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Which Refugee Self-Reliance? Whose Durable Solution?

Examining the relationship between self-reliance and durable solutions for refugees

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Acknowledgements

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Content

Executive Summary

Global attention on refugee self-reliance has grown in recent years. This has been further heightened through the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), as one of its four key objectives is to 'enhance refugee self-reliance'. The COVID-19 pandemic has further illustrated the precarity of many refugees' lives, highlighting how quickly refugees' ability to meet their own needs can dissolve in the face of unexpected events. Yet despite increasing attention, there is a notable gap in discussions on the intersection of refugee self-reliance and arguably the most important topic relating to refugees: durable solutions.

This report examines the relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions as it plays out in both practice and rhetoric. It presents the finding of an extensive literature review that identified not only programming explicitly relating to refugee self-reliance but cognate and parallel terms, including livelihoods programming that often appear in returnee reintegration packages and peacebuilding programming in countries of origin, as well as 'integration support' more commonly discussed in regions of resettlement. 27 key stakeholder interviews were held with experts from self-reliance programming, practitioners and scholars focusing on each (or all) of the durable solutions, non-state donors, and refugees. Information was also drawn on from over 50 interviews held in 2020 and 2021 with key stakeholders on urban forced migration, including municipal authorities and urban, 'self-reliant' refugees themselves.

The report focused on the following research questions:

- In what ways and to what extent is self-reliance programming expected to contribute to each of the three pathways towards durable solutions to displacement?
- What evidence and evidence gaps exist on the effectiveness of self-reliance programming in support of the various pathways towards durable solutions to displacement?
- What similarities and differences in self-reliance programming exist across each of the durable solutions?

Key findings on the relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions:

- **There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of self-reliance programming in helping refugees reach a durable solution. But that doesn't mean it isn't helping.** For example, while refugee self-reliance programming is perceived to support reintegration after voluntary repatriation, there is no large-scale cohesive body of evidence that illustrates this assumed causation. Given the average length of exile, among other challenges, this in many ways make sense: proving the effectiveness of specific self-reliance programming for repatriation would require a long-term study of refugees both in exile as they gained skills and/or assets and then upon voluntary repatriation, in order to understand how these skills were put to use for reintegration. However, evidence on the potential importance (rather than necessarily the effectiveness) of refugee self-reliance programming exists through evidence on the choices and outcomes of refugees in situations of refugee cessation, voluntary repatriation, and integration after resettlement.

- **Multiple definitions exist of both self-reliance and durable solutions.** A variety of buzzwords exist in relation to both durable solutions and self-reliance, including 'economic inclusion', 'social inclusion', 'social cohesion', 'labour market integration' and 'resilience'. In general, although these terms may be defined by one agency, they may be used differently by others, or in fact look the same in practice. This can make it difficult to understand the relationship between durable solutions and self-reliance, as well as get a sense of similar and differing approaches, such as the fostering of livelihoods versus economic inclusion. And, in many humanitarian and development documents, the concept of self-reliance simply remains undefined. This suggests the value of pursuing a common understanding behind different terminology for practitioners, policymakers, and donors alike.

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- **Self-reliance is a step towards a durable solution – not a durable solution itself.** Achieving self-reliance was perceived by key informants as providing refugees with the agency to make voluntary decisions about their lives, sometimes linked to decisions about durable solutions themselves. Yet despite agreement among practitioners and other stakeholders interviewed, self-reliance programming in practice rarely targets any durable solution other than local integration. Often, even this is implicit rather than explicit due to host country restrictionism.

- **Integration is a core part of every durable solution.** In much of the literature on resettlement and repatriation, success is only defined at the point at which refugees are considered to be fully integrated or reintegrated into a country, with social, political, and economic rights realised. Recognising this linkage between solutions more clearly by practitioners could set the stage for more explicit conversations on how self-reliance fits within integration across solutions.

- **Similar self-reliance programming is 'packaged' for different durable solutions.** Self-reliance programming in support of – usually de facto – local integration is often called 'livelihoods programming', 'resilience programming', or 'income-generating activities'. Self-reliance programming after resettlement is most commonly known as 'economic self-sufficiency', 'integration assistance' or support as part of an 'integration package'. This programming after repatriation might in turn be part of 'reintegration assistance' or come in the form of 'peacebuilding' and/or 'post-conflict recovery' activities. However, these may all refer to very similar programmes with similar intended outcomes..

- **Common challenges across solutions include employment certification or recertification, a lack of job opportunities, societal tensions, and often, ongoing situations of poverty.** While some self-reliance programming may address some of these challenges, a broader emphasis on developing programming that addresses self-reliance as a holistic term is needed. In part, addressing the holistic nature of refugee self-reliance could come through a clearer understanding of what challenges and barriers are often *not* contextual, and instead can be planned for and addressed across solutions.

- **Mobility is a key foundation for self-reliance and solutions – and often goes unacknowledged.** Mobility is often considered a coping mechanism rather than a solution, but there can be a grey area surrounding it in the case of durable solutions. Many agree that mobility is key for livelihoods, and thus is a component of self-reliance. However, it is often perceived as negative by humanitarian and development actors, as well as by states. Clearer acknowledgement of mobility both during and after exile is needed. Through greater recognition of mobility as a practice, a way of life, and, indeed, perhaps even a solution for some, there is the opportunity to learn more about the role of mobility in refugees' live and, hopefully, design programming and policy that reflects it.

- **The lack of clarity surrounding which durable solutions refugees may reach impedes self-reliance programming, leading to a bias towards (generally de facto) local integration.** Much of the existing self-reliance programming is designed without knowledge of which durable solution refugees will reach (if any), generating a heavy bias towards orienting refugees towards the local society and markets of their current host country. Acknowledging this bias in self-reliance programming in exile leads to interesting and important considerations of how programming could or should change if it instead sought to prepare refugees for other solutions.

Recommendations include the following, with a full list presented at the end of this report:

Recommendations for States and Donors

- Invest in self-reliance programming that has a strong durable solutions lens, including innovative pilots seeking to better prepare refugees for specific solutions once they become available
- Recognise that refugee self-reliance programming often necessitate significant investment and resources, and therefore should not be used as a justification for reducing aid to refugees or as a containment strategy
- Encourage more dialogue and coordination between donors on self-reliance programming across durable solutions, such as exploring cross-border funding and programmes to strengthen particular components of refugee self-reliance as well as vice versa. Greater coordination amongst donors opens up important oppor-

tunities for investment across the timescale of both self-reliance and durable solutions, and could offer the chance for more tailored interventions based on displaced people's capacities and plans to take place, particularly if programming is not confined to one location or solution

Recommendations for UNHCR

- Engage in dialogue with donor states on the risks of using the concept of self-reliance as a political tool to reduce humanitarian assistance or 'contain' populations in host countries in the Global South
- Clarify how 'self-reliance' and similar terms such as 'resilience', which appear in the GCR in different ways, are conceptualised and defined
- Request actors to consider how current GRF pledges and other investments are or could be linked to durable solutions, and include this in their pledge updates

Recommendations for Humanitarian and Development Agencies

- Clearly define the term 'self-reliance' as used in particular programming, with the understanding that it can be very context- and population-specific. However, highlighting its multi-dimensional nature rather than reducing it to income-generation is more reflective of many refugees' realities, as is acknowledging that self-reliance does not mean independence from any support systems, but likely a combination of many different ones
- Encourage self-reliance practitioners to identify how programme outcomes can support a durable solution utilising existing durable solutions analysis frameworks and tools – or be explicit in the aim to support refugees in the 'here and now' in exile as they seek to build capacities and assets in camp settings, out of camp settings and in urban areas
- Strengthen dialogue with practitioners addressing different durable solutions, such as examining how self-reliance programming plays out in different contexts with a focus on identifying good practices and ongoing challenges to build better evidence for programming and to identify key areas for donor investment.

Introduction:
Why Refugee Self-reliance?

'Everyone, from local community-based organizations to international non-governmental organizations to policy makers and donors, wants to support, fund and implement more effective programs to support the self-reliance of the displaced.'[1] This quote from a field manual for building livelihoods succinctly sums up much of the buzz around refugee self-reliance, broadly defined as the ability to live without humanitarian assistance. Many would argue it is little wonder that refugee self-reliance features so high on the agenda: 82.4 million people are forcibly displaced, over 26 million of them refugees.[2] Refugees live in protracted situations of displacement for anywhere from 10 to 26 years. While humanitarian budgets have grown overall in the last five years, they have shrunk in comparison to the quickly rising number of people in need.[3]

Notably, however, the document this quote comes from was written over a decade ago. Literature and programming on refugee self-reliance has grown significantly since this time, particularly with UNHCR's 2009 Urban Refugee Policy and increasing recognition of urban refugees, who largely lack international assistance and are assumed to be self-reliant. The attention on refugee self-reliance has been further heightened through the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), affirmed by the UN General Assembly in December 2018, with one of its four key objectives to 'enhance refugee self-reliance'.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further illustrated the precarity of many refugees' lives, highlighting the informal nature of much of their work and how quickly their ability to meet their own needs can dissolve in the face of unexpected events.[4] Alongside concern at the extreme vulnerability of many so-called 'self-reliant' refugees has come criticism of self-reliance as a tool for donors to reduce assistance in order to save funds,[5] as well as efforts to both meaningfully define[6] and measure the term.[7] Yet despite increasing attention, there is a notable gap in discussions on the intersection of refugee self-reliance and arguably the most important topic relating to refugees: durable solutions.

Self-Reliance and Durable Solutions

The three durable solutions for refugees – voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement – have long been considered the most effective pathways to reinsert refugees into a sustainable, dignified life. Seen as instrumental for helping refugees access protection and rights, durable solutions were laid out in the 1951 Refugee Convention and have been reaffirmed in a variety of contemporary policy instruments. These includes the New York Declaration[8] and resulting Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework[9] and the Global Compact on Refugees,[10] as well as the Grand Bargain.[11]

However, there is not one single understanding of when a durable solution has actually been achieved. While local integration, for example, was originally envisioned as the point at which a refugee achieved a full set of rights – in other words, when they became legally naturalized into a host country – a broader definition is often used today (expanded on in later

1   WRC (Women's Refugee Commissioan) (2009) Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings. New York: WRC.
2   UNHCR (2021) Figures at a Glance. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html (Accessed 1 October 2021)
3   Development Initiatives (2021) Chapter 2: Humanitarian and wider crisis financing. Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2021. Available at: https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2021/chapter-two-humanitarian-and-wider-crisis-financing/
4   Center for Global Development, Refugees International, and IRC (2020) Locked Down and Left Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees' Economic Inclusion. Policy Paper 179, July. Available at: https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4994/locked-down-left-behind-refugees-economic-inclusion-covid.pdf
5   Kaiser, T. (2006) 'Between a Camp and a Hard Place: Rights, Livelihood and Experiences of the Local Settlement System for Long-Term Refugees in Uganda'. Journal of Modern African Studies 44(4): 597–621.; Meyer, S. (2006) The "Refugee Aid and Development" Approach in Uganda: Empowerment and Self-reliance of Refugees in Practice. UNHCR Working Paper Series, no. 131. Geneva: UNHCR.; Easton-Calabria, E. and Omata, N. (2018) 'Panacea for the refugee crisis? Rethinking the promotion of 'self-reliance' for refugees'. Third World Quarterly. Available at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2018.1458301
6   Easton-Calabria, E. et al. (2017) Refugee Self-Reliance: Moving Beyond the Marketplace. RSC Research in Brief, no. 7. Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. Available at: http://dspace.jgu.edu.in:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10739/1266/Refugee%20Self-Reliance.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=n
7   To learn more, see the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative's Self-Reliance Index: https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/self-reliance-index
8   UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) (2016) United Nations 71/1. New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. New York: UN. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/584689257.pdf
9   UNHCR (2018) Bringing the New York Declaration to Life: Applying the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/593e5ce27.pdf
10   UNGA (2018) The Global Compact on Refugees. Geneva: UNGA. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf
11   Agenda for Humanity (2016) The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need. Istanbul, Turkey. Available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/grand_bargain_final_22_may_final-2_0.pdf

sections of this report). A newer body of policies, frameworks, and literature also focuses on finding durable solutions for IDPs, exemplified through the 2010 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs.[12] Guiding documents for policy and practice often include intentionally broad definitions, drawing on the three durable solutions but highlighting other important aspects of what a 'solution' entails. The Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) focusing on Eastern and the Horn of Africa, for example, heavily draws on the IASC IDP framework definition to focus on all displaced people:

> A durable solution is achieved when displaced people: No longer have specific assistance and protection needs linked to their displacement; and can exercise their rights without discrimination resulting from their displacement[13]

Regardless of the exact phrasing, definitions and discussions on durable solutions emphasise that the physical movement into a place of safety, such as through voluntary repatriation or resettlement, is not a solution alone. The IASC Framework, for example, proposes criteria which includes 'long-term safety, security and freedom of movement', 'adequate standard of living', and 'access to employment and livelihood opportunities'. Importantly, these criteria are tied to the respect, protection, and fulfilment of rights as indicators of when durable solutions have been achieved. Other common elements include 'resilience' and acknowledgement of a durable solution as a long-term process. Scholarship also notes that it is only since the 1980s that voluntary repatriation has come to be seen as 'the best, most preferred solution', and that as envisioned in the 1951 Convention, being a refugee was often considered a permanent situation of exile that demanded resettlement or local integration far more often than return.[14]

Each of these elements – the long-term process of achieving a durable solution, the assumed permanence of the solution itself, and the need for economic livelihoods as part of this – points us towards self-reliance as a key component of durable solutions. However, this intersection is far more implicit than explicit in much of the current humanitarian and development discourse on the topic. This lack of clarity can impede successful programming in a variety of ways, such as through programmes that place self-reliance (or durable solutions, for that matter) as either stepping stones or objectives themselves in contexts where either or both may in fact be unattainable. Without a clear understanding of the relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions as played out in both discourse and practice, there is also a risk that one is used to instrumentalise the other, or in fact that they are problematically conflated as one and the same.

