REFUGEE SELF-RELIANCE INITIATIVE

DRC DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

REFUGE POINT

# SELF-RELIANCE EVIDENCE REVIEW

# INTRODUCTION

The Self-Reliance Evidence Review (SRER) is a knowledge-mapping and assessment of publicly available research and evidence relating to self-reliance for refugees.

This study was undertaken jointly by RefugePoint and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), both members of the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI). The SRER contributes to the RSRI Learning Agenda, which outlines core questions to be answered to create an evidence base of effective practices to improve refugee self-reliance. The SRER is also intended to identify gaps in the evidence base on self-reliance, which can inform future research priorities on this topic. The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any of these organizations.

The Self-Reliance Evidence Review and related outputs are available at:
https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/evidence-review

Authors: Solenne Delga, Simar Singh, Camille Strauss-Kahn, Rachel Furlow, and Alli Gillespie

Cover Image: Claudine, a client in RefugePoint's Urban Refugee Protection Program, sells vegetables and snacks at a market in Nairobi, Kenya. Photo by Alexis Felder.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# METHODOLOGY & BIBLIOGRAPHY

# PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the SRER are to:

- Develop a consolidated, easily-accessed mapping of existing knowledge and evidence around refugee self-reliance;
- Identify program components and approaches that help foster self-reliance for refugees, to facilitate further replication and scaling of effective practices;
- Identify outstanding gaps in evidence which could be filled by data generated by other measurement and research initiatives, including the Self-Reliance Index.

This evidence review builds on previous efforts to map and review self-reliance research undertaken by the RSRI.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The SRER research team developed an initial list of questions based on the RSRI's Learning Agenda. Table 1 outlines the six main research questions and the core sub-questions that the SRER set out to address, to build an evidence base of effective practices to improve refugee self-reliance. The aim of the SRER was to capture to what extent existing evidence contributes to answering these questions.

When undertaking the analysis, the research team reformulated several questions in order to either capture trends in the literature that were not pre-identified or because there was too little available information (in which case, they are mentioned in *Evidence Brief – Research Gaps*). Questions for which significantly less information was available than initially expected are marked with an asterix (*) in Table 1.

**Table 1: SRER Original Research Questions & Sub-questions**

| Primary questions | Sub-questions |
|---|---|
| **How is self-reliance defined and understood?** | What variances in definition exist? |
| | Categorize definitions – economic, social, political and by stakeholders |
| **What types of programs exist to support refugees achieve self-reliance?** | Categorize types of programs (program typology) |
| | Do theories of change exist for these programs? What variances exist? |
| | How is impact / are outcomes defined?<br>At what level (individual, household, community, system)? |
| | What are the program inputs and costs? |
| | What are the program timeframes? How do they vary, and why? |
| | Categorize the types of programs by the target group profiles (displacement status, duration of displacement, socio-economic profiles and AGD considerations – including people with special needs) |
| **What works best to facilitate self-reliance for refugees?** | Programs: Is there evidence or examples of program successes and failures? What type of evidence? Where are the gaps in evidence? |
| | What does an enabling environment for self-reliance look like (1)?<br>Policies: How can a refugee-inclusive policy environment be created or sustained at community, local, national and global levels? What are incentives and disincentives? Who are the key actors, institutions and stakeholders? |
| | What does an enabling environment for self-reliance look like (2)?<br>Context: What role does context (e.g. urban vs. rural, camp vs. non-camp, low vs. middle vs. high income economies / macro-economy) play in shaping an enabling environment for refugee self-reliance? |
| **How is self-reliance measured?** | Which indicators, measurement/assessment tools, and methodologies are useful in tracking progress on self-reliance? At the individual, household, community, national and global levels? |
| **What is the impact of increased self-reliance?** | What difference does self-reliance make for refugees? * |
| | What is the value for money of self-reliance programs, especially compared to other forms of refugee assistance (i.e. direct delivery of assistance in a care and maintenance model)? |
| | How does increased self-reliance (and self-reliance programming) impact host communities? |
| | How does self-reliance contribute to the three durable solutions? |
| **How does self-reliance connect with other humanitarian and development agendas?** | Climate change and environmental degradation * |
| | Localization * |
| | Protection and gender justice * |

# METHODOLOGY

The methods used to produce the SRER were adapted from the Rapid Evidence Assessment methodology. The literature review and analysis consisted of four main steps: 1) document sourcing; 2) document review and quality check; 3) resource mapping; and 4) qualitative and quantitative data analysis. In the following sections, we describe each of these steps in detail, including the objective, the methods used as well as their limitations. Each of these steps were conducted in adherence to pre-written guidelines to ensure consistency across reviewers.

*Team:* a team of 7 people were involved in the mapping and review of resources to various extents and in various capacities. A core team of 4 primary investigators ensured continuity and quality assurance throughout the process.

*Results:* over 160 resources and more than 7,500 pages were reviewed for the purpose of this study. About half of the documents reviewed were program documents, one third were research papers, and one-sixth were policy papers. About one-fifth of the documents reviewed had a global focus, two-thirds included cases in East Africa, and one-third included cases in the Middle East.

## STEP 1. DOCUMENT SOURCING

### OBJECTIVE

Conduct a structured literature search of publicly available documentation on refugee self-reliance.

### METHODS

#### Definition of keywords

As the SRER focused on publicly available documents, resources were compiled through internet searches using various strings of keywords on Google search engine.

