

An Afghan refugee attending a decorative woodwork class in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran.



Encouraging Self-Reliance



Refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. They may have fled home with few belongings, but they carry with them highly valuable knowledge, skills and experience.

Enabling self-reliance is essential to delivering protection and solutions. More than 50 UNHCR field operations run livelihoods projects, with the objective of assisting refugees to live their lives with greater dignity, become economic actors and contribute positively to the economy of the country of asylum, linking their productive capacity with local and global market opportunities. ●●●

Through its Global Strategy for Livelihoods (2014-18), UNHCR is transforming livelihoods programming and taking forward the vision that refugees and other people of concern should be able to earn a safe and sustainable living that allows them to meet their basic needs and fully enjoy their human rights.

REFORMING LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMING

In 2015, UNHCR issued Operational Guidelines on Minimum Criteria for Livelihoods Programming. The Minimum Criteria represent standards that all UNHCR operations should meet when planning, implementing and monitoring livelihoods programmes. They focus on: strategic and evidence-based planning and data; partnership and technical capacity; targeting of activities; access to financial services; and programme management, monitoring and evaluation. For example, the Minimum Criteria require that UNHCR operations considering microfinance activities must partner with accredited microfinance institutions.

From 2016, compliance with the Minimum Criteria will be mandatory and a prerequisite for any livelihoods programming.

In the coming year, UNHCR will provide technical support to assist operations in achieving full compliance. The reform of the Office's approach to livelihoods and improved compliance with the Minimum Criteria will ensure value for money and cost-effectiveness in efforts to increase employment, employability and income for refugees.

CONNECTING REFUGEE SKILLS WITH THE GLOBAL MARKET

The International Trade Centre and UNHCR are working together to develop international markets

for refugee-produced goods and services in agriculture, information technology and artisan value chains. This collaboration will support efforts to identify local economic sectors and engage refugees in productive and economic activities.

The Refugee Artisan Initiative

For many refugee artisans, the greatest challenge for achieving self-reliance is to gain access to markets in which they can sustainably earn a living. Many have specialized skills passed down through generations, having worked in traditional arts and crafts such as inlaid wood, hammered metal, embroidery and crochet.

If skilled refugee artisans have access to tools, machinery, workshops and markets, they can produce and sell their goods, benefitting both their families and host communities. Allowing refugee artisans access to resources and markets provides a new source of economic development, as well as the potential for the transfer of unique skills to local artisans. Like all skilled producers, artists can be the drivers of development.

The Refugee Artisan Initiative helps refugee artisans, particularly women, gain access to materials and markets. The crafts industry has grown by 15 to 20 per cent annually in Asia, Europe and the United States since 2005, and is expected to grow by more than 25 per cent worldwide by 2016. Capitalizing on this growing market, UNHCR and its development and private-sector partners are working to match skilled craftspeople with the right type of marketplace that would enable them to sell their products.

One of the main obstacles for skilled artisans in low-income countries is the lack of access to international markets and buyers. With a widening global demand for hand-made products adapted to a modern market, the Refugee

Artisan Initiative is contributing to the preservation of cultural traditions while fostering self-reliance and community economic development.

Internet-based work

“Impact sourcing” is a global movement to bring internet-based jobs to disadvantaged communities. Social enterprises target people living in marginalized or disadvantaged conditions who are capable of performing information communication technology (ICT) functions if given access to training and employment in this sector.

Client organizations that outsource ICT work to impact-sourcing companies benefit from reasonable labour costs, while supporting job creation and community development goals as part of their corporate social responsibility strategy. Impact sourcing represents a win-win opportunity, which has both a financial and a social impact, creating shared value for communities and businesses alike.

In 2016, UNHCR will work directly with impact-sourcing companies to facilitate access to client companies, connect them to refugee workers and support training or other services needed to prepare refugees for ICT jobs. UNHCR and its partners will collaborate with impact-sourcing companies already present in refugee communities and facilitate the establishment of impact-sourcing centres in camps or other settings where this type of work is feasible.