Report Aims and Overview

This report examines the relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions as it plays out in both practice and rhetoric. This is particularly important in light of the GCR's focus on enhancing refugee self-reliance and enabling access to durable solutions – and the barriers to progress that the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing challenging political environments have brought to these and other areas of refugee protection. Given the ongoing emphasis on fostering refugee self-reliance, there is a particular need to better understand what effective self-reliance programming constitutes and how it can be promoted within a durable solutions lens that places refugee protection and rights at its core.

This report was conducted as a complementary piece to DRC's and RefugePoint's Self-Reliance Evidence Review, a comprehensive mapping and evidence review of available literature on refugee self-reliance published between 2005 and 2021. In the course of this review, a gap in literature on the linkages between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions was identified, despite the importance of both areas of practice. To address this, this report draws on an extensive literature review[15] that identified not only programming explicitly relating to refugee self-reliance but cognate and parallel terms, including livelihoods programming that often appear in returnee reintegration packages and peacebuilding programming in countries of origin, and 'integration support' more commonly discussed in regions of resettlement.

27 key stakeholder interviews were held with experts from self-reliance programming, practitioners and scholars focusing

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12   IASC (2010) Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/50f94cd49.pdf
13   ReDSS (n.d.) ReDSS Durable Solutions Framework: A Guidance Manual. Nairobi: ReDSS. Available at: http://regionaldss.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ReDSS-Solutions-Framework-guidance-manual.pdf
14   Hammond, L. (2014). 'Voluntary' repatriation and reintegration. In: Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E., Loescher, G., Long, K., & Sigona, N. (Eds.) (2014) The Oxford handbook of refugee and forced migration studies. OUP Oxford.
15   This review drew on scoping study methodology according to Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. International journal of social research methodology, 8(1), 19-32.

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on each (or all) of the durable solutions, and several non-state donors and 'self-reliant' refugees. A virtual roundtable with experts from within DRC was held to discuss findings as part of the research process and external reviewers provided further detailed comments. While humanitarian and development actors, as well as academic scholars, were interviewed, due to time constraints a key limitation of this report is the limited engagement with government actors and refugees on this topic. However, in addition to the key stakeholder interviews held between September – November 2021, data was drawn from over 50 semi-structured qualitative interviews held in 2020 and 2021 with key stakeholders on urban forced migration, including municipal authorities in Uganda and Ethiopia and urban, 'self-reliant' refugees themselves.

The report addresses the following research questions:

- In what ways and to what extent is self-reliance programming expected to contribute to each of the three pathways towards durable solutions to displacement?
- What evidence and evidence gaps exist on the effectiveness of self-reliance programming in support of the various pathways towards durable solutions to displacement?
- What similarities and differences in self-reliance programming exist across each of the durable solutions?

The first section of this report discusses definitions of refugee self-reliance and durable solutions, as well as the relationship between them. The report then turns to refugee self-reliance programming in relation to each of the three durable solutions, followed by an overview of key themes identified through the research. The report concludes with recommendations for practice, collaboration, and advocacy.

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Foto: Bangladesh 2021, DRC

Defining Refugee Self-Reliance,
Defining Durable Solutions

'What's clear and important is that self-reliance does not replace durable solutions – it's a key element of the concepts, it's part of the journey.'[16]

A variety of buzzwords exist in relation to both durable solutions and self-reliance. As discussed by many informants, these include 'economic inclusion', 'social inclusion', 'social cohesion', 'labour market integration', and 'resilience'. In general, although these terms may be defined by one agency, they may be used differently by others, or in fact look the same in practice.

This can make it difficult to understand the relationship between durable solutions and self-reliance, as well as get a sense of similar and differing approaches, such as the fostering of livelihoods versus economic inclusion. Although it is beyond the scope of this report to analyse the variety of existing terms in this sphere in detail, their prevalence suggests the value of pursuing a common understanding behind different terminology for practitioners, policymakers, and donors alike. The table below provides a snapshot of how self-reliance and durable solutions are discussed in the current strategies and most recent annual report of different refugee-serving agencies.[17]

Table 1.
Snapshot of Different Agencies' and Institutions Discussion of Self-Reliance and Durable Solutions

Agency and example source	Self-Reliance as a Key Objective?	Linkage between self-reliance and durable solutions?	Example of how achieved?
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Source: Global Strategy 2022-2025	**Yes** – 'NRC works to ensure that by 2030, those forced to flee are safer and can exercise their rights, quickly access the services needed to regain control of their lives and are able to become self-reliant and find solutions.' (4)	**Yes** – Aims to consolidate 'Self-reliance and durable solutions for people in protracted displacement' 'Self-reliance and durable solutions for people in protracted displacement Our responses aim to help people permanently resolve their displacement, and to have access to the resources they need to be self-reliant in the meantime.'	Advocates for 'the removal of barriers to self-reliance, and durable solutions' (7) Programmes 'designed to facilitate access to rights and resources that allow displaced people to meet their needs without relying on humanitarian assistance' (10)

16   Interview, #11.

17   Note: This table is not meant to be exhaustive of either agency or of discussions within different agencies. Instead, comparable guiding documents were sought (e.g. global strategies and/or annual reports) as these demonstrate key priorities of organisations. Interestingly, multiple organisations reviewed, including the International Rescue Committee, Finnish Refugee Council, Oxfam, and MercyCorps, did not mention either refugee self-reliance or durable solutions in these documents, although in many instances focus on one or both topics in their work.

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Source: DRC Strategy 2025	**Yes** – 'People affected by conflict and displacement must be able to pursue self-reliance. DRC's Goal: By 2025, DRC have [sic] supported (directly or indirectly) 13 million people affected by conflict and displacement to pursue self-reliance.' (6)	**Yes** – 'The second breakthrough speaks to the social and economic inclusion of people affected by conflict and displacement, also in times of economic recession. Evidence proves that displacement-affected populations face greater barriers to self-reliance, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities than non-displaced populations… Adhering to these breakthroughs is a key precondition to achieve durable solutions and to address discrimination…' (6)	'While responses may vary according to political and economic contexts and whether the emphasis should be on inclusion politics or supporting the economies of displacement-affected areas, the importance of strengthening displaced persons' agency and contribution remains central – also to change the prevailing narrative that displaced persons are a burden on host communities.' (6)
UNHCR UNHCR Global Report 2020	**Yes** – 'Enhancing the self-reliance of refugees and other people of concern is a crucial component of the Global Compact on Refugees. Better self-reliance means refugees and host communities are better able to meet their essential needs, enjoy their human rights and live with dignity. Ensuring they have quality education, livelihoods opportunities and access to safe and sustainable energy benefits both host communities and people of concern to UNHCR.' (2016)	2020 Global Report: In passing – under section on 'Seeking durable solutions for protracted refugee situations', several examples of self-reliance provided (see next column)	'In Zambia, UNHCR continued its efforts to help integrate former Angolan and Rwandan refugees by supporting self-reliance and socioeconomic inclusion and moving away from encampment approaches. In Zimbabwe, the African Development Bank funded a UNHCR scheme to expand self-reliance opportunities through agricultural activities. In Namibia, some Angolan refugees received legal assistance to acquire permanent residence.' (Global Report, p98)
World Bank Group Source: Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts	Not directly in its core development approach to forcibly displaced people but later states: 'The purpose of a development response is to help forcibly displaced persons overcome the displacement-induced vulnerabilities which impinge on their ability to seize opportunities and which put them at high risk of falling into lasting poverty. It is not directly aimed at providing for basic needs, but at restoring self-reliance.' (90)	**N/A**	'This agenda is predicated on the assumption that continued humanitarian assistance is provided in parallel to ensure that the basic needs of the forcibly displaced (including food, health, etc.) are met until they can achieve self-reliance. The scope of such aid largely depends on the pace at which refugees and IDPs can gain employment or access other sources of incomes, which in turn is often a reflection of host government policies and of the success of development interventions.'' (91)

Refugee Self-Reliance

The most common official definition of refugee self-reliance comes from UNHCR's 2005 Handbook for Self-Reliance, defined 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'.[18] While some have sought to define the term in consensus with both refugees and practitioners,[19] in many humanitarian and development documents the concept simply remains undefined. Recent work by DRC and RefugePoint, as part of the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, has sought to review how various stakeholders define and use the term, finding that there is not a shared understanding of the concept in either academic scholarship or practitioner literature.[20]

Despite the wide-ranging nature of UNHCR's definition, a body of literature critiques much of the discourse and programming on refugee self-reliance, which narrowly focuses on refugees' ability to generate income so as to live independently from humanitarian assistance.[21] Some research has found that efforts to foster refugee self-reliance are often tied to concurrent aims to reduce funding for refugees.[22] One former director of a refugee-serving organisation in Egypt bluntly summarized this stance:

I wince when I hear the term 'self-reliance' because I think something bad is coming: there will be an attempt to withdraw services, to reduce levels of cash or in-kind support. These very quickly follow discussions on refugee self-reliance.[23]

One Senior Manager focusing on forced displacement within a major development donor agency discussed the issues with this approach:

We are a bit cautious around the self-reliance narrative because we recognise some of the demographic barriers to it, and that humanitarian assistance is part of transitioning to long-term development solutions in all refugee-hosting countries. An important part of the support we provide is looking at pathways to self-reliance and facilitating self-reliance but we are cautious about saying that our projects will **provide** self-reliance – there is no one size fits all.[24]

However, even in UNHCR documents, the focus on refugee self-reliance often remains on livelihoods and aid reduction. As discussed in the operational guidance on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas, entitled 'Promoting Livelihoods and Self-Reliance', for example,

Self-reliance, as a programme approach, refers to developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern (PoC), and *reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian or external assistance. Livelihood programming should assist refugees in becoming self-reliant.* Cash / food / rental assistance should be short-term and conditional and gradually lead to self-reliance activities as part of longer-term development.[25] [emphasis added]

In instances where self-reliance programming is equated with livelihoods programming and income-generation, there are also criticisms that the concept acts as a political tool for traditional donor countries seeking to uphold a de facto policy of containment.[26] Self-reliance programming, in this view, is seen as a means to support refugees and other forced migrants to live 'well enough' so as to not need humanitarian assistance – and also to not be driven to seek asylum in traditional donor countries in the Global North. This approach is often connected to rhetoric on 'illegal' or irregular migration. Such program-

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18   UNHCR (2005) Handbook for Self-Reliance. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/44bf7b012.pdf

19   For example, the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) workshopped the term in 2016-2017, ultimately settling on a near-identical definition to UNHCR's: "the social and economic ability of an individual, a household, or a community to meet its needs in a sustainable manner." Source: RSRI (2021) Frequently Asked Questions: What is self-reliance? Webpage, available at: https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/faq (accessed 20 November 2021)

20   DRC/RefugePoint (2021) Defining Refugee Self-Reliance. Self-Reliance Evidence Brief, no 1.

21   See for example articles in: Easton-Calabria, E. and Skran, C. (eds) (2020) Special Issue on Rethinking Refugee Self-Reliance. Journal of Refugee Studies, 33(1). Available at: https://academic.oup.com/jrs/issue/33/1

22   Kaiser, T. (2006) 'Between a Camp and a Hard Place: Rights, Livelihood and Experiences of the Local Settlement System for Long-Term Refugees in Uganda'. Journal of Modern African Studies 44(4): 597–621.; Meyer, S. (2006) The "Refugee Aid and Development" Approach in Uganda: Empowerment and Self-reliance of Refugees in Practice. UNHCR Working Paper Series, no. 131. Geneva: UNHCR.

23   Interview, #4.

24   Interview, #26

25   UNHCR (2011) Promoting Livelihoods and Self-Reliance: Operational guidance on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/134/2017/02/For-Jacobsen-UNHCR-Promoting-self-reliance.pdf

26   Easton-Calabria, E. and Omata, N. (2018) 'Panacea for the refugee crisis? Rethinking the promotion of 'self-reliance' for refugees'. Third World Quarterly. Available at https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1458301

ming has been undertaken by significant donors such as the UK government, which alluded to Syrian refugees in its 2017-2018 'illegal migration' project objectives, which included efforts to:

increase economic opportunities and create job opportunities in source countries to improve economic growth, support job growth, retain home grown talent, and increase options for those at risk of illegal migration, including from Syria…[27]

Notably, these strategies are employed despite thin evidence of what actually works to foster refugee livelihoods.[28]

However, among practitioners, the term varies but is almost always conceptualised as more than just livelihoods or income-generation. As one humanitarian coordinator working on durable solutions in the Middle East explained,

We have conceived of self-reliance as a key concept that is part of enabling pathways to durable solutions. We usually look at self-reliance in a holistic way, some people think it's only about livelihoods or economies but that's not the way to define it. Self-reliance means you have a basic level of social safety net so that if you lose your job or income, you are not left with nothing. The cash assistance modalities that exist in our region support this idea [of a safety net], and access to labour markets is a big one. Self-reliance includes access to basic quality services that enable you to thrive and to have a certain level of wellbeing.[29]

More recent scholarship follows this trend, expanding on components such as the under-acknowledged role of social connections and networks in the definition itself.[30] While some work has also pointed out the need for refugees' own definitions to be incorporated into existing understandings of self-reliance,[31]

there remains a gap in literature exploring this, as well as refugees' conceptualisations of the connection between self-reliance and durable solutions. As one director of an organisation focusing on durable solutions stated,

Today there is an interest in the [social] networks of Somali and South Sudanese refugees because of the forced migration policy environment. These highly networked, pastoralist societies are now internationalized through resettlement programmes. All of this energy and social capital and agency is being enacted through these networks to enable people to survive. So, the question in regards to self-reliance and durable solutions is: how can we build on what people are doing? If we can engage with this then we can actually discuss refugee self-reliance. Then we could have different set of conversations around durable solutions…I'd like to think there could be a more real conversation between what people actually want and how they're surviving and what states are willing to accept.[32]

Refugee self-reliance, resilience, and the GCR

Refugee self-reliance is a core concept in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) with 'enhanc[ing] refugee self-reliance' one of the Compact's four key objectives. While the term is not defined in the Compact, it is defined in the 2019 GCR Indicator Framework, following a narrower version of the 2005 UNHCR Handbook as 'the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs in a sustainable manner and with dignity.' However, the indicator itself only focuses on refugees' economic inclusion, thereby keeping with a broader trend of focusing primarily on the definition's economic dimensions.

