

# Encouraging Self-Reliance

A photograph of a hairdresser in a refugee camp. The hairdresser, a man with a beard and a light-colored shirt, is focused on styling the hair of a customer. The customer is seated and wearing a light blue protective cape. The background is a wall covered in numerous small, colorful posters and advertisements, including one for 'Klassic' and another for 'MEGA HAIR'. The scene is brightly lit, and the overall atmosphere is one of a busy, self-sustaining business.

Youssef, a Central African refugee, has set up a hairdressing business in Amboko refugee camp, Chad.



**M**any refugees do not have access to safe and legal employment. And yet, whether in protracted or emergency situations, self-reliant refugees are better able to take care of themselves and their families. Support for livelihoods was an essential element of UNHCR's protection strategy in 2014, with a view to reducing the risk of economic and sexual exploitation or exposure to child labour for people of concern.

The organization's livelihood programmes are designed to match refugees' interests and capacities to local market opportunities. Livelihood programmes should involve refugee and host communities, in order to provide an enabling environment for refugees to contribute to the local economic development in the country of asylum. ●●●

## UNHCR'S GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR LIVELIHOODS

**U**NHCR launched a five-year Global Strategy for Livelihoods (Livelihoods Strategy) in 2014. The Livelihoods Strategy

aims to ensure that refugees and other people of concern to UNHCR are able to make a safe and sustainable living that meets their basic needs, contributes to their dignity and provides for the full enjoyment of human rights. The Livelihoods Strategy has been key to prioritizing self-reliance in UNHCR's protection work and in the search for durable solutions. Fifteen UNHCR country operations had begun implementation of the Livelihoods Strategy in late 2014, adopting context-specific, multi-year plans using market-based approaches that seek to have a sustainable impact. UNHCR has also assisted its operations to access the necessary technical expertise to develop quality, multi-year self-reliance strategies.

In 2014, UNHCR also developed new Operational Guidelines on the Minimum Criteria for Livelihoods Programming (Operational

Guidelines). The Operational Guidelines set out minimum criteria that UNHCR and partners should meet when planning, implementing and monitoring livelihood programmes in accordance with the Livelihoods Strategy. The Operational Guidelines assist UNHCR operations and partners to link livelihood programming with market-based solutions, laying the foundation for sustainable self-reliance for refugees. The Operational Guidelines also include information on available support for livelihood programming, such as global framework agreements that allow operations to access expertise in data collection, economic surveys, and business development services.

In 2014, UNHCR signed an agreement with a partner to conduct a socio-economic assessment of residents in Dollo Ado refugee camp, Ethiopia. This assessment will provide UNHCR with quality data, and will also support the systematization of data-collection methods that will be useful for operations globally as UNHCR prioritizes data-driven approaches to livelihood programming.

### ● *The Global Strategy for Livelihoods has four key objectives:*

- 1) Promote the right to work and the right to development;
- 2) Enable people to preserve and protect their productive assets as well as meet their immediate consumption needs;
- 3) Develop and expand proven and innovative ways of supporting refugees' economic self-reliance;
- 4) Improve planning, learning and practice on successful approaches to livelihoods.

## THE GRADUATION APPROACH

UNHCR continued exploring the use of the Graduation Approach in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods for refugees and other people of concern. This methodology seeks to “graduate” people out of extreme poverty through a carefully sequenced combination of social protection measures to promote livelihoods and microfinance. The Graduation Approach was created by the World Bank’s Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) and the Ford Foundation, based on a successful programme by the BRAC Development Institute in Bangladesh. It has been tested by 10 different organizations in eight countries, with several impact assessments indicating that the model is effective.

The goal of the Graduation Approach is to move households out of unemployment and poverty over a period of 18 to 36 months. Case management for participants may

involve provision of cash allowances for basic needs, transferring productive cash assets, building savings to support resilience, training in skills and business development, as well as coaching and mentorship.