With the understanding that some resources relevant to self-reliance may not always specifically use the term ‘self-reliance’, the search involved combinations of two series of keywords:

| First series | Second series |
|---|---|
| self-reliance<br>livelihoods<br>economic inclusion<br>social inclusion<br>financial inclusion<br>economic empowerment | refugees<br>displacement<br>internally displaced persons (IDPs)<br>host country<br>host communities |

## Criteria for inclusion

In order for a resource to be included in the dataset, it needed to meet four criteria:

1. ***presence of keywords;***
2. ***published recently;***
3. ***be evidence-based;***
4. ***be in English.***

***Presence of keywords:***
1) self-reliance must be mentioned at least once OR the resource must mention any combination of at least three other keywords from the first series above; AND 2) refugees must be mentioned at least once OR the resource must mention any combination of at least two other keywords from the second series above.

***Date:*** the resource must have been published no earlier than January 1, 2005. The sourcing of documents was undertaken between January and March 2021 and included resources published in 2021 as far as they were available and referenced by the time of the searches. (See below for a discussion of resources published later in 2021).

***Evidence-based:*** the resource must be either a primary or secondary source. This includes, but is not limited to, case studies, policy briefs, project evaluations, and impact evaluations. This excludes news articles and opinion articles that do not refer to broader expertise or research.
***Language:*** the evidence review only considered resources available in English due to process constraints.

**Observations & Limitations**

*Public resources:* As the SRER only included resources that were available in the public domain, it is not an exhaustive review of all resources and literature on the subject of refugee self-reliance. In particular, organizations engaging in self-reliance programming often have internal resources (including after-action reviews, lessons learned, program evaluations, etc.) that are not made publicly available.

*Resources found through Google Search:* Carrying out a structured keyword search online only allowed us to identify documents that were tagged and referenced with the specific keywords. As a result, the set of resources reviewed is only reflective of the comprehensive set of documents that come up in an open search on the internet, not necessarily all available public resources.

*Publications in English:* The SRER was limited to publications in English. We acknowledge that significant resources on refugee self-reliance may exist in other languages, particularly those developed by local actors. In *Evidence Brief – Research Gaps*, we discuss the bias that this may introduce in terms of examples and geographies represented for self-reliance programming.

*Timeframe of publications:* Document sourcing was carried out through March 2021. The research team is aware that several relevant resources were published afterwards, especially ahead of the High-Level Officials Meeting of December 2021. While these resources could not be

included in the initial evidence review, the aim of the 'living' library is to allow for their addition and mapping at a later point in time. Additionally, important resources relevant to this study were published prior to 2005. These were used as references wherever relevant but not included in the SRER dataset, and can be found in the "Additional References" section of the bibliography.

# STEP 2. RELEVANCE AND QUALITY REVIEW

## OBJECTIVE

Focus the review on resources that meet minimum stated criteria in terms of relevance and quality.

## METHODS

There were two criteria for the inclusion of resources in the final dataset: 1) relevance to the SRER research questions; and 2) meeting quality standards, in order to ensure the data provided is not only anecdotal and can be considered as evidence.

### Relevance assessment

To assess relevance, we considered two questions for each resource: 1) Is one or more of the primary research question(s) addressed? 2) To what degree does the resource address the primary research question?

**Table 2 – The six primary categories of research questions**

| Code | DEF | PRG | WW | MEA | IMP | OTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Question** | How is self-reliance defined and understood? | What types of programs exist to support refugees achieve self-reliance? | What works best to facilitate self-reliance for refugees? | How is self-reliance measured? | What is the impact of increased self-reliance? | How does self-reliance connect with other humanitarian & development agendas? |

The degree to which the resource was relevant to the primary research question was coded on a scale from 0 to 3, in which 0 indicates the resource did not discuss the research question, 1 indicates that the research question was only discussed in the context of other concepts, 2 indicates the research question was discussed in at least one paragraph, and 3 indicates the research question was discussed in at least several paragraphs.

The minimum relevance score for inclusion was set at 2. Therefore, any resources that had at least one paragraph discussing the primary research question were considered relevant for inclusion.

### Quality assessment

Resources that were deemed relevant to the research project were then assessed for quality. The quality criteria included: 1) **Conceptual framing** – does the source have clear research questions? (on a 0 to 3 scale); 2) **Methodological transparency** – does the source explain its research design and data collection methods (primary sources) or how resources were selected for inclusion (secondary sources)? (on a 0 to 3 scale); 3) **Validity of findings** – are the limitations of the conclusions clearly highlighted? Can the findings be generalized? (on a 0 to 2 scale). The scores for each quality criteria were considered cumulatively to determine whether the resource met the minimum threshold for quality set by the methodology.

The minimum quality score was set at 6. Resources that passed both the relevance and quality assessments were then reviewed and coded according to the primary research questions and sub-questions.

**Observations & Limitations**

Low relevance threshold: We have found ex post that there is a high heterogeneity in the dataset between resources that discuss relevant topics to self-reliance in some depth (min. relevance score = 2) and resources that are primarily focused on self-reliance (max. relevance score = 18). Conducting an analysis of the information coded in a dataset by relevance score provides additional information about the topics that are currently discussed at length in the literature and where gaps may exist. We provide insights from this analysis in *Evidence Brief – Research Gaps.*

To account for these sources of heterogeneity and provide meaningful descriptive statistical analysis, we have eventually decided to consolidate two datasets with different units of analysis: one is compiled by resource (in which a book is counted as one item) and one is compiled by section (in which each chapter of a book is counted as a separate element). Unless otherwise indicated, the findings we present in the final evidence briefs are those that are consistent across both levels of analysis.

# STEP 3. RESOURCE MAPPING

## OBJECTIVE

Analyze and identify trends regarding what information is available in the resources for each of the primary research questions.

## METHODS

### Primary variables

Each sub-question related to the primary research questions was assigned a variable for the coding process (see Table 3). While coding, reviewers also summarized the relevant content of the resource.