Interestingly, at different points the phrase seems to be used

27   UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2018) Tackling illegal migration: objectives 2017 to 2018. Transparency data, 16 February. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/official-development-assistance-oda-fco-programme-spend-objectives-2017-to-2018/tackling-illegal-migration-objectives-2017-to-2018

28   Mcloughlin, C. (2016). Sustainable livelihoods for refugees in protracted crises. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/59845112ed915d022b00006e/135_livelihoods-in-refugee-settings.pdf

29   Interview, #11.

30   Carpi, E., Field, J. A., Dicker, S. I., & Rigon, A. (2020) From livelihoods to leisure and back: refugee 'self-reliance' as collective practices in Lebanon, India and Greece. Third World Quarterly, 42(2), 421-440.

31   Easton-Calabria, E., Mookherjee, Y. (2017) The Many Selves in Self-Reliance: Why Words and Definitions Matter. December 15. Refugees Deeply. Available at: https://deeply.thenewhumanitarian.org/refugees/community/2017/12/15/the-many-selves-in-self-reliance-why-words-and-definitions-matter

32   Interview, #6.

either as synonymous with or distinct from the that of 'resilience'.[33] While a 2017 Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExComm) paper explores refugee self-reliance and resilience from a protection and solutions perspective, its attempt to define the distinction between the terms is muddled. The ExComm paper states, for example: 'Self-reliance can lead to resilience, while resilience is necessary to ensure that progress towards self-reliance is not eroded or reversed in the face of sudden-onset shocks and longer-term trends, such as climate change.'[34] This chicken-or-egg conundrum, wherein it is unclear if self-reliance fosters resilience or vice versa, or if the two are independent concepts, makes it hard to understand their usage within the GCR itself.

Overall, in the GCR the term 'resilience' appears twice as often as 'self-reliance' (six and three times, respectively). Notably, they are used together along with 'solutions' in the section on Support Platforms, with the function of the platforms including: 'supporting comprehensive policy initiatives to ease pressure on host countries, build resilience and self-reliance, and find solutions'.[35] This phrasing is important in that here each concept is presented as independent from the other: resilience is not the same as self-reliance, and neither one constitutes a solution. It is also noteworthy (and perhaps problematic) that 'solutions' rather than 'durable solutions' are presented as a goal of the support platforms.

Independently, 'self-reliance' appears only once in the GCR other than its mention as a key objective, in relation to food security and nutrition: 'Acknowledging that food and nutrition are priority basic needs, in support of host countries, States and relevant stakeholders will contribute resources and expertise to facilitate access by refugees and host communities to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, and promote increased self-reliance in food security and nutrition, including by women, children, youth, persons with disabilities and older persons.'[36]

In contrast, however, 'resilience' is further discussed in direct relation to durable solutions:

[H]ost States that seek to strengthen national policies and institutions for the resilience of local and refugee communities often require sufficient contributions from the international community as a whole to accompany their efforts, until durable solutions can be found. Efforts to support refugees and host communities in no way diminish, and are in fact complementary to, the need to facilitate future arrangements for durable solutions.[37]

Here, strengthening the resilience of local and refugee communities alike is presented as a meaningful and necessary period of support and investment until durable solutions are reached, and is clearly discussed as apposite to rather than conflicting with durable solutions themselves.

Overall, the limited engagement with the concept of self-reliance in the GCR, as well as the lack of clarity regarding the definition of 'local solutions' as distinct from durable solutions suggests the value of increasing dialogue on these topics and defining terms so as to better understand UNHCR's stance on the relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions.

Durable Solutions

While durable solutions are often assumed to refer only to the three explicitly laid out in the 1951 Convention, interview informants also proposed varying elements of durable solutions and even questioned the 'durability' of them. Multiple informants highlighted ongoing mobility as a reality that the durable solutions do not adequately take into account. As one refugee scholar explained,

A lot of research is not looking at how people are incorporating mobility into their lives, particularly of people who have returned. The whole concept of durable solutions seems to have a static lens that ultimately is adding to the theory of containment. But regardless of whether they're refugees or IDPs, everyone is mobile, either as individuals or different family members – mobility is a piece of how they survive.[38]

The GCR also uses 'solutions' in varying ways, referring not only to 'durable solutions' but to 'local solutions'. It aims to 'facilitate access to durable solutions' as well as a 'mix of solutions'

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33   For example, in Section 2.2 of the GCR on the Support Platform, its functions are described as including efforts to 'build resilience and self-reliance'; however para 64 seems to be describing self-reliance through the term 'resilience': 'host States that seek to strengthen national policies and institutions for the resilience of local and refugee communities often require sufficient contributions from the international community as a whole to accompany their efforts, until durable solutions can be found'.

34   ExComm (2017) Resilience and self-reliance from a protection and solutions perspective. Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme Standing Committee 68th meeting. EC/68/SC/CRP.4. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/58ca4f827.pdf

35   GRC, 2.2, para 23.

36   GCR, 2.7, para 80.

37   GCR, para 64.

38   Interview, #14.

including 'other local solutions and complementary pathways for admission to third countries, which may provide additional opportunities'.[39] However, local solutions are not defined in the GCR and at times appear to refer to local integration by another name. One NGO informant highlighted the risk of this, citing the need for clear definitions to avoid both misunderstanding and intentional misuse of the term. This is also relevant for discussions on refugee self-reliance due to the possibility that 'local solutions' may be interpreted as pursuing a form of de facto local integration that comes without assistance or rights, leading to situations where self-reliance – reduced in constrained contexts to mean income generation by any means possible – is the only viable option.

Several informants as well as documents by donors such as the World Bank focused on durable solutions as being on a spectrum of progress. As one World Bank document explained:

Durable solutions are often described as either/or categories: a one-off repatriation process, a forever integration, or a rare resettlement opportunity. Yet in practice the forcibly displaced have to negotiate a complex process of belonging based on a multiplicity of factors. Many try to keep their options open.[40]

Identifying the relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions

Key stakeholders and some (though not all) of the reviewed literature presented refugee self-reliance as a step towards a durable solution and not a durable solution in and of itself. This is both a rights-based argument and a practical one, given the restrictions on rights that many refugees face. Reflecting on the precarity of many 'self-reliant' refugees' lives today, Ferris writes,

…how far this is from the three solutions originally envisioned by the founders of the international [refugee] regime back in the early 1950s, where refugees were expected to return home, start a new life elsewhere through resettlement, or settle into a host country with all the benefits and rights

of citizens. Self-reliance is only a partial solution, compared to those – nonetheless, given today's realities, it is an important tool in helping refugees make the best of a bad situation.[41]

Similarly one former UNHCR staff member explained that achieving both durable solutions and refugee self-reliance is a 'process with multiple components – it has a legal component and a socioeconomic component. If you are only legally integrated but not otherwise, are you really self-reliant? The purist legal approach isn't really sustainable.'[42]

Echoing this stance, the ReDSS durable solutions framework is based on the premise that:

Achieving a durable solution should be viewed as an incremental pathway, with intermediate outcomes that can be categorized as material/economic (e.g., improved livelihoods), physical/social (e.g. increased social cohesion between the displaced and host populations) and legal (e.g. being legally allowed to work, or access government-run health and education services).[43]

One informant working in the Middle East explained, 'Achieving durable solutions is a process that leads to integration or to reintegration. All three solutions lead to that [some form of integration], and self-reliance is just part of integration.'

These perceptions align in their understanding of refugee self-reliance as part of a pathway *to* durable solutions, while it is often also an assumed or intended outcome of durable solutions itself (discussed further in the following sections). While rarely discussed explicitly in literature, it also follows that refugees could in fact reach a durable solution *without* being self-reliant. A refugee child who is resettled, for example, would be considered to have achieved a durable solution despite not working or living independently. Similarly, elderly refugees or those with disabilities who either voluntarily repatriate or are resettled, and who thrive through a heavy reliance on family or state assistance, may not be considered self-reliant according to some definitions but would likely meet the criteria for having

39   GCR, para 85.
40   World Bank Group (2017) Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts. WA, D.C.: World Bank. P. 103. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25016/9781464809385.pdf?sequence=11&isAllowed=y
41   Ferris, E. (2018) When refugee displacement drags on, is self-reliance the answer? 19 June, Order from Chaos, Brookings Institute. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/06/19/when-refugee-displacement-drags-on-is-self-reliance-the-answer/
42   Interview, #8.
43   ReDSS (n.d.) ReDSS Durable Solutions Framework: A guidance manual. Available at: http://regionaldss.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ReDSS-Solutions-Framework-guidance-manual.pdf

reached a durable solution according to many. Refugee self-reliance and durable solutions are clearly independent concepts which become more or less related depending on definitions selected (such as whether self-reliance is determined on an individual or household basis) and the contexts and refugee populations being considered.

Programming for self-reliance and durable solutions

Despite understandings of a relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions, most programming does not explicitly address both. In part, this can be attributed to the static nature of many programmes targeting self-reliance as well as those focused on durable solutions, which are almost always tied to the current geographic location of refugees. One manager of the refugee livelihoods portfolio of a major private foundation described more recent attempts to imagine this otherwise:

Instead of funding 'programme A' set in a particular country with programmes that can't go across a border, we would approach it from the view that we are agnostic as to the country, because our programme is about delivering assistance to X number of people or to an entire community. With this approach, it doesn't really matter where the funding is routed, if it's in one community, as part of a cross-border resettlement scheme, etc. Funding could move with a family, for example. However, while we do see examples of cross-border programming, more often they are divided across a border with different donors on either end.[44]

While still rare, programming such as this offers the opportunity to assist refugees wherever they end up going, thereby potentially offering more support for reaching a durable solution and for achieving self-reliance through flexible funding focused much more on refugees themselves instead of their location.

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44   Interview, #27

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Refugee Self-Reliance and Local Integration

Generally considered the most viable solution, local integration is often the most neglected officially – it has been termed a 'forgotten' solution,[45] an 'undocumented' one,[46] as well as the official 'forbidden' solution.[47] Host states are often reluctant to grant rights to refugees that might in any way influence their interest in staying or ability to do so, and often outright deny any pathway to citizenship. However, despite this, both literature and programming on self-reliance have a clear emphasis on local integration. Jacobsen and Fratzke summarise the reasoning behind this prevailing stance well:

Most refugee situations are not resolved quickly. Instead, they become protracted, stretching over years or even decades, often without a clear end in sight. Because of this, it has become more important than ever to find ways to better integrate refugees into countries of first asylum, particularly by ensuring they have access to livelihoods and economic opportunities.[48]

Emerging from the reality of protracted displacement has also come a wider recognition that the ability of refugees to become self-reliant is highly dependent on their broader context and ability to access systems and resources; correspondingly, effective self-reliance programming must move beyond individual support to refugees to also address the environment within which refugees live.

But what do we mean when we use the term 'local integration' today? Few refugee-hosting countries in the world offer a viable pathway towards citizenship and the full set of rights that the original solution, as laid out in the 1951 Convention, intended. As mentioned earlier, even the GCR presents local integration as possible without legal naturalisation. In this sense, what is commonly referenced is *de facto* (informal) rather than *de jure* local integration, which refers to legal naturalisation. As one humanitarian coordinator in the Middle East explained,

When we're defining our areas of work in host countries, we discuss integration and inclusion. Some people say inclusion is like a watered-down durable solution – that it's not 'doing' integration because it's happening on the ground de facto [rather than legally]….The political realities force us to rethink the language that we use.'[49]

In this sense, economic inclusion or social cohesion may be partial synonyms of de facto integration without ever being discussed officially as such. Indeed, in the absence of legal integration, de facto local integration is often separated in literature into social integration or social inclusion or cohesion and labour market integration, with a heavy emphasis on the latter. However, both scholars and practitioners have sought to widen this lens, in part through the creation of integration frameworks identifying different domains inherent to the integration process[50] as well as the development of a Refugee Integration Scale comprised of elements including language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability, and employment among others.[51]

Problematically, when de facto local integration is discussed in literature and project documents, it is commonly equated – albeit often implicitly – with labour market integration through a central emphasis on refugees' access to work. With this as either an explicit or implicit goal, much self-reliance programming in host countries constitutes livelihoods programming. Those offered by humanitarian and development organisations often offer technical skills oriented towards local markets – despite a common lack of market assessments undertaken. These trainings, in areas such as sewing, carpentry, jewellery-making, and cooking, range in length from three to twelve months. By the end of trainings, refugees are often highly skilled. But here's the catch: 70 of the 145 States party to the 1951 Refugee Convention restrict refugees' right to work either in part or in full, echoing the stance of many of the 48 states that have not ratified the Convention.[52] This ultimately means that many refugees

45   Jacobsen, K. (2001) 'The Forgotten Solution: Local Integration for Refugees in Developing Countries'. New Issues in Refugee Research. UNHCR Working Paper No. 45.
46   Fielden, A. (2008) 'Local Integration: An Under-Reported Solution to Protracted Refugee Situations'. New Issues in Refugee Research. UNHCR Working Paper No. 158.
47   Hovil, L. (2014) Local Integration. In: In: Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E., Loescher, G., Long, K., & Sigona, N. (Eds.) (2014) *The Oxford handbook of refugee and forced migration studies*. OUP Oxford.
48   Jacobsen, K. & Fratzke, S. (2016) Building Livelihood Opportunities for Refugee Populations: Lessons from Past Practice. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Available at: http://www.regionaldss.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/TCM-Dev-Jacobsen-FINAL.pdf
49   Interview, #11.
50   See for example Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008) Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of refugee studies*, *21*(2), 166-191.
51   Beversluis, D., Schoeller-Diaz, D., Anderson, M., Anderson, N., Slaughter, A., & Patel, R. B. (2017) Developing and validating the refugee integration scale in Nairobi, Kenya. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *30*(1), 106-132.
52   Zetter, R., & Ruaudel, H. (2016) Refugees' right to work and access to labor markets–An assessment. *KNOMAD Working Paper. Washington, DC: World Bank Group*. Available at: https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/KNOMAD%20Study%201-%20Part%20II-%20Refugees%20Right%20to%20Work%20-%20An%20Assessment.pdf

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are either unable to work or can only do so informally, which comes with its own set of risks.

To what extent, therefore, can self-reliance programming contribute to local integration as a durable solution?

