directed toward the UNHCR, host countries, and donors. These recommendations were developed and are intended to be implemented recognizing the holistic nature of self-reliance.

1. Ease refugee access to timely documentation



Imagine you have to renew your visa every two months for eight years. It is a nightmare. During that time they don't have financial support so many people work in the streets. They don't have regular work because no employer wants to hire someone who might not get their visa renewed. - CBO Leader in Ecuador



Individual documentation is foundational to refugee protection and is seen by civil society actors to be the most critical issue for refugee self-reliance.

UNHCR should:

- **Reprioritize access to identity documentation for individual refugees across hosting countries.** It should do so by strengthening its partnerships with host countries to improve access to status documentation, prioritizing ease of use and in a reasonable time frame, and ensuring that refugee women and girls are registered as independently from their husbands or other male household members.
- **Expand its funding to refugee-led organizations to provide critical outreach to and support for refugees to register and regularize their documentation.** RLOs can share accurate information about registration, as well as, accompany and support refugees to register, renew, or update documentation. UNHCR should prioritize funding to RLOs that typically work closest to refugees themselves, especially in times of crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

States should:

- **Provide timely and easily accessible registration for refugees who reside on their territory.** States should provide them with individual identity documents that document their status as a refugee in the country, enable realization of rights (right to work, access health, education and social protection services, and are recognized and understood by all public and private service providers).
- **Make documentation valid for a longer period of time and ease requirements for renewal and reverification of documentation.**
- **In countries in which refugee documentation conveys the right to work, this should be indicated explicitly on the refugee documentation.** This should be done in tandem with outreach and education for employers and service providers on refugees' right to work.
- **Improve civil registration to ensure that refugees can access registration and certification of births, marriages, divorces and deaths.** This is key to enable refugees to claim nationality, access education and long-term self-reliance.
- **Digitize and decentralize all refugee documentation processes.** To ease access, states should digitize and decentralize the processes of registering refugees and renewing documentation.
- **Train government officials and private sector actors to recognize and understand refugee documentation and the rights and services it conveys.**

Donors should:

- **Increase technical and financial resources to support UNHCR and host country governments to update, streamline, and digitize individual refugee registration and documentation,** with user accessibility prioritized.
- **Prioritize funding to RLOs** to support refugees to access registration and documentation through community-based information desks/help lines, associated technology, and transport for refugee registration and documentation, while also meeting Grand Bargain localization funding commitments.

2. Improve economic Inclusion



Improve policy environment and guarantee foundational rights in particular right to work, freedom of movement. Ensure demand side interventions are equally supported and valued as supply side support to refugee skills. - INGO Leader



For refugees, the right to work and access to labor markets are key for becoming self-reliant, rebuilding their lives and securing dignity, and allowing them to contribute to their host communities. Study participants noted the important role of the private sector in supporting mechanisms enabling refugees to access not just jobs but also financial services.

UNHCR should:

- **Aggressively support global efforts for recognition of skills and inclusion of refugees in decent work by ensuring refugees have the legal right to work in countries of displacement.** In countries where the right to work is recognized, **UNHCR should work with federal and municipal authorities to expand the awareness of employers about this law.**
- **Work closely with the finance/banking industry to ensure access to financial services for refugees.** Banks in hosting countries should develop programs that allow refugees to open bank accounts and receive loans with low interest rates, by using their identification documentation. **UNHCR should engage financial institutions to expand financial training programs with civil society** (financial literacy, management, and saving mechanisms) focused on refugee youth to achieve self-reliance.^{29, 30}
- Expand private sector companies' understanding of refugee rights and encourage refugee job placements.

States should:

- **Ensure legally recognized refugees have the right to work, earn a living and contribute to the hosting nation.** This right should be extended to all employment sectors and apply to refugees of diverse genders.
- **Implement legislation encouraging entrepreneurship among refugees and allowing refugees to register their businesses, regardless of gender.** With more refugees displaced for longer periods of time, businesses have a critical role to play in helping refugees integrate economically in their new host communities and contribute to the local economy. **Support municipal governments to work with refugee communities and RLOs to inform them of their rights.** In countries enabling refugees to own businesses by law, governments should work with refugee communities to inform them of these rights.
- **Engage the private sector on the right to work.** In countries where the right to work is recognized, national and local authorities should work with business leaders such as the chamber of commerce to expand employers' awareness of laws and policy governing refugees' right to work



We cannot travel with the UN ID. It's not safe to move around, it's only safe to stay where you are. Just imagine living in the same place, not going anywhere for 10 years. How would it feel? We cannot even have bank accounts. If we have to transact we have to ask for money from our family or friends in other countries. And even Western Union doesn't trust the UN ID, because it can be faked. It is very difficult.

- CBO Leader



²⁹ <https://www.rescue.org/announcement/opportunity-passporttm-helps-foster-youth-achieve-financial-goals>.

³⁰ https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Economic_Empowerment_of_Urban_Refugee_Youth_Guiding_Principles_Exec_Summary.pdf.

3. Increase funding for refugee self-reliance, including support to RLOs



I think that it could be helpful if civil society could take some of that [refugee registration]...most of which centers around trying to go through the length and the cost purely of that administrative process. It's not very user friendly and I'm not sure that it is entirely unintentional. - INGO Leader in Jordan



UNHCR and donor governments should

- **Recommit to the Grand Bargain agreements to fund national organizations, CBOs and RLOs.**^{31, 32} **Extend timelines for grants and partnership opportunities as outlined in the Grand Bargain commitments.** Grants should include funding for a period of at least 2-3 years to match the needs of CSOs working on self-reliance programs.
- **Ensure funding requirements are easily accessible and manageable for RLOs, including those unable to formally register.** A growing number of examples, such as Resourcing Refugee Leadership, Reframe, and Global Giving, highlight the opportunities to do this well and responsibly. These efforts should be supported and emulated.
- **Support the implementation of guidelines for the international community on how to meaningfully engage and fund RLOs.** Guidelines should encourage implementing partners to fund, support, and mentor RLOs, particularly those led by refugee women and those representing diverse groups of refugees, for example persons with disabilities.
- **Engage with a wide range of RLOs, including women-led RLOs and those representing diverse groups of refugees, with different scopes and activities rather than only RLOs with international access.** Establish criteria for funding and share widely with all RLOs to mitigate competition among RLOs representing different communities.

4. Develop age-, gender-, and diversity-sensitive self-reliance programming

UNHCR and donors should

- **Strengthen disaggregated data collection for refugee self-reliance.**³³ Data disaggregated by age, gender, and disability will help CSOs design programs that meet the specific needs of diverse groups, based on data.
- **Engage women, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, and people living with disabilities, and refugees with other diversities (e.g. educational backgrounds, ethnicity, political views, and language), when designing and implementing programs related to self-reliance.**
- **Develop holistic self-reliance programs that include sexual and reproductive health, including contraception; support mental health and psychosocial support, and address gender-based violence.**

³¹ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders>.

³² https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/s0chre147aurskg8zqjse66fh6ipe08l_

³³ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021_GCR-Indicator-Report_spread_web.pdf.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

CBOs - Community Based Organizations
CSO - Civil Society Organization
GCR - Global Compact on Refugees
GRF - Global Refugee Forum
GRYN - Global Refugee Youth Network
HLMO - High Level Officials Meeting
INGO - International Non-Governmental Organization
MENA - Middle East and North Africa
NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council
RLO - Refugee Led Organizations
RLRH - Refugee Led Research Hub
RSRI - Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees

Refugee SELF-RELIANCE Initiative

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