**Table 3 - Coding variables by research question**

| Main Code | Sub-questions | Code |
|---|---|---|
| **DEF** | Categorize definitions – economic, social, political – as well as 'other' and "multiple' | **ECO; SOC; PLT; OTH;**<br>**(MULT)** |
| **PRG** | Categorize types of programs (program typology)<br>Do theories of change exist for these programs? What variances exist?<br>How are results / outcomes defined?<br>What are the program inputs and costs?<br>What are the program timeframes? How do they vary, and why?<br>Categorize the types of programs by the target group profiles (displacement status, duration of<br>displacement, socio-economic profiles and AGD considerations) | **TYP**<br>**TOC**<br>**RES**<br>**COST**<br>**TIME**<br>**WHO**<br>**(MULT)** |
| **WW** | Is there evidence or examples of program successes and failures? What type of evidence?<br>How can a refugee-inclusive policy environment be created or sustained at community, local,<br>national and global levels? What are incentives and disincentives? Who are the key stakeholders?<br>What role does context (e.g. urban vs. rural, camp vs. non-camp, low vs. middle vs. high income<br>economies / macro-economy) play in shaping an enabling environment for refugee self-reliance? | **EVD**<br>**POL**<br>**CXT**<br>**(MULT)** |
| **MEA** | Which indicators, measurement/assessment tools, and methodologies are useful in tracking progress on self-reliance? At the individual, household, community, national and global levels? | **INDL; HHLD; COMM; NATL; INTL**<br>**(MULT)** |
| **IMP** | What difference does self-reliance make for refugees?<br>What is the value for money of self-reliance programs?<br>How does increased self-reliance (and self-reliance programming) impact host communities?<br>How does self-reliance contribute to the three durable solutions? | **DIF**<br>**VAL**<br>**HOST**<br>**DUR**<br>**(MULT)** |

| Main Code | Sub-questions | Code |
|---|---|---|
| **OTH** | Climate change and environmental degradation | **CC** |
| | Localization | **LOC** |
| | Protection and gender justice | **PRO; GEN** |

## Secondary variables

Descriptive variables were also included in the coding process. The secondary variables included:

- Date: year of publication
- Type: type of publication (policy paper, case study, etc.)
- Number of pages: total pages in the resource
- Geography: the country and/or region discussed
- Prominence of refugee voices: whether or not the publication centered, or considered, refugee voices (through survey data, interviews, focus groups, etc.)
- Population/group: which population/group the resource discussed (only refugees, specific refugee groups, etc.)

**Observations & Limitations**

To ensure internal consistency, a random subset of resources was assigned to several reviewers. These random checks confirmed that coding was largely consistent across reviewers. Any variance was primarily found in how each reviewer included comments on the resources for the primary variables.

# STEP 4. QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

## OBJECTIVE

Identify additional descriptive information and general trends in the selected resources.

## METHODS

At the conclusion of the standard coding process, several variables were added to obtain further additional descriptive information and trends in the resources. These variables were included to add further details and capture topics that were not covered in the initial coding. Additionally, the research team conducted a total of 11 key informant interviews (KIIs) with researchers and practitioners in the field of refugee self-reliance.

## Additional variables

- Urban vs. rural: if the resource was discussing primarily urban or rural refugee populations
- In-camp vs. out-of-camp: if the resource was discussing camp or non-camp settings
- Youth: if the resource specifically discussed self-reliance for youth
- Self-reliance vs. livelihoods: if the resource specifically discussed self-reliance, or whether livelihoods was used as a proxy term to discuss self-reliance

## Qualitative and quantitative trend analysis

Using the primary variables above, their comments, and the secondary variables, reviewers conducted a qualitative trend analysis for each of the six primary research questions. This included reviewing all of the comments on the primary variables and also conducting random back checks to ensure consistent coding was used. When drafting the final briefs, the authors referred back to the original publications when creating references to mitigate any bias by the initial reviewers.

A quantitative analysis was also conducted using descriptive statistics about the type and content of resources to include in the final analysis. This included statistics about which topics were mentioned by publication, the most prominent geographies of the resources, etc.

## Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

The objectives of these interviews were to both validate the study's preliminary findings and also gather any additional nuance and details that may not have been adequately mapped in the resource review. Interviewees included researchers and practitioners from the field of forced displacement. Each KII was conducted virtually by a member of the research team and lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. The interviews were facilitated by a discussion guide, but questions were tailored to each participant. Participation in the interviews was voluntary and confidential, and, as a result, any insights from the KIIs included in the briefs are non-attributed.

**Observations & Limitations**

Due to the small sample size of resources the quantitative analysis is only intended to be illustrative of the dataset reviewed and not the broader evidence base on self-reliance.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that refugees are the primary focus of this research project. Evidence on other displaced populations (IDPs, asylum seekers, etc) were only considered insofar as they shed light on self-reliance and displacement issues that can apply to refugee populations (such as in comparative studies).

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

The numbered bibliography below serves as a common reference for the evidence briefs. Each brief contains numbered citations that link to the resources listed in the bibliography. Citations mentioned in the evidence briefs are not exhaustive, but reflect references selected for relevance and diversity of publishing authors.