If local integration is largely regarded as refugees' ability (rather than right) to work and contribute to local economies, then depending on the context, the answer seems to be 'to some extent' or 'hardly at all'. This purported linkage between local integration and income-generation is particularly relevant to consider for instances where refugees are unable to work or, due to a variety of possible reasons, *should not* work. In particular, this focus on integration as income-generation is problematic as there is a corresponding risk that social assistance such as cash transfers is not seen as a viable (and often badly needed) component of integration – or of self-reliance. This is all the more important to evaluate given Jacobsen and Fratzke's finding that:

Despite the growing interest in and resources devoted to livelihood programs, as yet there is little concrete evidence that current strategies are successfully meeting their goals of fostering self-reliance and durable solutions. In general, there is a lack of independent evaluations, hard data, and external assessments of most livelihood programs. In particular, there are few impact evaluations that assess the extent to which programs actually improve the livelihood or self-reliance of refugees and minimize negative externalities.[53]

Often these 'negative externalities' are so great that it may be unreasonable to expect a particular livelihoods programme to have a large impact. In Lebanon, for instance, the country hosting the largest number of refugees per capita, it is estima-

ted that 88% of Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty.[54] The study, based on a representative sample of Syrian refugees, found high unemployment (38%), food insecurity in refugee households (49%), and growing rates of child labour (4.4%).[55] Refugees in the country, which adopted a 'no camps' policy after the civil war, face numerous challenges, including an estimated 80% lacking legal residency and hence limited access to the formal labour market. Similar to Syrians, Palestine refugees in Lebanon are also very marginalised, with limited rights, including the right to work except under extremely limited circumstances.[56] A 2015 survey found that 89% of Palestine refugees from Syria are in poverty and 9% are living in extreme poverty. 56% of Palestine refugees were found to be jobless, while those that are employed are in low-paying, low-skilled jobs and often in exploitative and insecure working conditions.[57]

The Government of Lebanon has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and since 2015 Lebanon has restricted the right for refugees to seek asylum and suspended the registration of Syrian refugees by UNHCR.[58] These challenges have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut blast, and ongoing economic and political instability. In a context such as this, where refugee rights fall far short of local integration (itself a 'forbidden' term in Lebanon), and where the country itself has been plunged into crisis, expecting refugees to be self-reliant seems problematic and in many cases outright dangerous.

Despite these challenges, a variety of refugee self-reliance programmes exists in the country. As a joint 2020 organisational policy brief on livelihoods programming in Lebanon explains, 'Ensuring access to livelihoods is a critical component of supporting people to achieve their preferred durable solution to their protracted displacement.'[59] The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan targets both Lebanese nationals and displaced Syrians with interventions including cash for work, technical and soft skills vocational training, and financial and business development support.[60] However, livelihoods in the country remains a significantly underfunded sector – only 43% funded in 2020,[61] with many actual activities reduced or halted due to the govern-

53   Jacobsen, K. & Fratzke, S., Building Livelihood Opportunities for Refugee Populations.
54   UNHCR/WFP/UNICEF (2021) 2020 Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR). Available at: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85002
55   Ibid.
56   ILO (n.d.) Policy Brief: The Work of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon is a Right and a Common Interest. Geneva: ILO. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_248434.pdf
57   (AUB) American University Beirut (2015) Survey of the Socio-economic Status of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon. American University of Beirut (AUB) & UNRWA. Available at: https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/survey_on_the_economic_status_of_palestine_refugees_in_lebanon_2015.pdf
58   UNHCR (2021) Lebanon: Refugees and Asylum-seekers. Webpage, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/lb/refugees-and-asylum-seekers
59   ReDSS/DRC/IRC/Mercy Corps/NRC/Save the Children (2020) What next for livelihoods programs in Lebanon? Respondign during economic crisis and COVID-19. Policy Brief. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/What%20Next%20for%20Livelihoods%20Programs%20Lebanon.pdf
60   UN & Government of Lebanon (2021) The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan. P. 128. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LCRP_2021FINAL_v1.pdf
61   UNHCR (2021) LCRP 2020 End of the Year Funding Update as of 31 December 2020. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lcrp-

ment's emergency restrictions after the Beirut blast.

There is little data on actual outcomes of self-reliance programming for refugees in the country, although that which exists paints a negative picture. Research measuring self-reliance through the Self-Reliance Index in Lebanon found low levels of self-reliance among Syrian refugees.[62] Research on livelihoods training for Syrian refugees in the city of Halba, Northern Lebanon, posits that due to humanitarian aims to not challenge or disrupt host economies, these trainings are little more than thinly packaged leisure activities.[63] At the same time, the social connections formed can be important and even life-saving, and some posit, using refugees in Lebanon as one example, that a wider definition of self-reliance that takes these into account is needed.[64] However, if livelihoods trainings are in actuality targeting psychosocial wellbeing, social connections, or the ever-elusive 'social cohesion', rather than refugees' livelihoods themselves, then there is a need for them to be labelled accordingly.

Despite poor or uncertain livelihoods outcomes from trainings, many are concerned at the even worse impact that *not* targeting livelihoods at all may bring both refugees and poor Lebanese in the longer-term. As well as a poorer quality of life in exile, refugees may in the future be worse equipped to (re)integrate upon voluntary repatriation or resettlement without the skills and experience that livelihoods programming can bring. As one brief states,

…[T]here are fears that if donors redirect their funding away from livelihoods to support the COVID-19 response in the short-term, this may translate into further reductions in livelihoods interventions and funding in the medium-term. The impacts of both the economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic will have dire consequences on the poorest and vulnerable in Lebanon, while recovering from the crisis will be challenging. Supporting vulnerable households with livelihoods intervention will be critical to help them re-gain access to income generation to rebuild their resilience, together with the Lebanese economy, and ultimately provide them with self-reliance. The operational and financial capacity for NGOs to respond in the immediate- and medium term livelihoods needs must be maintained.[65]

Self-Reliance and Social Protection

Notably, this and other discussions on self-reliance and livelihoods have little to do tangibly with durable solutions but instead with coping and survival. Over the past years this has led many agencies working in the region to promote social protection schemes alongside livelihoods programming, including widening refugees' access to healthcare and education and the provision of cash-based assistance. As one Senior Policy Advisor in the MENA region discussed,

The challenge will definitely be the longer-term socio-economic implications [of COVID-19 and other challenges] and social cohesion, how the government continues to include or not include refugees. But I think the development gaze is the default, it is now here to stay because of the limitations: protracted displacement is here, voluntary repatriation is not happening. We need the actors and structures in place, and a design of response to move us more towards a longer-term approach.[66]

The 2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon states, for example: 'As households are already implementing negative coping mechanisms and facing drastic income reductions, it is recommended that partners design and implement large scale cash-based programs', noting, 'With almost all families now living below the SMEB [Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket] and in poverty, maintenance and scale-up of regular multipurpose cash assistance through the basic assistance sector is highlighted as a priority in the overall response.'[67]

2020-end-year-funding-update-31-december-202

62   Seff, I., Leeson, K., & Stark, L. (2021). Measuring self-reliance among refugee and internally displaced households: the development of an index in humanitarian settings. *Conflict and health*, *15*(1), 1-12. Available at: https://conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13031-021-00389-y

63   Carpi, Estella. (2020). Towards a Neo-cosmetic Humanitarianism: Refugee Self-reliance as a Social-cohesion Regime in Lebanon's Halba. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 33*(1), Pp224-244.

64   Carpi, E., Field, J. A., Dicker, S. I., & Rigon, A. (2020). From livelihoods to leisure and back: refugee 'self-reliance' as collective practices in Lebanon, India and Greece. *Third World Quarterly*, *42*(2), 421-440.

65   ReDSS/DRC/IRC/Mercy Corps/NRC/Save the Children (2020) What next for livelihoods programs in Lebanon? Respondign during economic crisis and COVID-19. Policy Brief. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/What%20Next%20for%20Livelihoods%20Programs%20Lebanon.pdf

66   Interview, #15

67   UNHCR/WFP/UNICEF (2021) 2020 Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR). P. 14. Available at: https://data2.unhcr.

DRC

In this sense, social assistance such as cash transfers can be considered a form of both humanitarian and development assistance through helping refugees meet basic needs as well as contributing to them building assets for the longer term. In this way, social assistance can fill an important gap in de jure local integration and support durable solutions. While livelihoods programming and other support may well have their place within this architecture of assistance, it is important to note that any efforts towards the 'self-reliance' of Syrian refugees in Lebanon – if defined as living independently from humanitarian assistance – likely means making people resort to exploitative labour such as sex work[68] or a reliance on child labour, or returning to Syria under extremely dangerous conditions.[69]

This reality calls into question the extent to which refugee self-reliance, if it is discussed hand-in-hand with aid reductions or defined as living without any formal assistance, *should* be a goal. The growing emphasis on access to social protection systems represents a tension with reductionist understandings of self-reliance as living without assistance, rather than, for example, a broader emphasis on meeting needs sustainably and with dignity. As one World Bank document notes in a discussion of promoting refugees' socio-economic opportunities, 'This agenda is predicated on the assumption that continued humanitarian assistance is provided in parallel to ensure that the basic needs of the forcibly displaced (including food, health, etc.) are met until they can achieve self-reliance.'[70]

The dire situation of many refugees in Lebanon and elsewhere also highlights the value of expanding such a definition of self-reliance to more explicitly include refugees' recourse to social protection systems. Growing research and practice points in this direction – the ReDSS/IASC durable solutions indicator framework cites access to social protection systems as one important indicator of a solution, for example[71] – although there remains much to be done. While preliminary considerations of the 2021 Global Refugee Forum High-Level Officials' Meeting do not mention social protection directly, they do highlight the importance of access to national systems: 'Self-reliance requires

that refugees have access to jobs, livelihoods, and educational opportunities and that they are included in national systems.'[72] This stance was echoed in interviews with UNHCR, as well.

Along these lines, an earlier 2020 UN position paper on social protection in Lebanon recommends, for example, that long-term institutional reform should include, 'Develop[ing] linkages between social assistance programs and other programs (livelihood opportunities, public works, labor market activation, health, education and social welfare, etc.), including alignment with existing safety nets for refugees.'[73] An ongoing point of tension is how this badly needed support indeed links to durable solutions, and whether parallel or inclusive social protection systems in countries such as Lebanon can go far enough to foster the de facto social integration that terms such as 'inclusion' or 'social cohesion' seem to suggest.

Economic and Financial Inclusion

As a broader aspect of inclusion, in recent years UNHCR and other humanitarian and development actors have increasingly used the terms 'economic inclusion' and 'financial inclusion' in tandem with livelihoods and self-reliance programming. As UNHCR explains, 'UNHCR works to promote livelihoods and economic inclusion for refugees. We advocate for their right to work and support them in becoming more resilient and achieve [sic] self-reliance.'[74] This work has included UNHCR and the World Bank's Partnership for Economic Inclusion Poverty Alleviation Coalition (PAC) to 'increase self-reliance, economic and social inclusion of extremely poor refugees and host community members using the well-proven graduation approach', which 'graduates' members from poverty through a scaling series of consumption assistance, financial inclusion, training, seed capital, and mentoring.[75] While PAC is currently only implementing projects for refugees in host countries, the graduation approach model has been expanded by the Asian Development Bank to target people affected by involuntary resettlement due to development projects in the Philippines, suggesting the widespread application of this model for different types of forced migrants as well as in different contexts of forced migration.[76]

org/en/documents/details/85002

68   For a case study of survival and livelihoods strategies of LGBTQI+ refugees, one of the most vulnerable refugee populations, in Lebanon, see: Akram (2019) No Rainbow, No Integration: LGBTQI+ Refugees in Hiding, Beirut, Lebanon. Case Study, Refugees in Towns Project. Tufts University. Available at: https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Lebanon.pdf

69   Human Rights Watch (2021) 'Our Lives are Like Death': Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/10/20/our-lives-are-death/syrian-refugee-returns-lebanon-and-jordan

70   World Bank, 'Forcibly Displaced', p. 91.

71   The indicator reads in full: 'Access to social protection mechanisms – 12. Existence of legal, administrative or discriminatory barriers to accessing national social protection programs.'

72   UNHCR (2021) High-Level Officials Meeting 2021: Preliminary considerations. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/6001b5274.pdf

73   UN (2020) Social Protection in Lebanon: Bridging the Immediate Response With Long-Term Priorities. November, Position Paper. Beirut: UN. 19. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/5631/file/Social_Protection_in_Lebanon_UN_Position_Paper_Nov_2020.pdf.pdf

74   UNHCR (2021) Webpage: Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/livelihoods.html (accessed 20 September 2021)

75   To learn more, see: Poverty Alleviation Coalition methodology, https://alleviate-poverty.org/methodology

76   Schelzig, K. and Rawal, P. (2020) Testing the Graduation Approach in the Philippines. Asian Development Bank (ADB) Briefs, no. 132,

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So-called 'cash plus' models, which offer cash transfers along with components such as livelihoods trainings, and unconditional cash transfers are other initiatives linked to economic inclusion. However, in contrast to the Graduation Approach, andtying into the tension around social protection systems and self-reliance above, they are often not considered self-reliance programming as they in fact entail regular humanitarian assistance.