UNHCR will ensure that jobs are appropriate for the skill sets of the refugees targeted, and that they are able to advance in their work as they acquire new skills. As with all refugee work opportunities, the Office monitors conditions and remuneration levels to ensure they are in line with local and international standards.

The initiative currently focuses on countries with existing impact-sourcing markets, such as India and Kenya. In 2016, UNHCR will expand it to several more operations, including Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda.

The Agriculture and Rural Markets Initiative

The aim of the Agriculture and Rural Markets Initiative is to help refugee producers to improve the yield, quality and variety of production, as well as to increase sales, enter new markets, and build their resilience to climate-related and market shocks.

Many refugees possess valuable skills as farmers, herders or livestock producers. Where they have access to plots of land, they can often grow enough to increase their food security, thereby reducing their dependence on assistance. Access to more land would allow many refugee agriculturalists to produce enough to market their products. They would thus be able to contribute to local economic development while providing for themselves and their families.

For small-scale producers, the primary goal of the initiative is to increase food security. Even small plots can be managed to grow enough to feed a family or reduce the need for food aid.

Larger-scale farmers and herders are supported to develop businesses in addition to production. UNHCR and partners support large-scale farmers in organizing collective sales, finding new markets and learning ways to add value to their products; strengthen their business skills; and access financial services to expand their enterprises.

It is not only refugees who benefit when they are able to grow food or raise animals, participate freely in markets, or access technical support and other services; the local economy benefits as well. UNHCR and host communities and governments, NGOs,

businesses and researchers all have a role to play in making this happen. In 2016, UNHCR will develop rural and agricultural value chains in Burkina Faso, Chad, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger and Uganda.

**LINKING ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT
TO ASSISTANCE**

The Graduation Approach is a poverty-reduction model that aims to help people living in extreme poverty to build their skills and graduate from this situation. The Approach draws on the most relevant aspects of social protection, livelihoods development and financial services to deliver practical results. It was developed by the World Bank's Consultative Group to assist the Poor (CGAP) and the Ford Foundation, adapting a methodology used by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC).

Since 2013, UNHCR has implemented the Graduation Approach in Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Egypt. The Government of Costa Rica has now adopted it as part of its national poverty reduction strategy.

In the first phase of the Graduation Approach, UNHCR and partners identify potential participants from displaced populations who are most likely to achieve self-reliance through sustained support, and matches them to viable livelihood opportunities. In the second phase, participants begin receiving time-bound mentoring and assistance to support the family during the training phase. This coincides with support to save and thus build resilience and good financial management. Thirdly, participants begin the process of skills and workforce preparedness training. Finally, when participants are ready

to enter the workplace, UNHCR and partners provide seed capital or an asset transfer to launch a livelihood activity.

Graduation participants may continue to have access to educational, health and psychosocial support, depending on their needs. They may also continue to receive cash assistance. Following the mentoring and training phase (usually 6-12 months), participants are expected to be self-reliant and to no longer require cash assistance.

In 2015, the Graduation Approach has been expanded to rural sites outside of camps in Burkina Faso and Zambia, and in 2016, UNHCR plans to reach 10 countries in total. The focus will be on operations that manage food and cash assistance as these programmes provide an effective safeguard for beneficiaries not to slip back into poverty while they are building their livelihoods assets and skills. ■

**AREAS OF INTERVENTION
ANTICIPATED IN 2016**

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS TARGETED

Community empowerment and self-reliance

Self-reliance and livelihoods improved

Increase technical capacity of UNHCR operations in livelihoods programming

- Roster of livelihoods experts will be developed and managed.
- Technical support missions will be conducted to at least 10 country operations.
- One technical training session will be organized targeting UNHCR and partner staff.
- The livelihoods learning programme will be launched.
- Compliance of 100 operations with the minimum criteria for livelihoods programming will be monitored and improvement plans will be developed.