[1] Ajluni, Salem (2019) "The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Jordanian Labour Market," WANA Institute/Ukaid/Mercy Corps, p. 31

[2] Aleinikoff, T. Alexander (2015) "From Dependence to Self-Reliance: Changing the Paradigm in Protracted Refugee Situations," Transatlantic Council on Migration, p. 16

[3] Alix-Garcia, Jennifer, Erhan Artuc, and Harun Onder (2017) "The Economics of Hosting Refugees: A host community perspective from Turkana," The World Bank, p. 124

[4] Andrews, Colin, Aude de Montesquiou, Ines Arevalo Sanchez, Puja Vasudeva Dutta, Boban Varghese Paul, Sadna Samaranayake, Janet Heisey, Timothy Clay, and Sarang Chaudhary (2021) "The State of Economic Inclusion Report 2021 : The Potential to Scale," The World Bank, p. 348

[5] Antequisa, Regina "Nanette" and Justin Corbett (2018) "Learning from Survivor and Community-led crisis responses in the Philippines," Local to Global Protection, p. 13

[6] Ash, Nazanin and Cindy Huang (2018) "Using the Compact Model to Support Host States and Refugee Self-Reliance," World Refugee Council/Centre for International Governance Innovation, p. 28

[7] Barbelet, Veronique and Caitlin Wake (2017) "Livelihoods in displacement: From Refugee Perspectives to aid agency response," Overseas Development Institute, p. 45

[8] Barbelet, Veronique, Jessica Hagen-Zanker, and Dina Mansour-Ille (2018) "The Jordan Compact: Lessons learnt and implications for future," Overseas Development Institute, p. 8

[9] Bernu, Rachel (2016) "Local Integration Focus: Durable Solutions Framework, Uganda 2016," ReDSS, p.32

[10] Betts, Alexander (2018) "Don't Make African Nations Borrow Money to Support Refugees," Foreign Policy

[11] Betts, Alexander (2018) "Kenyan study sheds new light on gap between refugees and host communities," The Conversation

[12] Betts, Alexander (2021) "The Wealth of Refugees: How Displaced People Can Build Economies," Oxford University Press, p. 449

[13] Betts, Alexander, Andonis Marden, Raphael Bradenbrink, and Jonas Kaufmann (2020) "Building Refugee Economies: An evaluation of the IKEA Foundation's programmes in Dollo Ado," Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, p. 180

[14] Betts, Alexander, Imane Chaara, Naohiko Omata, Olivier Sterck (2019) "Refugee Economies in Uganda: What Difference Does the Self-Reliance Model Make?" Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, p. 44

[15] Betts, Alexander, Imane Chaara, Naohiko Omata, Olivier Sterck (2019) "Uganda Self-Reliance Model: Does it Work?" Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, p. 6

[16] Betts, Alexander, Louise Bloom, Josiah David Kaplan, and Naohiko Omata (2017) "Refugee economies - Forced displacement and development," Oxford University Press, p. 268

[17] Betts, Alexander, Naohiko Omata, and Olivier Sterck (2018) "Refugee Economies in Kenya," Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, p. 51

[18] Betts, Alexander, Naohiko Omata, and Olivier Sterck (2020) "Self-reliance and Social Networks:Explaining Refugees' Reluctance to Relocate from Kakuma to Kalobeyei," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 23

[19] Betts, Alexander, Naohiko Omata, and Olivier Sterck (2020) "The Kalobeyei Settlement: A Self-reliance Model for Refugees?," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 34

[20] Betts, Alexander, Naohiko Omata, Cory Rodgers, Olivier Sterck, and Maria Stierna (2019) "The Kalobeyei Model: Towards Self-Reliance for Refugees," Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, p. 36

[21] Betts, Alexander, Remco Geervlier, Claire MacPherson, Naohiko Omata, Cory Rodgers, and Olivier Sterck (2018) "Self-Reliance in Kalobeyei? Socio-Economic Outcomes for refugees in North-West Kenya," Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, p. 48

[22] Beversluis, David, David Schoeller-Diaz, Martin Anderson, Natalie Anderson, Amy Slaughter, Ronak B. Patel (2016) "Developing and Validating the Refugee Integration Scale in Nairobi, Kenya," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 26

[23] Boeyink, Clayton Todd (2020) "Politics and practises of refugee self-reliance in trifurcated states of north-western Tanzania," University of Edinburgh, p. 354

[24] Buscher, Dale (2016) "Formidable Intersections: Forced Migration, Gender and Livelihoods," Chapter in a book being edited by Dr. Ulrike Krause, Center for Conflict Studies, University of Marburg (forthcoming), p. 21

[25] Buscher, Dale (2018) "Refuge in the City," Social Sciences, p. 15

[26] Cabot Venton, Courtney and Toscane Clarey (2018) "Economics of Alternative Expenditure," Center for Disaster Protection/International Rescue Committee/Airbel Center/Ukaid, p. 11

[27] Cabot Venton, Courtney, Julian Richardson, Toscane Clarey, and Ginevra Jarmaine (2019) "Innovative Financing for Responses to Refugee Crises," Airbel Center/International Rescue Committee/Ukaid, p. 44

[28] Carpi, Estella (2020) "Towards a Neo-cosmetic Humanitarianism: Refugee Self-reliance as a Social-cohesion Regime in Lebanon's Halba," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 20

[29] Center for Global Development/International Rescue Committee (2017) "REFUGEE COMPACTS: Addressing the Crisis of Protracted Displacement," p. 68

[30] Charles, Sarah, Cindy Huang, Lauren Post, and Kate Gough (2018) "Five Ways to Improve the World Bank Funding for Refugees and Hosts in Low-Income Countries and Why These Dedicated Resources Matter More than Ever," International Rescue Committee/Center for Global Development, p. 10

[31] Church World Service (2016) "Urban Refugee Self-Reliance Pilot Program," p. 48

[32] Clements, Kelly, Timothy Shoffner, and Leah Zamore (2016) "Uganda's approach to refugee self-reliance," Forced Migration Review, p. 3

[33] Crawford, Nicholas and Sorcha O'Callaghan (2019) "The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: responsibility-sharing and self-reliance in East Africa," Overseas Development Institute (ODI), p. 21

[34] Crawford, Nicholas, John Cosgrave, Simone Haysom, and Nadine Walicki (2015) "Protracted Displacement: Uncertain paths to self-reliance in exile," Overseas Development Institute, p. 54

[35] Danish Embassy/Norwegian Embassy/Republic of Kenya (2010) "In Search of Protection and Livelihoods," p. 85