UNHCR has also increased its work on financial inclusion to create enabling environments in which refugees can create livelihoods and become self-reliant. Lack of access to banking and other financial services such as loans create huge barriers for many of the world's refugees; this in turn is often linked to restrictions on eligible documentation, such as refugee IDs or expired passports not being considered legal proof of identity. UNHCR and other actors have started working with financial service providers in host countries as well as internationally on barriers such as this, and have advocated to host governments for increased financial inclusion for refugees.[77] Some of the changes are promising. In 2019, for example, the Government of Pakistan allowed Afghan refugees to open bank accounts for the first time. Those refugees with businesses now have the option to not only conduct business in cash but through transfers as well, and can save money in bank accounts. As the Prime Minister explained, 'From now onwards they can participate in the formal economy of the country. This should have been done a long time ago.'[78]

Afghan refugees in Pakistan have long been de facto integrated into the country, although with significant barriers such as to banking, and have been recipients of a variety of self-reliance programming almost since the 1980s.[79] However, this does not ensure that refugees are in fact self-reliant, particularly when extreme events such as the COVID-19 pandemic occur. As a senior policy officer in a major humanitarian organisation working in Asia and the Pacific explained,

In addition to the tremendous health implications, there were really profound and dire - socio-economic impacts on the refugee populations. The majority of refugee populations in Pakistan and Iran are unskilled, daily wage labourers in the informal sector. And the informal sector was the first sector to be hit really hard. So pretty much immediately what we have seen is a tremendous loss of livelihoods in both Afghanistan and Iran, particularly given the refugee profiles of populations in both countries.[80]

Refugee self-reliance, legal status, and access to rights

As evidenced by the quote above, limited legal environments pose enduring challenges across the world. Although less discussed in relation to refugee self-reliance, issues with legal statuses and the ensuing possibilities or limitations of integration also play out with asylum-seekers and refugees who arrive in Europe through informal channels. As one legal expert on refugees in Europe explained,

When we have looked at self-reliance and durable solutions in the EU overall, we see, first, that the conditions people face when they seek protection in Europe are so damaging that their future integration and prospects for self-reliance is undermined. Their limited access to protection, access to territory, detention and otherwise inadequate protection conditions – all of those hamper the possibility of local integration in different ways. Alongside that, [legal] status is a precondition for self-reliance and local integration in the EU; it's important particularly because there is less of a black market here than in other regions, so status is a gateway to employment.[81]

Among other points, this illustrates how the importance of de facto versus de jure local integration depends heavily on context, particularly as related to fostering refugee self-reliance. Notably, in the case of the EU in contrast to many other countries, the legal architecture means that refugee self-reliance *should* be possible as part of local integration. As the same legal expert stated,

April. Available at: https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/601781-adb-brief-132-graduation-approach-philippines.pdf; ADB (2021) Graduation Approach. Webpage, available at: https://www.adb.org/what-we-do/themes/social-development/overview/graduation-approach (both accessed 5 November 2021)

77   UNHCR/UNCDF (2017) Financial Inclusion of Forcibly Displaced Persons and Host Communities: A UNHCR and UNCDF joint initiative. Available at: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR_UNCDF_FinancialInclusion_ForciblyDisplaced_HostCommunities.pdf

78   Gulf News (2019) Imran Khan allows Afghan refugees to open bank accounts in Pakistan. 25 February. Available at: https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/imran-khan-allows-afghan-refugees-to-open-bank-accounts-in-pakistan-1.62304612

79   Easton-Calabria, E. (2020) Warriors of Self-reliance: The Instrumentalization of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *33*(1), 143-166.

80   Interview, #20.

81   Interview, #2

DRC

There are so many elements of the [EU] legal framework that can have either a negative or a facilitating impact on self-reliance. For example, if you took the pillars of the CEAS [Common European Asylum Standards] as they exist, like the implementation of reception procedures, then these legal obligations would be the way to support refugee self-reliance. I am talking about the implementation of what's in the law itself, but also as interpreted by the courts in Luxembourg and Strasbourg as linked with CEAS and, indeed, national courts. While far from perfect, the legal framework has enough in it to foster self-reliance were it to be implemented properly.[82]

Another policy expert on European asylum summarised the challenge succinctly, 'What I see are the discussions, the frameworks are there, such as the right to what is in the integration packages. How to access it is the issue.'[83]

Case Study: What Self-Reliance for Rohingya in Bangladesh?

Bangladesh currently hosts over 890,000 Rohingyas,[84] with almost 9 out of 10 Rohingyas registered as refugees in congested camps. The concentration of refugees in Cox's Bazar is now amongst the densest in the world. The Government of Bangladesh is not party to the 1951 Convention, although it is a signatory to the Global Compact on Refugees. It neither grants refugees the right to work nor access to wider markets in the country. While refugees are allowed to have businesses and conduct agricultural activities within camps, these opportunities are limited. The international community is so far providing basic needs to Rohingya, including food, non-food items, shelter, and WASH.

Alongside traditional care-and-maintenance assistance, different types of self-reliance programming for refugees also exist, commonly termed 'livelihoods programmes' and 'income-generating activities'. Since 2017, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has provided livelihoods programming and support to nearly 11,000 Bangladeshis and over 6,000 refugees.

However, recent floods in Cox's Bazar illustrate the vulnerability of both refugees' and host communities' livelihoods to outside forces such as climate hazards. 'Many community members have now lost all their livelihoods and assets in the floods, including livestock, fisheries and crops,' IOM writes, 'and are in need of immediate recovery support. Over 3,000 people who received livelihoods support face thousands of dollars in losses.'[85]

The challenges of this context are further amplified by the Government of Bangladesh's drastic decision in December 2020 to begin relocating 100,000 Rohingya refugees to a remote island in the Bay of Bengal called Bhasan Char. Tens of thousands have already been relocated, despite intense concern by human rights groups and the UN. Bhasan Char is cyclone and flood-prone, and is considered uninhabitable by many local Bangladeshis. The deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch explained, 'There's concerns about health, there's concerns about medical services, there's concern about adequate amounts of food and other supplies… it's a disaster waiting to happen.'

At first, most international organisations, including the UN, refused to provide services on Bhasan Char due to a lack of safety inspections, which were denied by the Government of Bangladesh, out of a fear that service provision would legitimise a forced relocation to an unsafe location. However, in October 2021, UNHCR signed a non-public Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enable access to Bhasan Char for the UN and other humanitarian agencies. The freedom of movement of refugees to and from the island appears limited, and there are further concerns that the 'voluntary' nature of relocation is undermined. Dozens of refugees have fled or attempted to do so, with many citing a lack of income-generating activities as well as humanitarian services as reasons for doing so.[86] The MoU appears designed in part to address these challenges: the government will now allow refugees on Bhashan Char to create livelihoods activities and access skills, including vocational training, and other capacity-building activities.

But what will this mean in practice, and to which durable solution is self-reliance programming in this context actually contributing?

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82   Interview, #2
83   Interview, #3
84   UNHCR (2021) Bangladesh: Operational Update, July. Available at: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Bangladesh_Operational%20Update_July%202021.pdf
85   International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2021) Urgent support needed as thousands of Cox's Bazar community members lose livelihoods. 3 August, Press release. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/urgent-support-needed-thousands-cox-s-bazar-community-members-lose-livelihoods
86   DevEx (2021) What does the UN MoU with Bangladesh government mean for Rohingya refugees? 14 October. Available at: https://www.devex.com/news/what-does-the-un-mou-with-bangladesh-govt-mean-for-rohingya-refugees-101841

The Government of Bangladesh is clear that local integration is not an option and that voluntary repatriation is the goal. As one ministry official recently stated, 'Rohingyas want to return to their homeland, Myanmar, and all need to work constructively to that end.'[87] In humanitarian and development spheres the conversations are often similar. As one researcher explained,

With the Rohyinga five or six years ago lots of people were saying that even if local integration is not an option, at least what we need to do is prepare the next generation of Rohinyga in skills training. We have to think about what they will need in relation to returning back to Myanmar to rebuild a peaceful society.

As will be further discussed in the next section, self-reliance programming in exile is often premised (officially at least) on voluntary repatriation rather than local integration itself. However, some advocates of lifting restrictions on Rohingyas in Bangladesh point towards the win-win that a policy closer to de fact integration could bring refugees and local Bangladeshis alike. In this view, encouraging 'sustainable refugee livelihoods' could address the economic pressures faced by both refugees and hosts, thereby 'allow[ing] refugees to use resources for refugee self-reliance while linking refugees and hosts to the local economic system instead of keeping refugees confined in the camps'.[88]

One humanitarian actor with this aim is the previously mentioned Poverty Alleviation Coalition, which has now begun operating in Bangladesh and is in the targeting phase of identifying programme recipients. The project aims to help ultra-poor households – both refugees and hosts – graduate from ultra-poverty as well as achieve the '[e]nhanced self-reliance of the refugee community that ensures dignity, security, socio-economic empowerment, increased confidence level, positive behavioural change, and higher social inclusion'.[89] This is laudable – and extremely ambitious – given the constrained environment of self-reliance programming in the country. As one informant noted drily about the situation on Bhasan Char, 'Despite the premise of livelihoods projects, it is providing quite the opposite of an enabling environment for refugees.'[90]

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87   Dhaka Tribune (2021) UN signs deal with Bangladesh to help Rohingyas in Bhasan Char. 9 October. Available at: https://www.dhakatribune. com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2021/10/09/crucial-mou-on-un-s-operational-engagement-in-bhashan-char-signed

88   Khaled, A. (2021) Do No Harm in refugee humanitarian aid: the case of the Rohingya humanitarian response. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action,* 6(7): 1-13. Available at: https://jhumanitarianaction.springeropen.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s41018-021-00093-9.pdf

89   Poverty Alleviation Coalition (2021) Webpage: Bangladesh. Available at: https://alleviate-poverty.org/bangladesh (last accessed 3 October 2021)

90   Interview, #8.

Case Study: Jordan and de facto integration for Syrian refugees

In contrast to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh or Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan exemplifies a case of de facto integration, albeit with mixed results. Jordan hosts some of the highest number of Syrian refugees and has been lauded internationally for its 'long-term hospitality'. There are over 672,000 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan,[91] approximately 81% of whom live in urban areas.[92] Large refugee populations also live in the Zaatari and Azraq camps. Much small numbers of Iraqi (66,000), Yemeni (12,800), Sudanese (6,000), and other refugees also live in the country.[93] Refugees in Jordan live within a precarious legal framework, as the government is neither a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol, and does not abide by the UNHCR legal terminology of 'refugee'. However, in 1998 the Jordan Ministry of Interior (MoI) and UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to protect refugee rights. The MoU allows refugees to live outside camps and grants work permits, providing the opportunity for de facto integration. However, despite widening opportunities for Syrian refugees in Jordan, approximately 80% live below the poverty line, compared to only 14.5% of the national population.[94]

Most literature on Syrian refugees' self-reliance in Jordan focuses on economic opportunities and livelihoods, with limited literature directly reflecting on other components of self-reliance, or indeed on durable solutions. As one study states, 'Jordanians and Syrian refugees consider work the key to self-reliance, but they confront significant obstacles to accessing livelihoods'.[95] In turn, literature that does focus on areas which might be included by some within the definition of self-reliance, such as social networks or psychosocial wellbeing, rarely makes linkages to self-reliance directly. One study examining Syrians' social networks in Jordan found that they were under-utilised by many refugees, with isolation 'an active decision made to cope with lack of resources', suggesting that 'circles of kinship are shrinking under harsh financial conditions of displacement'.[96] However, this and other studies of social and psychoso-

cial wellbeing include limited discussion of either self-reliance or durable solutions, despite findings that could be beneficial to both: as 'international funding continues to divert, the humanitarian community is in dire need of new and creative strategies to maintain the quality of life for Syrians in exile–institutional engagement with social networks and social capital represents one such opportunity.[97] This missing engagement is representative of a wider lack of literature examining the social and community-level elements of refugee self-reliance, and in turn how these might relate to effective self-reliance programming both in and of itself as well as for durable solutions.

Regularising the status of informal and unregistered Syrians in Jordan

In 2018 the Jordan Ministry of Interior (MoI) and UNHCR launched a campaign aiming to regularise the status of informal and unregistered Syrian refugees in Jordan.[98] Refugees lacking proper documentation, most notably a MoI card, are unable to legally live outside of refugee camps and lack access to healthcare and until recently to education, as well. As of 2016, of the 515,000 refugees registered with UNHCR as living outside of refugee camps, 363,000 had MoI cards while 152,000 did not;[99] even today the Jordanian government asserts that there are large numbers of unregistered refugees in the country. The policy change enabled Syrians to regularize their status for free at UNHCR offices or through mobile registration, and provided documents at police stations to complete the process. This campaign has helped urban refugees gain legal rights and more access to both state and international assistance,[100] and represents a positive step towards formal integration.

In contrast to many refugees in other host countries, refugees legally registered in Jordan have access to basic social services including healthcare and education, which alleviates significant pressure on their daily life. As an Overseas Development Institute report on the lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Jordan states,

91   UNHCR (2021) Syria Regional Refugee Response - Jordan. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36
92   DSP (2020) In My Own Hands: A medium-term approach towards self-reliance and resilience of Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan. January, Research Report. P. 8. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73879.pdf
93   UNHCR (2021) Operational Update – Jordan. October. Amman: UNHCR.
94   DSP (2020) In My Own Hands: A medium-term approach towards self-reliance and resilience of Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan. January, Research Report. P. 8. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73879.pdf
95   DSP, 'In my own hands'
96   Stevens, M. (2016) The collapse of social networks among Syrian refugees in urban Jordan, Contemporary Levant, 1:1, 51-63. Available at: https://www.urban-response.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/the-collapse-of-social-networks-among-syrian-refugees-in-urban-jordan.pdf
97   Ibid.
98   UNHCR (2018) Rectification of Status: Regularising the status of informal and unregistered Syrian nationals in Jordan. Amman: UNHCR. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Amnestyleaflet_Englishcopy_FINAL-1.pdf
99   Norwegian Refugee Council (2016) Securing Status: Syrian refugees and the documentation of legal status, identity, and family relationships in Jordan. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/securing-status-syrian-refugees-and-documentation-legal-status-identity-and-family
100   The Jordan Times (2018) 'Syrian refugees will greatly benefit from regularizing situation'. March 5. Available at: http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/syrian-refugees-will-greatly-benefit-regularising-situation%E2%80%99%99

The wide-scale provision of food vouchers and cash grants in Jordan, as well as Syrians reporting good access to primary healthcare and schooling for their children, means that few refugees we spoke to had resorted to the most harmful means of generating income (child labour, survival sex) or reducing costs (cutting meals, living in poorer accommodation).[101]

Such findings speak to the value of social assistance for helping refugee avoid exploitative or harmful strategies, and the ways in which a more open policy environment for refugees can offer opportunities that pave the way for both self-reliance and durable solutions in the future.