Improve strategic planning for livelihoods

- Baseline, market and end-line assessments will be conducted in 5 additional country operations.
- Country-specific livelihoods strategic plans will be developed in at least 10 additional country operations.

Support refugees to access international markets

- Quality of refugees' artisanal products will be improved in 3 additional country operations.
- Partnership with business partners and employers will be built at the global and country levels.
- Purchase orders of refugee-made artisanal products will be organized from 3 additional countries.
- Community Technology Access centres will be developed in 5 additional countries.

Achieve more employment and self-employment for poor and ultra-poor refugees in a coordinated manner

- The use of the Graduation Approach will be expanded to 5 additional countries (potentially Chad, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Niger, Sudan and Uganda).
- A new agreement with a technical support entity will be signed to conduct design and monitoring missions to country operations willing to adopt the model.
- Additional partnerships with economic development actors will be developed.

Enhance the enabling environment for refugees livelihoods

- Guidelines on refugees' access to financial services will be developed.
- Training targeting 5 microfinance institutions will be organized.
- An advocacy strategy on refugees work rights will be developed in coordination with ILO and others.

CAR refugees turn hand to other jobs to fund exile in Cameroon

This article is an adapted version of a UNHCR news story

12 August 2015

MEIGANGA, Cameroon, August 2015 | *Humming from the speakers of a nearby mosque breaks the silence of the pitch-black night. A shadow slips out of a cabin. She closes the door behind her and tucks her hands into her cotton skirt. It is 4.30 a.m. and the cold is biting.*



UNHCR/O. LABAN-MATTEI

A refugee from the CAR working in the fields near Meiganga, eastern Cameroon.

Philomène Issa, 50, begins her day. "I'm off to the fields to plant seedlings," she explains in French dotted with Sango, her native tongue.

Like many others who fled bloodshed in the Central African Republic (CAR), the former nursery school principal has had to reinvent herself since arriving in Cameroon one year ago. She lives on the edge of Meiganga, a city of 70,000 people in eastern Cameroon, but knows few people and has managed mostly on her own.

"I earn between 500 to 750 CFA francs (0.75-1.10 euros) a day," she said. She hopes to earn more to pay the rent. "I already have 2,000 francs, but I owe the landlord 3,000."

Philomène is one of over 131,000 refugees from the CAR who have sought safety in Cameroon since fighting erupted back home in December 2013. The influx has strained host communities and aid agencies alike, yet funding for humanitarian assistance has reached barely 18 per cent of the USD 145 million needed here this year. As a result, UNHCR and its partners have had to make hard choices. "The priority was to save lives," said Jose Katunda, who heads the refugee agency's office at Adamawa.

Half the CAR refugees in Cameroon are now living in camps linked to local villages, with a view to better integration. Refugees receive shelter, free health care and a monthly food allowance.

But the other half have settled in towns and villages in the Eastern and Adamawa regions. Some did so by choice, seeing it as a more dignified way of living in exile. Others, like Philomène, gravitated there because they lacked information about the camps. These out-of-camp refugees are scattered across more than 300 different locations, many of them quite remote, where international aid cannot always be made available. "With limited resources, we have had to concentrate our action on protection activities: refugee registration and documentation," Katunda said.

UNHCR now encourages the settlement of refugees in local villages rather than in camps or sites, where overcrowding can exacerbate social tensions. To

facilitate their integration and help them become self-reliant, these refugees receive small loans to allow them to start business activities—particularly those who are isolated and vulnerable, like Philomène.

UNHCR also provides assistance in the form of household goods, drinking water and food. That's good news for Philomène. Managing on her own, she has found only part-time work as a day labourer, picking and replanting zom, a local vegetable. Working is her only option for survival.

"If I cross my arms and stay home, who is going to give me enough to live?" she asks. ○