[36] Danish Refugee Council/Norwegian Refugee Council/ReDSS (2017) "Local Integration Focus: Bay Region," p. 63

[37] Danish Refugee Council/ReDSS/Samuel Hall (2016) "Review of Durable Solutions Initiatives in East and Horn of Africa," p. 66

[38] Danish Refugee Council/UNHCR/FEG Consulting (2012) "Living on the Edge: A Livelihood Status Report on Urban Refugees Living in Nairobi, Kenya," p. 63

[39] De Vriese, Machtelt (2006) "Refugee livelihoods: A review of the evidence," UNHCR, p. 53

[40] Dempster, Helen, Thomas Ginn, Jimmy Graham, Martha Guerrero Ble, Daphne Jayasinghe, and Barri Shorey (2020) "Locked Down and Left Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees' Economic Inclusion," Center for Global Development/Refugees International/International Rescue Committee, p. 44

[41] Dobson, Stephen, Gabriella Agrusti, and Marta Pinto (2021) "Supporting the inclusion of refugees: policies, theories and actions," International Journal of Inclusive Education, p. 6

[42] Durable Solutions Platform/Columbia University (2020) ""In My Own Hands": A Medium-Term Approach towards Self-Reliance and Resilience of Syrian refugees and Host Communities in Jordan," p. 56

[43] Durable Solutions Platform/Danish Refugee Council/Norwegian Refugee Council/International Rescue Committee (2020) "Improving Self-Reliance And Resilience In Jordan: Lessons Learned From Livelihoods Interventions," p. 14

[44] Durable Solutions Platform/IGAM Research Center on Asylum and Migration (2019) "Working towards self-reliance: Syrian refugees' economic participation in Turkey," p. 44

[45] Easton-Calabria, Evan (2016) "Refugees asked to fish for themselves: The Role of Livelihoods Trainings for Kampala's Urban Refugees," UNHCR/University of Oxford, p. 35

[46] Easton-Calabria, Evan (2020) "Warriors of Self-reliance: The Instrumentalization of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 23

[47] Easton-Calabria, Evan, Mia Tong, and Ceren Topgul (2018) "International Refugee Congress 2018 Consultation Report," International Refugee Congress, p. 32

[48] Easton-Calabria, Evan, Ulrike Krause, Jessica Field, Anubhav Tiwari, Yamini Mookherjee, Caitlin Wake, Veronique Barbelet, Estella Carpi, Amy Slaughter, and Kellie Leeson (2017) "Refugee Self-Reliance - Moving Beyond the Marketplace," Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, p. 6

[49] Embiricos, Alexandra (2020) "From Refugee to Entrepreneur? Challenges to Refugee Self-reliance in Berlin, Germany," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 22

[50] FAO (2018) "Food security, resilience and well-being analysis of refugees and host communities in northern Uganda," p. 78

[51] FAO (2019) "Food security and resilience of refugees and host communities in south-west Uganda," p. 64

[52] Field, Jessica, Anubhav Dutt Tiwari, Yamini Mookherjee (2017) "Urban refugees in Delhi: Self-Reliance can't be exclusively entrepreneurial," IIED/Urban Crises, p. 4

[53] Field, Jessica, Anubhav Dutt Tiwari, Yamini Mookherjee (2020) "Self-reliance as a Concept and a Spatial Practice for Urban Refugees: Reflections from Delhi, India," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 21

[54] Fratzke, Susan and Camille Le Coz (2019) "Strengthening Refugee Protection in Low- and Middle-Income Countries," Migration Policy Institute, p. 24

[55] Ginn, Thomas (2018) "Prison or Sanctuary?: An Evaluation of Camps for Syrian Refugees," University of Stanford Job Market Paper

[56] Graham, Jimmy and Martha Guerrero Ble (2020) "The Effect of COVID-19 on the Economic Inclusion of Venezuelans in Colombia," Center for Global Development/Refugees International, p. 19

[57] Gray Meral, Amanda (2020) "Assessing the Jordan Compact One Year On: An Opportunity or a Barrier to Better Achieving Refugees' Right to Work," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 19

[58] Grundin, Sofie and Luna Saadeh (2018) "Learning from community-led resilience responses in the occupied Palestinian territories," Local to Global Protection, p. 13

[59] Guerrero Ble, Martha, Izza Leghtas, and Jimmy Graham (2020) "From Displacement to Development: How Peru Can Transform Venezuelan Displacement into Shared Growth," Center for Global Development/Refugees International, p. 52

[60] Guerrero Ble, Martha, Izza Leghtas, Daphne Panayotatos, and Jimmy Graham (2020) "From Displacement to Development: How Colombia Can Transform Venezuelan Displacement into Shared Growth," Center for Global Development/Refugees International, p. 68

[61] Guyatt, Helen (2016) "Refugees Vulnerability Study, Kakuma, Kenya," Kimetrica/World Food Programme, p. 168

[62] Harvey, Paul and Jeremy Lind (2005) "Dependency and humanitarian relief A critical analysis," Overseas Development Institute, p. 55

[63] Horst, Cindy and Khadra Elmi (2007) "Participation in Sustainable Livelihoods," Danish Refugee Council/ CARE, p. 24

[64] Huang, Cindy (2017) "Global Business and Refugee Crises: A Framework for Sustainable Engagement," Tent/ Center for Global Development, p. 40

[65] Hunter, Meredith (2009) "The Failure of Self-Reliance in Refugee Settlements," POLIS Journal, p. 46

[66] Ilcan, Suzan, Marcia Oliver, and Laura Connoy (2015) "Humanitarian Assistance and the Politics of Self-reliance: Uganda's Nakivale Refugee Settlement," CIGI, p. 18