Economic and Livelihoods Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Jordanians

A wide variety of livelihoods programming for refugees exists in Jordan, including interventions focused on decent work outcomes, vocational training, job placement and matching interventions, and support for job retention. Research on these livelihoods and employment opportunities found that informality, a lack of decent work, and vulnerabilities because of their legal status affected Syrian and other refugees, which a variety of programming attends to. It was found that more effective livelihoods programming could take place through longer timeframes for programmes, with unconditional cash and capacity building as additional components, with an emphasis that, 'There is no "one size fits all" approach to improving livelihoods and self-reliance, with further testing and research required to increase the evidence-base on what works best in Jordan's current macroeconomic and legal climate.'[102]

By far the best publicly known measure is the 2016 Jordan Compact, which represents recent innovation in fostering refugee self-reliance within a context of protracted displacement through its inclusion of the private sector. The Compact addresses two of the GCR's main objectives of easing pressure on host countries through burden- and responsibility-sharing and of enhancing refugee self-reliance through a variety of strategies such as access to public education, and economic inclusion, including access to decent work.[103] There have also been broad-based reforms to increase the level of investment in Jordan, such as trade and investment facilitation. The Compact has been complemented by the so-called 2019 London Initiative, which focuses on economic growth.

Based on an agreement between the European Union, World Bank, the Government of Jordan, and other European governments, the Compact was created to integrate Syrian refugees into the labour market through jobs creation, particularly in the garment export industry, and included the issuance of 200,000 work permits for Syrian refugees in particular sectors. Specific steps to open access for formal employment for Syrians has also been provided, including waving fees required for work permit in a range of occupations and simplifying the document procedures. However, of the approximately 160,000 work permits issued to Syrian refugees as of 2020, only about 40,000 were being actively used,[104] illustrating a disappointing gap between policy as it is laid out and as it is enacted.[105] In this way, while the Compact has been considered a model for both compliance under international human rights law[106] as well as for policy, it has also been critiqued for failing to engage in refugees' own survival strategies and the realities of Jordanian labour market issues.[107] As one informant wryly put it, 'In Jordan with the Compact they give work permits but there's no work in practice. Or refugees are not given permits because certain jobs are excluded so they can't receive a permit for them. So refugees can't get a permit or there are no jobs –that's the context in Jordan.'[108]

Increased primary school access for Syrian refugees

While the employment of Syrians is still an ongoing challenge, other aspects of integration in Jordan are more positive. The Jordanian government, supported by international agencies, achieved approximately a 87% enrollment rate of Syrian primary school-aged refugees in Jordan in 2020, which far surpas-

101   Bellamy, C. et al. (2017) The lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees: A study of refugee perspectives and their institutional environment in Turkey and Jordan. London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI). P. 31. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/58bd75394.pdf

102   DSP/DRC/IRC/NRC (2020) Improving Self-reliance and Resilience in Jordan: Lessons Learned from Livelihoods Interventions. P. 10. Available at: https://dsp-syria.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Improving%20Self-reliance%20and%20Resilience%20in%20Jordan.pdf

103   IRC (2020) A Decade in Search of Work: A review of policy commitments for Syrian refugees' livelihoods in Jordan and Lebanon. June. Available at: https://www.rescue-uk.org/sites/default/files/document/2265/adecadeinsearchofworkfinal.pdf

104   DSP (2020) In My Own Hands: A medium-term approach towards self-reliance and resilience of Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan. January, Research Report. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73879.pdf

105   Barbelet, V.; Hagen-Zanker, J., and Mansour-Ille, D. (2018) The Jordan Compact: Lessons learnt and implications for future refugee compacts. London: Overseas Development Institute. Available at: https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12058.pdf

106   Gray Meral, A. (2020). Assessing the Jordan Compact One Year On: An Opportunity or a Barrier to Better Achieving Refugees' Right to Work. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 33*(1), 42-61.

107   Lenner, K., & Turner, L. (2019). Making Refugees Work? The Politics of Integrating Syrian Refugees into the Labor Market in Jordan. *Middle East Critique, 28*(1), 65-95.

108   Interview, #5.

DRC

ses the global average of 63% primary school-age refugee children enrollment.[109] This has occurred in part due to the opening of over 200 schools offering double-shifts and international funding such as a 200 million USD World Bank project to help Jordan expand early childhood education access for Syrian refugee and Jordanian children.[110]

A notable policy shift in support of education occurred in 2017 when the Jordanian government began allowing Syrian children lacking the required documentation to enroll in government schools. Children formerly needed to have a special ID card from the Interior Ministry confirming their status as refugees, which many refugees lack. This policy shift aligns with the government's policy to promote education for all; as one state minister said, 'In line with our value system in Jordan, we do not accept that any child be left out without education.'[111] However, in part due to very low secondary school enrolment of Syrian refugee children and an essential segmentation of the school system between Syrians and Jordanians, concerns have been raised as to whether 'the current education approach meets the academic needs of Syrians or Jordanians; is sustainable in the medium-term; or promotes self-reliance and resilience across the life course'.[112]

The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing state of emergency declared in Jordan in March 2020 has significantly impacted access to work and education for refugees in the country. However, it has further paved the way for inclusive social protection policies, notably in healthcare, although access to affordable healthcare remains challenging for many. The Government of Jordan included refugees in the COVID-19 response, with refugees having access to COVID-19 healthcare just as Jordanians do, and vulnerable refugees also planned to be included in early COVID-19 vaccinations.[113]

Overall, Jordan's refugee response, which has included significant support from donor governments and other outside actors, has led to important foundations for refugee self-reliance, while the overall context remains one of limited availability to durable solutions. The opening of work permits, access to national systems, and increased primary school access all represent important components of integration. The regularization of refugee status has positive implications for refugees, who are generally in precarious and potentially exploitive situations and lacking access to assistance and other basic services without it. While still in need of expansion and reform, these policies open the door to self-reliance, sustainable de facto integration, and hopefully the option of a durable solution in the future.

109   Human Rights Watch (2020) "I Want to Continue to Study': Barriers to Secondary Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Jordan. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/06/26/i-want-continue-study/barriers-secondary-education-syrian-refugee-children-jordan

110   Theirworld (2017) 700,000 Jordanian and Syrian refugee children to benefit from education funding boost. December 6. Available at: https://theirworld.org/news/jordan-syrian-refugee-children-early-education-funding-boost-world-bank

111   The Jordan Times (2017) Jordan allows Syrian children with no documents to join schools. September 24. Available at: http://jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-allows-syrian-children-no-documents-join-schools-%E2%80%94-officials

112   DSP (2020) In My Own Hands: A medium-term approach towards self-reliance and resilience of Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan. January, Research Report. P. 8. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73879.pdf

113   UNHCR (2021) UNHCR Jordan 2020 Year in Review: Supporting refugees in Jordan: what we achieved in 2020. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/unhcr-jordan-2020-year-review-supporting-refugees-jordan-what-we-achieved-2020

Refugee Self-Reliance and Voluntary Repatriation

Voluntary repatriation is considered by many to be the preferred solution to displacement. Indeed, much of the rhetoric on the value of providing refugees with skills, education, and financial products and services in displacement centres on the perception that this will make them more able and likely to return home and contribute to their countries of origin. As one stakeholder explained,

When there is a discussion on the link between self-reliance and return it is often with the thinking: if local integration is not feasible, then we need to think about how we use displacement time to have the right education and skills training to allow recovery when people return back to their countries affected by crisis. In Syria there were a lot of conversations around the fact that Syria is going to need a whole load of specific skills for specific physical rebuilding, like structural engineering. This fed into the conversations on economic-based self-reliance.[114]

In these conversations, refugee self-reliance programming is perceived to support reintegration after voluntary repatriation. Interestingly, there is no large-scale cohesive body of evidence that illustrates this assumed causation. Given the average length of exile, among other challenges, this in many ways make sense: proving the effectiveness of specific self-reliance programming for repatriation would require a long-term study of refugees both in exile as they gained skills and/or assets and then upon voluntary repatriation, in order to understand how these skills were put to use for reintegration. A former UNHCR staff member even conceded that a stance adopted by UNHCR in the 1990s, that achieving refugee self-reliance in exile was a way to contribute to reintegration and post-conflict recovery, was more of a policy than an evidence-based position. 'We tried to counter ideas of encampment, particularly in countries like Kenya where the whole idea was that if you keep refugees at minimal levels of survival, they're more likely to go back home at first possibility. Quite opposite, I said.'[115]

That said, despite a lack of widespread studies illustrating this, evidence on the potential importance (rather than necessarily the effectiveness) of refugee self-reliance programming can be found through examining the choices and outcomes of refugees in situations of refugee cessation as well as voluntary repatriation. Some research has found, for example, that refugees who have been able to gain livelihoods and assets in exile may be more likely to return home in the first place and have an easier integration process.[116] The former member of UNHCR also explained that part of UNHCR's stance came from 'evidence that Somalis were going back to Somalia but then coming back to Kenya because they couldn't make it. We realised they were more likely to stay back home if they had skills and capacities than those who go back under precarious circumstances without any skills.'[117]

Literature not just on voluntary return but on peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery and reconciliation also backs up perceptions that refugees with skills and assets, potentially acquired through formal self-reliance programming, will have more to offer their country upon repatriation. This ranges from refugees shaping justice and reconciliation processes which can contribute to conflict resolution[118] to facilitating political processes[119] and contributing to local and national economies.[120] Some research identifies how different types of refugee assistance provided in host countries can contribute to peacebuilding processes:

[A] wide range of training opportunities can be extended to refugees in prolonged exile that would eventually contribute to ensuring a durable solution to their plight, either through repatriation, local integration, or resettlement in a third country. Opportunities such as language training, vocational training, professional development, peace

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114   Interview, #13.

115   Interview, #8.

116   Omata, N. (2013) The complexity of refugees' return decision-making in a protracted exile: Beyond the home-coming model and durable solutions. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *39*(8), 1281-1297. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1369183X.2013.778149

117   Interview, #8.

118   Purkey, A. (2019) "Transformative Justice and legal conscientization." In: Bradley, M. et al. (eds) (2019) *Refugees' roles in resolving displacement and building peace: Beyond beneficiaries*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

119   Grace, J., & Mooney, E. D. (2009) Peacebuilding through the electoral participation of displaced populations. *Refugee survey quarterly*, *28*(1), 95-121.

120   Hammar, A. (Ed.). (2014) *Displacement economies in Africa: Paradoxes of crisis and creativity*. Zed Books Ltd. Available at: http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:714748/FULLTEXT01.pdf

education, and other activities could all form part of a broader solutions-oriented approach, and contribute to both peacebuilding and the self-reliance of refugees.[121]

One can also understand the value of returning to countries – almost always post-conflict, often lacking strong governance and economies – with as many tangible and intangible assets as possible. Returnees often face challenges including destroyed infrastructure, weak or non-existent social services, community tensions, chronic poverty, and fractured social networks.[122] Recent focus groups in Afghanistan and Somalia identified that returnees who had financial, human, and social capital, largely gained during their time in exile, generally had a better quality of life upon repatriation.[123] However, particular populations such as elderly people may have a harder time with reintegration due not only to limited livelihoods opportunities but to social stigma, as illustrated by one very contextual example of accusations of witchcraft targeting elderly refugee and migrant returnees in Malawi.[124] Growing recognition of the significant needs of many returnees led UNHCR to expand its focus to include them in the 1990s as a part of its broader mandate expansion; as one informant explained, 'Before then one of UNHCR's deputy high commissioners used to say that our approach to repatriation was "a cooking pot and a handshake."'[125]

Repatriation and reintegration packages may also include livelihoods programming aiming to foster returnee self-reliance. In its 2008 Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy on the return and reintegration of displaced populations, UNHCR states that it 'aims to offer 'timely, targeted, time-limited, predictable and clearly defined support to the reintegration process' including 'providing basic inputs to open up initial livelihoods opportunities'. It acknowledges that, 'The impact of devastation and neglect on such areas is usually so great that returnees find it very difficult to establish new livelihoods, access basic services and benefit from the rule of law.' In part to address this, UNHCR prioritizes activities that support returnees' livelihoods strategies; this includes supporting agricultural production, income-generating activities, micro-credit schemes, and livelihoods trainings.[126]

One scholar on repatriation noted that much of the discussion on self-reliance and voluntary repatriation takes place in literature and practice targeting sustainable development, with a focus on how humanitarian and development practitioners can help returnees sustain short- to medium-term economic engagement to support reintegration.[127] She explained,

I haven't seen the term 'self-reliance' used in any way in relation to the durable solution of voluntary repatriation in part because that's not the purpose of the term – the purpose of the term is to tell host countries that they don't need to be responsible in a welfare state capacity for people that aren't their citizens. But in the case of repatriation, it's assumed that if you're a citizen of a state you can be responsible for yourself, with a little bit of development help. So there's no longer a question of citizens being self-reliant. However, I think that's a mistake. It ignores broader structures – so much of the development focus for returnees is building a house but that doesn't take into account broader community, social, and political dynamics. For example, where is that house? Whose land is it on? Who is in the community surrounding the returnee?[128]

In this vein, the short-term livelihoods projects provided to some returnees as part of a broader strategic sustainable development plan is simply a means to integrate people into an economy – without understanding or acknowledgement of the broader factors that enable people to become self-reliant. Critiques of this approach are nearly identical to many surrounding refugee self-reliance programming within host countries, where providing a skillset does nothing to alleviate other significant challenges such as legal barriers to work, lack of capital, or host community xenophobia. As the repatriation scholar stated, 'In terms of obstacles to livelihoods and self-reliance on either side of a border, I think that after repatriation there are

121   Milner, J. (2009) Refugees and the regional dynamics of peacebuilding. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *28*(1), 13-30. P. 27.
122   Omata, N. (2013) Repatriation and integration of Liberian refugees from Ghana: The importance of personal networks in the country of origin. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *26*(2), 265-282.
123   DRC/IRC/NRC/ReDSS/DSP/ADSP/Samuel Hall. (year?) Unprepared for (re)integration: Lessons learned from Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syrian on Refugee Returns to Urban Areas. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cfe2c8927234e0001688343/t/5e33cebfe051ef5d-56719e6d/1580453652247/Reintegration+Full+Report.pdf
124   Nyirongo, M. (2020) Against the Norm: Religion, Witchcraft, and the Re-Integration of Elderly and "Socially Dissident" Returnees, Mzuzu, Malawi. Case Study, Refugees in Towns. Feinstein Centre, Tufts University. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599720dc-59cc68c3683049bc/t/5fbdc2c19d793648404e1473/1606271682744/RIT+Report+2020+Mzuzu+Malawi.pdf
125   Interview #8.
126   UNHCR (2008) Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy: UNHCR's Role in Support of the Return and Reintegration of Displaced Populations. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/partners/guides/4c2203309/policy-framework-implementation-strate-gy-unhcrs-role-support-return-reintegration.html
127   Interview, #12
128   Interview, #12

DRC

the same obstacles to local integration – just under a different name. Does the government want to allow work permits, allow medical care, and so on?'[129]

Foto: Azraq refugee camp, Jordan 2019, Mais Selman/DRC

129   Interview, #12

Refugee Self-Reliance and Resettlement

Refugee resettlement – the selection and transfer of refugees to a third state and the provision of permanent residence status, rights, and eventually citizenship – is perhaps the most sought-after and least-offered durable solution. It is well-known that worldwide less than 1 per cent of refugees are resettled each year,[130] a statistic that helps explain why expanding access to third country solutions is one of the GCR's four objectives. Around 28 countries offer resettlement, with the United States (US), Canada, and Australia historically providing the most places; however, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, refugee resettlement in 2020 hit a 'record low' with only 22,770 resettled globally.[131] In fact, resettlement rates have been shrinking globally since the 1980s, with already low quotas further reduced, thereby placing more urgency on 'finding' other durable solutions for refugees as the number of refugees globally continues to steadily increase.

