

NGO statement on the General Debate

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

With unprecedented global forced displacement, self-reliance models need to be the norm, rather than the exception, when planning assistance and response to ongoing crises.

Dwindling solutions and compounding shocks to forcibly displaced populations contribute to protracted dependency on humanitarian aid while global forced displacement is at a record high. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to disproportionately impact displaced populations through: exclusionary economic policies; set-backs in access to education; limited access to health services, and restrictions on freedom of movement. In some regions, the pandemic contributed to limiting civil society space and to reductions in funding, particularly for national and refugee-led organizations that provide essential, frontline services to refugees. Furthermore, the latest UN IPCC report highlights that the climate change magnitude on populations, including refugees, is much larger than previously acknowledged and increasingly driving displacement.

In this context, the dominant model of indefinite cycles of “emergency” humanitarian aid is increasingly obsolete and inadequate. It is time for a decisive emphasis on self-reliance approaches and objectives. This does not mean leaving refugees to manage for themselves or denying the responsibilities of duty bearers. It means actively designing equitable policies and programs enabling refugees to make voluntary and informed choices to rebuild their lives, support themselves and their families and contribute to their communities.

Planning for self-reliance should begin early in the response, with related tools incorporated into humanitarian aid delivery, including approaches targeting vulnerable populations, which allow moving beyond “care and maintenance” models towards leveraging refugees’ capacities. Moreover, enhancing self-reliance opportunities helps lay the foundation for durable solutions and to weather shocks better; as aligned with the Refugee Compact and the SDGs agenda. And, most importantly, it's what many refugees tell us they want.

Several actions can be taken now to promote self-reliance opportunities:

First, elevate champions and replicate effective practices.

Many emerging policies and strategies currently champion self-reliance opportunities. For example, the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, Poverty Alleviation Coalition, and Prospects Partnership serve as conveners and field catalysts, to shift the forced displacement response paradigm. Positive examples of budget planning, funding facility models and host country policies recognizing the multi-dimensional

aspects of refugee inclusion should also inform discussions and the development of pledges for the upcoming Global Refugee Forum and High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges.

To elevate best practices, we call on UNHCR, States, donors and civil society to:

- Track and share evidence on positive impacts of self-reliance approaches with refugee hosting countries. This should come with continued strengthening of local economic development and economic inclusion by directing adequate resources to refugee hosting areas and engaging local organizations and host communities in response design and implementation.
- Advocate for and commit to multi-year funding for programs, such as graduation approaches, that expand access to livelihoods opportunities for refugees of all profiles and backgrounds and fund wrap-around support services to address barriers to self-reliance.
- Track the impacts of self-reliance funding and policies over time, including via stocktaking based on civil society grounded experience.

Second, build a robust evidence base.

There are limited attempts at rigorous measurement of self-reliance outcomes. Success of traditional humanitarian efforts tends to be measured according to sector-specific outputs or outcomes during annual project cycles, which are not well aligned with the longer timeframes and multidimensional indicators needed to observe changes in self-reliance outcomes.

To build better evidence, we call on UNHCR, States, donors and civil society to:

- Promote a shared understanding of self-reliance as part of operationalizing the GCR, including via refugees' meaningful participation, to help set feasible targets and goals for enhancing self-reliance.
- Develop common, multi-sector indicators to chart global progress on self-reliance, diminish duplication of efforts, and inform pledging for the Global Refugee Forum. This would enhance the existing GCR indicator framework, through a more holistic perspective. Examples like the Self-Reliance Index and the Refugee Economies program at the Oxford University can inform this process.
- Prioritize funding research that systematically collects refugee perspectives on and definitions of self-reliance to inform conceptual and operational understanding of self-reliance in general. This must also contribute to better programming design – including the impacts of self-reliance approaches in the early stages of humanitarian response and localized approaches to durable solutions.

Third, involve refugees in decisions that impact them.

Resilience and development cooperation discussions now build on promising new models for refugee participation in decision making at various levels and stages of policy and program cycles – for instance, on adaptation and anticipatory action for climate displacement. Those models should be scaled and connected to self-reliance discussions. Furthermore, several organizations have developed guidelines, including for children and youth, which provide useful frameworks and starting points for discussion.

To further expand refugee participation in self-reliance policy making, we call on UNHCR and States to:

- Involve refugees, including adolescents and youth, via national refugee advisory boards, local consultation with refugee-led organizations and networks, and/or inclusion of refugee advisors in all official delegations to international refugee system meetings. Ensure participants have access to professional development opportunities – including via partnerships and funding; and extract existing learning and best practices such as the Refugee Engagement Forum in Uganda.
- Hold staff – at all levels – accountable to their responsibility to promote meaningful participation approaches, particularly in settings where refugees face barriers to engagement and where participation in humanitarian and development response is limited and, promote policies facilitating these efforts.
- Capitalize on the development of hybrid meetings during the pandemic to promote new opportunities for remote engagement in global and regional meetings, especially recognizing the challenges for refugees to travel to sites like Geneva, such as cost, visa and safety concerns.

NGOs stand ready to support these efforts and UNHCR's attention to this issue.

A detailed version of this statement is available at icvanetwork.org

Thank you.