[67] International Finance Corporation (2018) "Kakuma as a Marketplace," p. 88

[68] International Rescue Committee (2018) "Dreams Deterred: Opportunities to Promote Self-Reliance for Somali Refugee Youth in Kenya," p. 24

[69] Jacobsen, Karen (2001) "The forgotten solution: local integration for refugees in developing countries," UNHCR, p. 43

[70] Jacobsen, Karen and Susan Fratzke (2016) "Building Livelihood Opportunities for Refugee Populations: Lessons from Past Practice," Migration Policy Institute, p. 43

[71] Joint Agency NGO Report (2020) "Into the unknown: Listening to Syria's displaced in the search for durable solutions," p. 32

[72] Kabir, Raiyan and Jeni Klugman (2019) "Unlocking Refugee Women's Potential," International Rescue Committee/Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, p. 33

[73] Kamau, Christine and John Fox (2013) "The Dadaab Dilemma: A study on Livelihood activities and Opportunities for Dadaab Refugees," Danish Refugee Council/UNHCR, p. 71

[74] Kirisci, Kemal (2020) "How trade concessions can improve refugee self-reliance," Brookings Institution

[75] Klug, Anja (2012) "Towards durable solutions - enhancing refugees' self-reliance through a temporary labour migration scheme," UNHCR, p. 10

[76] Kluge, John and Tim Docking (2021) "Project Understanding: Refugee Investing, How Private Capital Can Unlock Opportunity for Refugees," IPSOS, p. 3

[77] Krause-Vilmar, Jina (2011) "Dawn in the City: Guidance for Achieving Urban Refugee Self-Reliance," Women's Refugee Commission, p. 32

[78] Krause-Vilmar, Jina (2011) "The Livin' Ain't Easy: Urban Refugees in Kampala," Women's Refugee Commission, p. 29

[79] Krause, Ulrike and Hannah Schmidt (2020) "Refugees as Actors? Critical Reflections on Global Refugee Policies on Self-reliance and Resilience," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 19

[80] Kuhle, Helene, Alexi Taylor-Grosman, and Andrew Mitchell (2017) "Leave no one behind: graduation for refugees," UNHCR/Trickle Up, p. 8

[81] Landau, Loren, Kabiri Bule, Ammar Malik, Caroline Wanjiku Kihato, Yasemin Irin-Erickson, Benjamin Edwards, and Edward Mohr (2017) "Displacement and Disconnection? Exploring the Role of Social Networks in the Livelihoods of Refugees in Gaziantep, Nairobi, and Peshawar," Urban Institute, p. 24

[82] Leeson, Kellie (2021) "Project Understanding: Moving from Crisis Response to Building Refugee Resilience," IPSOS, p. 2

[83] Leeson, Kellie, Prem B. Bhandari, Anna Myers, and Dale Buscher (2020) "Measuring the Self-Reliance of Refugees," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 20

[84] Lockhart, Dorsey (2018) "Syrian Refugees Labour Inclusion Policy in Jordan," WANA Institute/Ukaid/Mercy Corps, p. 16

[85] Lockhart, Dorsey and Katrina Barker (2018) "Syrian Refugee Women and Workforce Inclusion in 2017," WANA Institute/Ukaid/Mercy Corps, p. 10

[86] Lopez, Linda and Samer Saliba (2021) "Project Understanding: Urban Refuge, How the City of LA is Building Inclusive Communities," IPSOS, p. 3

[87] Love, Kaitlin (2021) "Project Understanding: Putting Refugees at the Center of Response," IPSOS, p. 3

[88] MacPherson, Claire and Olivier Sterck (2019) "Humanitarian Versus Development Aid for Refugees: Evidence from a Regression Discontinuity Design," p. 68

[89] Maltz, Gideon (2021) "Project Understanding: How Businesses Can Address the Global Refugee Crisis," IPSOS, p. 3

[90] Manji, Farah and Joanna de Berry (2019) "Desk Review on Livelihoods and Self-Reliance for Refugees and Host Communities in Kenya," The World Bank, p. 71

[91] McLoughlin, Claire (2017) "Sustainable Livelihoods for Refugees in Protracted Crises," K4D, p. 13

[92] Mehan, Shalini (2016) "From Care And Maintenance To Self-Reliance: Sustainable Business Model Connecting Malian Refugee Artisans To Swiss Markets Using Public-Private Partnerships," UNHCR, p. 38

[93] Meyer, Sarah (2006) "The 'refugee aid and development' approach in Uganda: empowerment and self-reliance of refugees in practice," UNHCR/University of Oxford, p. 97

[94] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (2018) "Evaluation of the Regional Development and Protection Programme in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq," p. 76

[95] Mookherjee, Yamini and Evan Easton-Calabria (2017) "The Many Selves in Self-Reliance: Why Words and Definitions Matter," The New Humanitarian

[96] Norwegian Refugee Council/International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School (2017) "Recognising Nairobi's Refugees," p. 27

[97] Norwegian Refugee Council/International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School (2018) "Supporting Kakuma's Refugee Traders," p. 13

[98] Norwegian Refugee Council/International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School (2018) "Supporting Kakuma's Refugees: The Importance of Freedom of Movement," p. 15

[99] Norwegian Refugee Council/Samuel Hall (2014) "Living Out of Camp: Alternative to Camp Based Assistance in Ethiopia," p. 67

[100] Norwegian Refugee Council/Save the Children/Action Against Hunger/CARE/Danish Refugee Council/ International Rescue Committee/Durable Solutions Platform (2018) "Dangerous ground - Syria's refugees face an uncertain future," p. 40

[101] Nutz, Nadja (2017) "A Guide to Market Based Livelihoods Interventions for Refugees," UNHCR/ILO, p. 44

[102] OECD (2019) "Lives in Crises : What Do People Tell Us About the Humanitarian Aid They Receive?"