Refugee resettlement programmes differ by country, with a combination of NGO and state support to enable the integration of newly arrived refugees. Thus, after resettlement quickly comes discussions on how refugees can become integrated into their new society as quickly as possible. As one researcher with decades of experience in refugee livelihoods and self-reliance explained, 'Resettlement and integration really go together to make a durable solution…there is a lot of research out there on resettlement which is actually referring to integration, although scholars don't call it local integration. In this sense, the three durable solutions are artificially separated.'[132] That said, self-reliance programming intersects with resettlement at both the selection and integration stage.

Multiple countries, including significant resettlement countries like the US, Canada, Australia, as well as Germany and Norway, use additional eligibility criteria for refugees in addition to UNHCR's vulnerability and eligibility criteria.[133] One of the most common is that of 'integration potential', which is generally determined by education levels and occupational training, work experience, language skills, religious affiliation, and even age. Summarised in one report as 'an evident commitment to integration and self-sufficiency', this criteria often includes either an implicit or explicit focus on self-reliance. However, this appro-

ach comes with risks generally borne out by those refugees that may not fit this additional criteria but are in no less (and perhaps even greater) need of protection. UNHCR's stance on this is clear:

UNHCR urges resettlement States not to use integration potential and other discriminatory selection criteria (e.g. family size, age, health status, ethnicity and religion). Such discrimination undermines the protection and needs-based approach to resettlement, creating inequalities and protection gaps, and limits access to resettlement by some refugees most at risk.[134]

Regardless of how refugees are selected for resettlement, in some countries many integration programmes explicitly aim to place refugees into employment, thus targeting the economic side of refugee self-reliance. However, others such as the United Kingdom initially target social connections as a means to integration.[135] A formal integration process can take years, particularly when learning the host country language is a pre-requisite to employment, such as in countries like Germany, and likely a significant component of social integration, as well.
The United States, like Japan, focus on economic self-sufficiency through employment. However, the US is known for its exceptionally short timeframe of assistance, with refugees provided support for 90 days and expected to have found a job within that time. In this context, integration largely means labour market integration, as little emphasis is placed on helping refugees learn English, gain advanced education or skills, or form new social networks. The focus on helping refugees quickly enter work is also enshrined in the US 1980 Refugee Act, which aims to:

make available sufficient resources for employment training and placement in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees *as quickly as possible*[136] [emphasis added]

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130   UNHCR (2021) Resettlement. Webpage, Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/resettlement.html (Accessed 20 November 2021)

131   UNHCR (2021) With refugee resettlement at a record low in 2020, UNHCR calls on States to offer places and save lives. 25 January. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/press/2021/1/600e79ea4/refugee-resettlement-record-low-2020-unhcr-calls-states-offer-places-save.html

132   Interview, #14

133   UNHCR (2013) Frequently Asked Questions About Resettlement. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/524c31666.pdf

134   ibid.

135   Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Kabe, K., Hashimoto, N., Hassan, S., & Reyes, M. (2021) Economic self-reliance or social relations? What works in refugee integration? Learning from resettlement programmes in Japan and the UK. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9(1), 1-19.

136   US Congress (1980) 1980 Refugee Act. Available at: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-94/pdf/STATUTE-94-Pg102.pdf

Yet there are doubts and criticism as to both the feasibility and the longer-term outcomes of refugees gaining 'economic self-sufficiency' so quickly.[137] Some also question the ability of actors within the US resettlement model itself, questioning whether self-sufficiency is a realistic outcome for US voluntary resettlement agencies themselves to strive to provide. '[G]iven the constraints under which such organizations operate,' one study asks, 'is it possible for resettlement assistance provided through underfunded and under-resourced faith-based organizations that must rely heavily on the work of volunteers to ensure the self-sufficiency of their clients?'[138]

While one study found that the goal of placing refugees into employment early in resettlement is largely achieved in the US, refugees' incomes remain low overall – in 2009, for example, it was found that even after 20 years in the US, refugees' household income remained below the average of an American born in the US.[139] It was noted that the budgets of US refugee resettlement programs are generally limited and most focused on helping new arrivals; programmes also vary by US federal state, meaning that the type and length of support a refugee receives upon arrival varies based on where they are resettled. However, long-term data on the outcomes of refugees in the US is sobering. One recent report found that Indo-Chinese refugees, who constitute the largest resettled refugee population in the country beginning in the 1970s, still struggle with significant rates of poverty – 45 years after resettlement.[140]

Interestingly, refugee resettlement data in other countries with stronger welfare systems than the US, such as Germany, also point out significant barriers to self-reliance. In 2015-2016 Germany accepted the highest number of asylum seekers of any EU country, providing those granted refugee status with a comprehensive integration package, with the expectation that they will learn German and eventually apply for jobs. However, in 2018 hardly more than 100,000 refugees were in full- or part-time employment.[141] In contrast to many refugee-hosting countries in the Global South, which lack a strong formal labour market, it is not the availability *of* but the access *to* work which poses a problem. As one Syrian refugee in Germany explained,

The main problem facing refugees is the job. This is a very hard situation because many refugees want to find a proper job. You can't be an engineer and work as a security man. A lot of teachers – of English, Arabic, geography – are trying to find any job, even as a driver or cook but they can't find it. I think the standards of labour is so high. The government should make it easier for people to get new jobs.[142]

But self-reliance, of course, isn't (or shouldn't be) simply about labour market integration. In her 2020 State of the Union Address, European Commission President von der Leyen stated, 'We will make sure that people who have the right to stay are integrated and made to feel welcome. They have a future to build – and skills, energy and talent.' The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, for example, focuses on a variety of areas related to integration, of which access to employment is only one. Member States are encouraged to provide independent housing and ensure equal access to healthcare, including mental health services, for refugees and asylum-seekers, while the Commission will work towards improving the recognition of qualifications for refugees through the Erasmus Programme. At the same time, many discussions of refugee integration, particularly relating to self-reliance (often discussed as 'labour market integration' or 'employment' in resettlement contexts), provide cost/benefit analyses of refugees that have little to do with their own experiences of integration or, indeed, the value they bring as human beings to new countries. In this sense, resettlement as a durable solution is presented in terms of how receiving countries can benefit from refugee – rather than focused on the protection or rights of refugees themselves.

The opportunities and risks of labour mobility as a complementary pathway

The rhetoric of receiving country benefits is prevalent in discussions of complementary pathways to resettlement. Formally discussed in the GCR in the 'Solutions' section (3) as 'Complementary pathways for admission to third countries' (para 94-96), these include both educational and labour mobility

137   Frazier, E., & van Riemsdijk, M. (2021). When 'self-sufficiency' is not sufficient: Refugee integration discourses of US resettlement actors and the offer of refuge. *Journal of Refugee Studies*.; Shaw, S. A., Funk, M., Garlock, E. S., & Arok, A. (2021). Understanding successful refugee resettlement in the US. *Journal of Refugee Studies*.; Chen, X., & Hulsbrink, E. B. (2019). Barriers to Achieving "Economic Self-Sufficiency": The Structural Vulnerability Experienced by Refugee Families in Denver, Colorado. *Human Organization*, *78*(3), 218-229.

138   Tyeklar, N. (2015) The US Refugee Resettlement Process: A Path to Self-Sufficiency or Marginalization? Chapter 9. In *Refugee Resettlement in the United States* (pp. 171-152). Multilingual Matters.

139   MPI (Migration Policy Institute) (2015) The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges. Available at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/UsRefugeeOutcomes-FINALWEB.pdf

140   SEARAC (2020) Southeast Asian American Journeys: A national snapshot of our communities. https://www.searac.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SEARAC_NationalSnapshot_PrinterFriendly.pdf

141   Ekren, E. (2018) Obstacles to refugees' self-reliance in Germany. June, Forced Migration Review, Issue 58. Available at: https://www.fmreview.org/economies/ekren#_ednref2

142   Interview, #15

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opportunities as well as community sponsorship programmes. A recent report details how between 2010 and 2019 over 1.5 million people from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, and Venezuela were granted admissions through family, work, and study visas.[143] While these admissions occurred through different legal channels, several traditional resettlement countries – Canada, Australia, and the UK – have explicit labour mobility schemes for refugees. Canada, for example, is known for both its Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot as well as a Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.[144] There are both champions and critics of the concept of complementary pathways, with strong agreement that these pathways must not come at the expense of pathways for refugees in most need of protection. As one researcher on humanitarianism explained,

One argument for third-country resettlement is that it should technically favour those that need to rely on effective social protection systems – those that are older, or live with disabilities. They should go to countries like Canada that have systems that offer safety nets. This thinking is not just an economic-based self-reliance but more of a safety-net based approach. But so many of the approaches to resettlement today are about contributing to a new country. There's all this publicity - even the Pfizer vaccine was made by a refugee [sic] – great, we should highlight that. But we should also highlight how an older couple with grandchildren should also be granted refugee status.[145]

The risk, some see, with complementary pathways is that it offers an – albeit often temporary – solution to those who may already be better-off than other refugees. This does not make them more or less deserving of protection or opportunities, but may perhaps increase the likelihood that states increase pathways for 'more promising' refugees rather than for those most in need.

Yet to what extent can complementary pathways such as labour mobility foster refugee self-reliance? While more data is needed, some point towards disappointing figures of employment among refugees resettled to third countries via normal resettlement pathways as indicators of potential challenge. As the founder of one UK charity that seeks to place refugees into employment stated:

There is a continuous pool of unemployed refugee professionals in the UK, so the idea of enabling refugee professionals from camps to access visas to come to the UK is misinformed. So the question is what drives that business model, and how are they magically going to be hired? Organisations and strategies come and go, but what about other people left behind? We see today that Britain is cherry-picking safety, valuing certain skills over the right to protection.

At the same time, for others, complementary pathways offer refugees the rights and opportunities they have always deserved yet are still seldom provided. One researcher on refugees in the Middle East described,

I've witnessed different committees [of humanitarian agencies] accepting livelihoods proposals. All hundreds of them get refugees to sew, knit, cook. Why do you need to make them like this? They focus on how to make them survive as refugees – but why can't you help them to not be a refugee anymore? Why not: have a 15-year old get a scholarship to go to the US or New Zealand and become somebody rather than grow up in a camp... All those programmes focusing on 'livelihoods', 'sustainable livelihoods' – ultimately the outcome is to make refugees' victimhood last longer and have them stay in the region. The whole world has become so international – this approach doesn't make sense!

143   UNHCR/OECD (2021) Safe Pathways for Refugees II - OECD-UNHCR Study on Third-country Solutions for Refugees: Admissions for family reunification, education, and employment purposes between 2010 and 2019. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/safe-pathways-refugees-ii-oecd-unhcr-study-third-country-solutions-refugees-admissions

144   To learn more, see: Cision (2021) Canada announces 3 new initiatives to welcome and support more refugees. 18 June. Available at: https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/canada-announces-3-new-initiatives-to-welcome-and-support-more-refugees-808038907.html; Government of Canada (2020) The Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot: Exploring labour mobility as a complementary pathway for refugees. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/economic-mobility-pathways-project-labour-mobility.html

145   Interview, #13. Note: the vaccine was developed by an immigrant, not refugee, couple.

Regardless of the different positions on complementary pathways, there is an interesting lack of mention in UNHCR and other organisational documents explicitly linking complementary pathways and self-reliance. Complementary pathways appear to be discussed mainly within the realm of solutions, while self-reliance, as previously discussed, often becomes conflated with local integration or discussed solely in economic terms. Yet the GCR's aim of increasing complementary pathways may indeed open up – albeit in limited numbers – some of the strongest opportunities for refugee self-reliance yet. Access to higher education and skilled labour are powerful foundations for economic security, decent work, and, possibly, long-term legal status, all of which can lead to 'solutions' for refugees. Linking these together as both concepts and practices is also important for expanding notions of refugee self-reliance, which, as illustrated by the quote above, can often appear confined to sub-par efforts towards local integration rather than linked to opportunities in traditional countries of resettlement.

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Key Themes Arising:
Reflecting on the Relationship Between
Refugee Self-Reliance and Durable Solutions

Out of this research arise multiple themes speaking to the relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions. The seven presented here are starting points for recommendations and next steps towards effective self-reliance programming that also contributes to helping refugees reach durable solutions. These are presented in the following section.

There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of self-reliance programming in helping refugees reach a durable solution – but that doesn't mean it isn't helping

Research for this report, including discussions with experts, could not identify any large-scale cohesive body of evidence that illustrates that refugee self-reliance programming supports refugees in reaching a durable solution, including the common assumption that this programming promotes reintegration after voluntary repatriation. As discussed in previous sections, this in many ways make sense: proving the effectiveness of specific self-reliance programming for repatriation is difficult without a long-term study of refugees both in exile as they gained skills and/or assets and then upon voluntary repatriation, to understand how these skills or assets were put to use for reintegration. However, evidence on the potential importance (rather than necessarily the effectiveness) of refugee self-reliance programming exists through evidence on the choices and outcomes of refugees in situations of refugee cessation, voluntary repatriation, and integration after resettlement. While more research in this area is needed, various studies point towards positive outcomes for refugees after resettlement, repatriation, or de facto integration that can be partially attributed to self-reliance programming. This includes having more assets, education, and social connections as well as livelihoods skills.