In 2014, UNHCR piloted the Graduation Approach in urban areas in Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Egypt. In Costa Rica and Ecuador, some 250 and 500 participants, respectively, participated in the programme during the first phase. Building on this success, UNHCR will trial the Graduation Approach in three rural contexts in 2015. UNHCR will also continue to explore new opportunities to integrate the Graduation Approach into its operations globally – both in urban and camp settings, as well as in protracted and crisis situations. The data collection for a baseline assessment has kicked off in Costa Rica, Ecuador and Egypt and an end-line impact assessment will be conducted in 2015 and 2016.

## ● *The Graduation Approach in Egypt*

In 2014, the programme involved approximately 4,000 participants in Egypt, including Syrian refugees in emergency situations, refugees from Africa in protracted displacement, as well as some Iraqi refugees and Egyptians from host communities. During participant selection, priority was given to young people and women.

In a context of reduced cash assistance for refugees due to limited humanitarian funding, the programme sought to enhance food security and self-reliance by providing employment and self-employment services. In 2014, more than 500 individuals entered employment and at least 360 others started a business as a result of the programme. The Graduation Approach has also proven useful to UNHCR in refining the targeting strategy for cash-based interventions in Egypt.

### NEW PARTNERSHIPS

UNHCR has pursued innovative partnerships to improve the planning and implementation of livelihood programmes in 2014. Many of the organization's country operations work with traditional relief or humanitarian partners that do not have experience in market-based livelihood programming. The Operational Guidelines require UNHCR operations to assess the capacity of current livelihood partners to ensure that they have expertise in economic development and can demonstrate impact through employment and income generation for refugees.

The Operational Guidelines also require UNHCR operations to undertake an institutional mapping exercise before livelihood strategies are developed in order to identify new potential partners, especially from the development community and private sector. Partners should include for-profit enterprises that could provide employment opportunities for refugees, without UNHCR necessarily providing any funding.

Refugees themselves are also exploring innovative ways to be more self-reliant. In Egypt, for example, Syrian women skilled in crochet have started adapting their traditional skills to meet global market demands by creating new product designs for an Egyptian-Dutch company, Zenza, which exports across Europe. Zenza specializes in metal lamps and has

been providing refugees with copper wire in order to produce crochet lamps. UNHCR is monitoring this initiative, as Zenza begins working with refugee women.

UNHCR formed a Livelihoods Advisory Board in 2014 to support implementation of the Livelihoods Strategy and broaden UNHCR's access to external expertise. UNHCR convened the first meeting in July 2014, gathering senior experts from entities with significant experience in economic development, including the ILO, the International Trade Centre (ITC), BRAC University, the CGAP, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the SEEP Network and the University of Illinois.

UNHCR also continues to draw on development expertise within the UN family, forming links with the ILO and ITC on employment generation and with FAO on agricultural development. In January 2015, the High Commissioner signed a global memorandum of understanding with ITC, in order to facilitate collaboration between the agencies and the inclusion of refugees in ITC's work.

UNHCR and WFP are seeking to reduce dependence on food assistance and increase refugee self-reliance through pilot projects in Chad and Uganda. These efforts follow up on the recommendations from a WFP-UNHCR joint evaluation on food assistance and durable solutions, and will contribute to the development of a



joint corporate strategy during 2015.

In Chad, UNHCR and WFP are testing ways to identify appropriate beneficiaries for food assistance according to income category. Targeting has been based on a survey of the entire refugee population, with priority given to the most vulnerable, rather than uniformly cutting rations for all refugees regardless of socio-economic status. In Uganda, the UNHCR-WFP joint programme emphasizes both livelihoods and resilience in economic zones around refugee settlements.

UNHCR also continues to prioritize partnerships with independent research institutions. The Humanitarian Innovation Project (HIP), based at the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford, conducted an economic study of refugees in Uganda in 2014. The research revealed that refugee livelihoods are part of trade networks, inside refugee settlements as well as nationally and globally. Refugees engage dynamically in the Ugandan economy by providing human capital, creating employment for Ugandans as well as other refugees, and buying goods and services for their businesses. The research also highlighted the importance of communications technology for livelihoods. In Uganda, a large number of refugees use mobile phones to

communicate with customers and suppliers, particularly in urban areas.