[103] Omata, Naohiko (2017) "The Myth of Self-Reliance: Economic Lives Inside a Liberian Refugee Camp," Berghahn Books, p. 194

[104] Omata, Naohiko (n.d.) "Promoting 'self-reliance' for refugees: what does it really mean?" Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre

[105] Otieno, Peter and Dorothy Gazarwa (2014) "Joint Assessment Mission – Kenya Refugee Operation," World Food Programme/UNHCR, p. 128

[106] Papademetriou, Demetrios G. and Susan Fratzke (2016) "Beyond Care and Maintenance: Rebuilding Hope and Opportunity for Refugees," Migration Policy Institute, p. 25

[107] Raimondi, Federica (2015) "Pathways to Self-Reliance for Urban Refugees in Egypt," CGAP

[108] ReDSS/Danish Refugee Council (2015) "Devolution in Kenya: Opportunities of transitional solutions for refugees," p. 15

[109] Refugee Law Project (2007) ”“Giving out their daughters for their survival” Refugee self-reliance, ‘vulnerability’, and the paradox of early marriage,” p. 65

[110] RET International (2020) ”Protection and self-reliance of refugee youth through education”

[111] Rosshandler, Kareem (2019) ”Syrian Refugees and Social Cohesion in Jordan,” WANA Institute/Ukaid/Mercy Corps, p. 7

[112] Samber, Sharon (2021) ”Project Understanding: Refugee Resilience in Ecuador,” IPSOS, p. 2

[113] Samuel Hall (2018) ”Local Integration Focus: Refugees in Ethiopia,” p. 60

[114] Samuel Hall and Elrha (2018) ”Innovating mobile solutions for refugees in East Africa,” p. 48

[115] Samuel Hall/UNHCR (2016) ”Market Assessment- Kakuma Refugee Camp Kenya,” p. 80

[116] Sanghi, Apurva, Harun Onder, and Varalakshmi Vemuru (2016) ”Yes, In My Backyard? The Economics of Refugees and Their Social Dynamics in Kakuma, Kenya,” The World Bank/UNHCR, p. 84

[117] Save the Children (2018) ”Making Lives: Refugee Self-Reliance and Humanitarian Action in Cities,” p. 124

[118] Schiltz, Julie, Ilse Derluyn, Wouter Vanderplasschen, and Sofie Vindevogel (2018) ”Resilient and Self-reliant Life: South Sudanese Refugees Imagining Futures in the Adjumani Refugee Setting, Uganda,” Children & Society, p. 13

[119] Schon, Anna-Mara, Shahad Al-Saadi, Jakob Grubmueller, and Dorit Schumann-Bolsche (2018) ”Developing a camp performance indicator system and its application to Zaatari, Jordan,” Journal of Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management, p. 28

[120] Skran, Claudena (2020) ”Refugee entrepreneurship and self-reliance: the UNHCR and sustainability in post-conflict Sierra Leone,” Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 30

[121] Skran, Claudena and Evan Easton-Calabria (2020) ”Old Concepts Making New History: Refugee Self-reliance, Livelihoods and the ‘Refugee Entrepreneur,” Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 21

[122] Slaughter, Amy (2017) ”The Case for Measuring Refugee Self-Reliance,” European Evaluation Society, p. 16

[123] Slaughter, Amy (2019) ”Fostering Refugee Self-reliance: A Case Study of an Agency’s Approach in Nairobi,” Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 17

[124] Sterck, Olivier and Antonia Delius (2020) ”Cash Transfers and Micro-Enterprise Performance: Theory and Quasi-Experimental Evidence from Kenya,” University of Oxford, p. 81

[125] Sterck, Olivier, Cory Rodgers, Jade Siu, Maria Flinder Stierna, and Alexander Betts (2020) ”Cash Transfer Models and Debt in the Kalobeyei Settlement,” Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, p. 40

[126] UNDP (2016) ”Global Toolkit on the 3x6 approach: Building resilience through jobs and livelihoods,” p. 84

[127] UNHCR (2006) ”Handbook for planning and implementing Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) Programmes”

[128] UNHCR (2006) ”Handbook for Self-Reliance”

[129] UNHCR (2010) ”Global Report 2010: Encouraging Self-Reliance”

[130] UNHCR (2011) ”Global Report 2011: Encouraging Self-Reliance”

[131] UNHCR (2011) "Promoting Livelihoods and Self-reliance: Operational Guidance on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas," p. 32

[132] UNHCR (2012) "Global Report 2012: Encouraging Self-Reliance and Livelihoods"

[133] UNHCR (2012) "Livelihood Programming in UNHCR: Operational Guidelines," p. 144

[134] UNHCR (2013) "Global Report 2013: Encouraging Self-Reliance"

[135] UNHCR (2014) "Global Report 2014: Encouraging Self-Reliance"

[136] UNHCR (2014) "Global Strategy for Livelihoods 2014-2018," p. 56

[137] UNHCR (2015) "Global Report 2015: Encouraging Self-Reliance"

[138] UNHCR (2016) "Livelihoods and Self-reliance," p. 8

[139] UNHCR (2017) "Resilience and self-reliance from a protection and solutions perspective," p. 7

[140] UNHCR (2019) "Are refugees' lives improving? – facilitating and measuring self-reliance and economic inclusion," p. 3

[141] UNHCR (2020) "Displaced & Disconnected: Connectivity for Refugees," p. 27

[142] UNHCR (2020) "Self-reliance and inclusion," p. 5

[143] UNHCR (n.d.) "The Benefits of belonging - local integration options and opportunities for host countries, communities and refugees," p. 48

[144] UNHCR/CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (2019) "UNHCR/CDA: Effects of Cash on Social Cohesion in Kalobeyei Settlement, Kenya - A Do No Harm Assessment," p. 6