Multiple definitions exist of both self-reliance and durable solutions, illustrating a need to develop common understandings of both

As reviewed earlier in the paper, a variety of buzzwords exist in relation to both durable solutions and self-reliance, including 'economic inclusion', 'social inclusion', 'social cohesion', 'labour market integration' and 'resilience'. In general, although these terms may be defined by one agency, they may be used differently by others, or in fact look the same in practice. The result is a lack of clarity regarding the relationship between durable solutions and self-reliance, as well as similar and differing approaches, such as what distinguishes the fostering of livelihoods versus economic inclusion. Problematically, in many humanitarian and development documents, the concept of self-reliance simply remains undefined. There is a clear value in pursuing a common understanding behind different terminology for practitioners, policymakers, and donors alike. This is particularly beneficial when working towards cross-border programming or self-reliance programming seeking to prepare refugees for a solution, as multiple points of connection between programming may be evident through either more standardized terminology or common understandings of what different terms encompass in practice.[146]

Self-reliance is a step towards a durable solution – not a durable solution itself

Across stakeholder interviews and some (though not all) of the literature, self-reliance was clearly explained as a preparatory step towards durable solutions, rather than a solution itself. Achieving self-reliance was perceived as providing refugees with the agency to make voluntary decisions about their lives, sometimes linked to decisions about durable solutions themselves. Yet despite agreement among practitioners and other stakeholders interviewed, self-reliance programming in practice rarely targets any durable solution other than local integration. Often, even this is implicit rather than explicit due to host country restrictionism. Both the convergence of understanding and divergence in practice suggest a need to clarify aims of self-reliance programming in different contexts as well targeting different populations: is self-reliance programming meant to lead to solutions or to ensure survival? While both objectives are needed, more clarity, and indeed, transparency, around the aims and underlying objectives of programming would offer an important starting point for discussions on how to improve outcomes within often extremely constrained environments.

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146   For a deeper discussion of this, see: DRC/RefugePoint (2021) Defining Refugee Self-Reliance. Self-Reliance Evidence Brief, no 1.

Integration is a core part of *every* durable solution

A key finding of this research is that when looking at the relationship between refugee self-reliance and durable solutions, it is imperative to recognise that integration is a core part of *every* durable solution. Just as after displacement to a host country comes the prospect of local integration, after resettlement comes integration and after repatriation comes reintegration. In fact, in much of the literature on resettlement and repatriation, success is only defined at the point at which refugees are considered to be *fully* integrated or reintegrated into a country, with social, political, and economic rights realised. Recognising this linkage between solutions more clearly by practitioners could set the stage for more explicit conversations on how self-reliance fits within integration across solutions.

Similar self-reliance programming is 'packaged' for different durable solutions (with similar challenges)

Relating to the above point, it is evident that while self-reliance programming exists both in preparation for and as part of accessing every durable solution, it is often 'packaged' under different names. Self-reliance programming in support of – usually de facto – local integration is often called 'livelihoods programming', 'resilience programming', or 'income-generating activities'. Self-reliance programming after resettlement is most commonly known as 'economic self-sufficiency', 'integration assistance' or support as part of an 'integration package'. This programming after repatriation might in turn be part of 'reintegration assistance' or come in the form of 'peacebuilding' and/or 'post-conflict recovery' activities.

Regardless of aim, skills training is a core component of all types of this self-reliance programming, with possible additions of grants or micro-finance funds for refugees or returnees to use as start-up capital for a business. And, regardless of context, many challenges endure. As one interview informant speaking about self-reliance after repatriation explained,

Challenges comes in the form of language laws, [lack of] recognition of educational certifications, limited access to land and property, and also many other ones that are contextual. The big picture for folks on the policy side is that none of these are about livelihoods projects. They're about structures and politics, that interplay between local- and national- level politics.[147]

Literature and interview informants also speak of the challenges of employment certification or recertification, a lack of job opportunities, societal tensions, and often, ongoing situations of poverty. While some self-reliance programming may address some of these challenges, it appears clear that a broader emphasis on developing programming that addresses self-reliance as a holistic term is needed. In part, addressing the holistic nature of refugee self-reliance could come through a clearer understanding of what challenges and barriers are often *not* contextual, and instead can be planned for and addressed across solutions. Identifying best practices and challenges from refugees' experiences in relation to each of the durable solutions could enable both practitioners and policymakers to gain a stronger evidence base for programming and policy.

Mobility is key – and often unacknowledged

As one researcher explained, 'The global refugee population is not staying where they are: they don't want to, and the truth is, they *can't* stay where they are.'[148] Mobility is often considered a coping mechanism rather than a solution, but there can be a grey area surrounding it in the case of durable solutions. Is the significant but uncounted 'secondary migration' of resettled refugees in the US to places other than their original site of resettlement, for example, representative of desperation or of agency?[149] Is return migration to a host country after repatriation an indicator of a failed solution – or a livelihood strategy? While the answer of course varies, many agree that mobility is key for livelihoods, and thus is a component of self-reliance. However, it is often perceived as negative by humanitarian and development actors, as well as by states. This is a stance worthy of being reconsidered.

Greater acknowledgement of mobility both during and after exile is needed, as research and key informants point towards its reality across solutions. Through greater recognition of mobility as a practice, a way of life, and, indeed, perhaps even a solution for some, there is the opportunity to learn more about the role of mobility in refugees' live and, hopefully, design programming and policy that reflects it. As one director of an agency focused on durable solutions shared,

The only way I see how things can change is if we [humanitarians] change how we work with people, and who the people we work with are. It is challenging because the norms of international

147   Interview, #12.
148   Interview, #14
149   Ott, E. M. (2011) Get up and go: Refugee resettlement and secondary migration in the USA. Research Paper #219, UNHCR New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper Series. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/4e5f9a079.pdf

legal systems don't actually stand up in places like Gambella on the Somali border [of Ethiopia], or other places where long-term refugees move freely across borders. People are doing their own thing in ways that don't fit well within the systems we have. As long as we don't acknowledge that then I don't know what we mean by self-reliance.[150]

Which durable solution? Which self-reliance?

A key challenge brought up in many stakeholder interviews is the fact that much of the existing self-reliance programming is designed without knowledge of which durable solution refugees will reach (if any). As one NGO stakeholder put it,

If you're equipping refugees for return, how do you make sure they acquire skills that will be valued in countries of origin? It's possible, but if you're targeting all of the durable solutions [through programming] how would you decide which language to teach, or access to which education? I think sometimes the conceptual notion of these linkages can be interesting and appealing, but then they are hard to apply.[151]

In the absence of knowledge about viable durable solutions for any particular individual or even refugee group, there is a heavy bias towards orienting refugees towards the local society and markets of their current host country. This can of course be very important for refugees during exile, although many would argue very few refugees truly 'locally integrate' despite this support. However, it can also be limiting in terms of other durable solutions. Technical skills such as sewing or carpentry may not be competitive skills in countries of resettlement or return, certificates gained in exile may also not be transferrable or recognised, and so on. One stakeholder speaking of self-reliance upon repatriation to Burundi spoke of challenges created by the Government of Burundi itself, which refused to recognise educational certificates received in Tanzania, and thereby effectively created societal divisions between those who stayed and those who left and then returned. Similar examples appear around the world, with the take-away for self-reliance programming that a lack of knowledge of where people are going can impact the success and usefulness of whatever they're being trained in. At the same time, acknowledging the bias of much self-reliance programming of focusing on local integration, leads to interesting and important considerations of how programming could or should change if it instead sought to prepare refugees for other solutions.

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150   Interview, #6
151   Interview, #9.

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Recommendations and the Steps Ahead

The following recommendations are presented based on the report's key findings that:

- There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of self-reliance programming in helping refugees reach a durable solution. But that doesn't mean it isn't helping
- Multiple definitions exist of both self-reliance and durable solutions, illustrating a need to develop common understandings of both
- Self-reliance is a step towards a durable solution – not a durable solution itself
- Integration is a core part of *every* durable solution
- Similar self-reliance programming is 'packaged' for different durable solutions (with similar challenges)
- Mobility is a key foundation for self-reliance and solutions – and often goes unacknowledged
- The lack of clarity surrounding which durable solutions refugees may reach impedes self-reliance programming, leading to a bias towards (generally de facto) local integration

Recommendations for States and Donors

- Promote and uphold policy environments that provide refugees with the right to work, access to social protection, and other rights and protection in accordance with refugee law
- Facilitate and seek international cooperation that enables refugee self-reliance, which recognises the need for mobility and preparation for integration either locally, on return or in a third country
- Utilise the expertise of displacement-focussed agencies and networks, including those led by refugees themselves, in understanding the complexity of durable solutions and the steps taken to achieve them
- Utilise the expertise of displacement-focussed agencies and networks, including those led by refugees themselves, in understanding the complexity of durable solutions and the steps taken to achieve them
- Invest in self-reliance programming that has a strong durable solutions lens, including innovative pilots seeking to better prepare refugees for specific solutions once they become available
- Recognise that refugee self-reliance programming often necessitate significant investment and resources, and therefore should not be used as a justification for reducing aid to refugees or as a containment strategy
- Invest in longer-term programming to foster refugee self-reliance and achieve durable solutions, recognising that 'impact' may not be evident during one funding cycle but instead may take several years (or more)
- Donor countries should ensure policy coherence between self-reliance and integration opportunities for refugees both domestically and in foreign policies and programming
- Encourage more dialogue and coordination between donors on self-reliance programming across durable solutions, such as exploring cross-border funding and programmes to strengthen particular components of refugee self-reliance as well as vice versa. Greater coordination amongst donors opens up important opportunities for investment across the timescale of both self-reliance and durable solutions, and could offer the chance for more tailored interventions based on displaced people's capacities and plans to take place, particularly if programming is not confined to one location or solution.

Recommendations for UNHCR

- Continue to promote mobility as a human right as well as a valuable livelihoods strategy, and promote the mobility that may occur even after durable solutions are reached
- Engage in dialogue with donor states on the risks of using the concept of self-reliance as a political tool to reduce humanitarian assistance or 'contain' populations in host countries in the Global South
- Affirm the multiple components of self-reliance per the UNHCR 2005 Handbook for Refugee Self-reliance, and encourage self-reliance programming that moves beyond livelihoods programming
- Increase advocacy and dialogue around complementary pathways as a means of fostering refugee self-reliance – through educational opportunities as well as labour visas
- Clarify how 'self-reliance' and similar terms such as 'resilience', which appear in the GCR in different ways, are conceptualised and defined
- Request actors to consider how current GRF pledges and other investments are or could be linked to durable solutions, and include this in their pledge updates

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- Include discussions of durable solutions alongside the 'market-based solutions' and 'livelihoods solutions' discussed in the HLOM Pre-Stocktaking Event on Jobs and Livelihoods in support of the GCR objective on 'enhancing refugee self-reliance'
- Analyse the 201 Jobs and Livelihoods pledges made at the GRF in 2019 for implicit or explicit connections to durable solutions

Recommendations for Humanitarian and Development Agencies

- Clearly define the term 'self-reliance' as used in particular programming, with the understanding that it can be very context- and population-specific. However, highlighting its multi-dimensional nature rather than reducing it to income-generation is more reflective of many refugees' realities, as is acknowledging that self-reliance does not mean independence from any support systems, but likely a combination of many different ones
- Encourage self-reliance practitioners to identify how programme outcomes can support a durable solution utilising existing durable solutions analysis frameworks and tools – or be explicit in their aim to support refugees in the 'here and now' in exile as they seek to build capacities and assets in camps or in urban areas
- Similarly, durable solutions actors should increase awareness of and utilise research and tools on self-reliance as a core component of their programming, with the understanding that some terminology may be different depending on different solutions (e.g. livelihoods, economic recovery, labour market integration, etc) while tools and frameworks may still be highly applicable
- More clearly link self-reliance programming with likely durable solutions, such as identifying educational, labour, or skills gaps in countries of resettlement or repatriation. This could take the form of a dedicated training or educational period once a durable solution is certain, such as when voluntary repatriation is an option or a resettlement country has been identified. Importantly, such a focus must move beyond the aim of labour market integration to include identifying educational opportunities, social protection systems, and social networks to support refugees in other important ways
- Link livelihoods trainings with start-up capital, business licenses, and other support tailored to their local context. While many refugees will still live in countries where conditions fall far short of local integration, there is a clear need for further support for de facto integration while de jure integration continues to be advocated for
- Link indicators for self-reliance with durable solutions (and vice versa) to better measure progress towards both
- Promote the long timeframe of a durable solutions lens – and fit self-reliance within this, with the understanding that both require a medium- and long-term approach
- Strengthen dialogue with practitioners addressing different durable solutions, such as examining how self-reliance programming plays out in different contexts with a focus on identifying good practices and ongoing challenges to build better evidence for programming and to identify key areas for donor investment.

Conclusion

Many of the current challenges faced globally today – the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic recession, strained international cooperation – directly impact both refugee self-reliance and durable solutions. Indeed, many of these trends point towards both the imperative of self-reliance and the ongoing disappointing reality of limited durable solutions. At the same time, many practitioners, policymakers, and donors – and certainly refugees themselves – are striving to actualise both. As this work continues, there is value in continuing to examine how refugee self-reliance and durable solutions programming may complement and inform each other, as well as value in promoting common understandings of what effective refugee self-reliance programming means in relation to obtaining durable solutions. Above all, regardless of economic trends or donor interests, it is imperative to further develop refugee self-reliance and durable solutions programming based not on external indicators or objectives but instead on the lives, understandings, and practices of those refugees meant to reach them.

Founded in 1956, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is Denmark's largest international NGO, with a specific expertise in forced displacement. DRC is present in close to 40 countries and employs 9,000 staff globally.

DRC advocates for the rights of and solutions for displacement-affected communities, and provides assistance during all stages of displacement: In acute crisis, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place, or upon return. DRC supports displaced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies. DRC works with civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and inclusion.

Our 7,500 volunteers in Denmark make an invaluable difference in integration activities throughout the country.

DRC's code of conduct sits at the core of our organizational mission, and DRC aims at the highest ethical and professional standards. DRC has been certified as meeting the highest quality standards according to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

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