In 2015, UNHCR will commission new research on the economic impact of refugees on host communities. There is growing recognition of the importance of this kind of data, including from donors and the World Bank. It is also recognized that displacement is a development issue and that it is important to understand its economic dynamics.

The Solutions Alliance (see also chapter on *Progressing towards Solutions*) continued to explore new approaches to forced displacement. A Research, Data, and Performance Management Working Group was formed in 2014, and is chaired by UNHCR and the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford. Group members include UNDP, the World Bank, Canada, the Feinstein Centre at Tufts University, the Joint IDP Profiling Service, RefugePoint, and Stanford University. The working group's main objectives include pooling existing research and data into a consolidated online platform, identifying gaps in research and data, building consensus on methodology and performance management of solutions in the refugee context, and offering guidance for specific country situations.

## **PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE OF CONCERN WITH OWN BUSINESS/ARE SELF-EMPLOYED FOR MORE THAN 12 MONTHS**

In **West Africa** UNHCR made significant progress in strengthening the ability of people of concern to open, maintain, or expand their own businesses. It was reported that 52% of people of concern have their own business or are self-employed. Good progress was also made by refugees in the Gambia: the Office's investments in livelihoods there resulted in a 25 percentage point increase in the GSP indicator for people of concern from Senegal, and a 15 percentage point increase for other people of concern in urban areas.

A workshop organized in Dakar in November 2014 enabled 32 participants from eight countries across the region to learn, review and improve the microfinance initiatives that UNHCR promotes in the region.

The coordination and development of comprehensive durable solutions strategies for refugees in protracted displacement situations in the region have also been an area of focus, facilitated by UNHCR's efforts to embed livelihood/self-reliance activities in solutions strategies. A comprehensive solutions strategy has been implemented to support over 3,000 Togolese refugees, as well as other nationalities in protracted situations, through a residence and work permit arrangement for a period of 10 years. This process has been accompanied by investments in livelihoods to increase self-reliance.

While there was an increase in self-employment in **Chad** for Sudanese refugees in the east of the country, as well as for some refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR), the percentage of people of concern with their own business or self-employed decreased for Central African refugees overall. The percentage of people of concern who are self-employed or have their own business fell by seven percentage points, to 72%. This decline is mainly due to the emergency influx in 2014 and the response to the needs of 18,000 new CAR refugees. Some 4,500 of these new refugees opted to reside with host communities, where living conditions were already difficult, and the operation had limited capacity to respond to the growing self-reliance needs.

For both the Central African refugees in the south and the Sudanese in the east, the key limiting factor for self-employment in the main sector of agriculture is the scarcity of available fertile land. UNHCR has made extensive efforts to introduce livelihoods activities for refugees outside the camps, and has undertaken additional livelihoods analyses. The operation is a recipient of "Seeds for Solutions" funding, which has helped over 3,300 refugees in villages. In response to the increased refugee population, the operation has engaged in a new approach for targeted food assistance, within the framework of the UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme, aimed at promoting self-reliance. ●

### COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY ACCESS

UNHCR has developed a strategy to improve community technology access, which will be launched in 2015. This is a shift in focus, from simply providing infrastructure (such as computers and internet centres) to facilitating better access to existing, quality online content for refugees. Content that is context-appropriate, in terms of language as well as applicability to local markets and refugee populations, can be provided through both free and paid online learning.

In 2014, UNHCR partnered with the Fuse Foundation to develop an online platform for refugees called UNHCR Exchange. The platform allows refugees to access online learning tools and to create their own courses, including livelihood-

related content. A pilot programme used UNHCR Exchange in the Nakivale refugee camp in Uganda to train 20 refugee entrepreneurs in video production and course creation.

UNHCR has also explored new partnerships to take advantage of the growing availability and diversity of online learning. One such partnership includes Codecademy, a free online platform that provides access to instruction in computer programming. UNHCR will support the translation of Codecademy instructional materials into Arabic to make the platform more accessible for Arabic-speaking refugees. Learning to code may provide refugees in range of different displacement situations with new livelihood opportunities, both locally and globally. ■

## AREAS OF INTERVENTION

## ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2014

Apply clear quality standards for livelihood programmes worldwide

- *Minimum Criteria for Livelihoods Programming* were developed to support implementation of the Livelihoods Strategy.
- Programme reviews were conducted in 18 countries during 2014, to measure the impact of livelihood programmes and inform targeted interventions based on local needs and market opportunities.
- A global livelihoods workshop was conducted in Geneva to gather best practices, discuss livelihood programming, and introduce the *Minimum Criteria for Livelihoods Programming*.

Develop a global corporate strategy for livelihoods

- UNHCR's capacity to promote self-reliance in its protection work was enhanced through the development of the UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps and solutions-related initiatives.
- Extended Community Technology Access (CTA) programming support was given to 11 country operations to ensure increased employment and self-employment opportunities. Staff from 16 operations attended a CTA workshop in Geneva,

Establish multi-year self-reliance strategies in UNHCR operations

- Multi-year strategic plans have been developed in 15 countries to increase the sustainability and impact of livelihood programmes.

Increase access to financial services

- Regional training was conducted in West Africa to improve microfinance practices.

Increase access to wage-earning employment

- 13 country operations provided refugees with employment services and job placement.

# Cupcakes prove a winner for Syrian bakers in Armenia

*This article is an adapted version of a UNHCR news story*

18 August 2014

**YEREVAN, Armenia, August 2014 |**

*Cupcakes and social media have helped a former travel agent from the Syrian city of Aleppo to start a new career in Armenia and earn a prestigious award in the process.*



The two bakers in Yerevan with some of their cupcake creations.

UNHCR

Azniv Kouyoumjian is among the estimated 12,000 members of Syria's ethnic Armenian population who have fled to Armenia since the Syrian crisis erupted in March 2011. The 27-year-old left Aleppo in 2012 and, like many other arrivals, struggled to find work due to the difficult economic climate and the language barrier.

But things began to improve when she and a fellow refugee, Sevan Tekkelian, joined an income-generation programme for Syrians, funded by UNHCR and implemented by the Armenian Red Cross Society and a government department that encourages entrepreneurs to set up new businesses.

Their innovative proposal to bake cupcakes and advertise and sell them online was accepted and the two women

were given a small loan, equipment for baking and some training in how to run a business. "Sweetheart.am" was born.

Business was slow at first and there was some tough competition in a country where many people have a sweet tooth, but Azniv and Sevan were determined to succeed and help support their families. They added cakes and cookies to their range and started to focus on cupcake design – a novelty in Yerevan that proved to be a winner.

"In Yerevan, all traditional cakes are delicious. There are a lot of patisseries that have been running for years that you cannot compete with if you are a new business," Azniv explained, "so we needed to make something different."

"Sevan is very good at design, so she is the one who decorates our cupcakes so beautifully," the young entrepreneur said. "We had to practice a lot. We dropped or messed up the cupcakes at least 10 times at the start, but now our cupcakes are irresistible."

Designs range from cartoon characters to the flags of nations participating in the 2014 World Cup football tournament in Brazil, and even UNHCR's distinctive sheltering hands logo.

Unlike most other bakeries, they use Facebook to advertise and sell the cakes. Their friends and family also pass on the word about the tasty treats. And working from home has helped cut costs, Azniv noted: "Starting your own shop is very difficult, and the rent is too expensive."

Last March, the duo received the Prime Minister's Award in Armenia, in recognition of their successful start-up business model. Success has given Azniv more confidence and she now dreams of buying her own pastry shop.

UNHCR and other humanitarian aid organizations have been supporting the Armenian Government as it addresses the needs of the refugees from Syria.

Assistance includes cultural orientation courses, rental subsidies and financial assistance, running soup kitchens, legal and job counselling services, vocational training, provision of basic medical services and access to microcredit and business support. ○