[145] UNHCR/Equity Bank/Turkana County Government (n.d.) "Cash for Shelter in Kenya: A Field Experience," p. 8

[146] UNHCR/HIAS (2016) "A Gradual Approach to local integration," p. 13

[147] UNHCR/Trickle UP/CGAP (n.d.) "Brief: Economic Inclusion of the Poorest Refugees," p. 8

[148] UNHCR/World Bank Group (2018) "Understanding the Socioeconomic Conditions of Refugees in Kalobeyei, Kenya," p. 62

[149] Wake, Caitlin and Veronique Barbelet (2020) "Towards a Refugee Livelihoods Approach: Findings from Cameroon, Jordan, Malaysia and Turkey," Journal of Refugee Studies, p. 17

[150] Women's Refugee Commission (2009) "Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practioners in Humanitarian Settings," p. 378

[151] Women's Refugee Commission (2011) "Bright Lights, Big City: Urban Refugees Struggle to Make a Living in New Delhi," p. 26

[152] Women's Refugee Commission (2013) "Economic Empowerment of Urban Refugee Youth," p. 24

[153] Women's Refugee Commission (2014) "A Double Edged Sword: Livelihoods in Emergencies," p. 48

[154] World Food Programme (2014) "Dadaab and Kakuma Refugee Camps Market Assessment," p. 72

[155] World Food Programme/UNHCR (2012) "The Contribution of Food Assistance to Durable Solutions in Protracted Refugee Situations; its impact and role in Bangladesh: A Mixed Method Impact Evaluation," p. 116

[156] X-Border Local Research Network (2020) "Beyond Relief: Securing Livelihoods and Agency for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh," p. 10

[157] Zetter, Roger and Heloise Ruaudel (2018) "Refugees' right to work and access to labour," Forced Migration Review, p. 4

# ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Christensen, Hanne (1984) "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: From Emergency towards Self-reliance," United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, p. 87.

Crisp, Jeff (2003) "UNHCR, refugee livelihoods and self-reliance: a brief history," UNHCR.

Jacobsen, Karen (2001) "The forgotten solution: local integration for refugees in developing countries," UNHCR Working Paper No. 45, p. 43.

Rogge, J.R. (1987) "When is self-sufficiency achieved? The case of rural settlements in Sudan," in Rogge, J.R. (ed.) Refugees: A Third World Dilemma.

UNHCR (1999) "Strategy Paper: Self Reliance for Refugee Hosting Areas, 1999 – 2003," UNHCR Uganda/ Government of Uganda.

UNHCR (2004) "Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities," UNHCR, p. 237.

# DEFINING SELF-RELIANCE

# DEFINING SELF-RELIANCE

In this evidence brief, we present the findings from our review of literature on the definition of refugee self-reliance: How is the concept defined, understood, and used by various stakeholders? What variance exists in the definition and why does it matter?

## KEY FINDINGS

How we choose to talk about self-reliance matters: it shapes the expectations, objectives, and approaches of all stakeholders in the refugee response system, including practitioners, policymakers, researchers, funders, governments, and displaced populations themselves.

While self-reliance has steadily grown in prominence as an objective in refugee response, we find that there is not yet a shared understanding of the concept as evidenced by the range of different definitions in use. Moreover, we found that frequently the term 'self-reliance' is referenced in the literature without being defined. When that is the case, it is usually implicitly reduced to only one of its many dimensions (most often the economic dimension), which in turn impacts the design and impact measurement of programs and policies.

In the literature, definitions of self-reliance are primarily clustered around use in two areas: policies and programs. The definitions in both clusters are closely related but not equivalent, and both fall short of reflecting certain critical elements related to self-reliance.

Policy-oriented definitions mostly explain self-reliance as a state of not being dependent on external assistance. These definitions often do not specify what types of "external assistance" are being referred to, which can be left open to interpretation. Policy-oriented definitions usually do not address what types of interventions could promote self-reliance.

Program-oriented definitions highlight areas of intervention that can enable self-reliance. These definitions have evolved from solely focusing on the economic dimensions of self-reliance (eg. livelihoods, income generation and/or employment) to acknowledging and emphasizing the importance of other dimensions of self-reliance (social, legal, political, etc.). The most commonly cited definition of self-reliance is one first proposed by UNHCR in 2005, which highlights both economic and social aspects of the term. Yet most programmatic definitions of self-reliance stop short of describing the broader multidimensionality of self-reliance and related programming.

Self-reliance is often conceptually linked to discussions about Durable Solutions, yet there is little available evidence or research about how self-reliance programming can contribute to any individual durable solution.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** All stakeholders should promote a shared understanding of self-reliance as part of operationalizing the Global Compact on Refugees, to help set feasible targets and goals for enhancing self-reliance, tracking progress, and promoting collaboration between implementing agencies. In particular, discussions of refugee self-reliance in programming or policy should include an explicit definition of self-reliance and systematically take into account (1) the multidimensional nature of self-reliance; (2) the quality standards that are inherent to self-reliance programming; (3) the various local support systems that enable self-reliance; and (4) the potential of the local context to support self-reliance.

**Recommendation 2:** Donors should prioritize funding research that gathers refugee perspectives on self-reliance, to help shape the conceptual and operational understanding of self-reliance in general, as well as contribute to better programming design in specific contexts and for specific target groups.

**Recommendation 3:** Practitioners and policymakers should consider two complementary objectives that advance refugee self-reliance: (1) how to bridge the gap in self-reliance between refugee populations and local populations, and (2) how to contribute to increasing the potential for self-reliance for all populations in a given refugee-hosting area when designing program and policy interventions.

# TOWARDS A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

The concept and associated definitions of self-reliance as applied to refugees have evolved over the past 50 years, gaining increased nuance over time. However, while there is a growing community of practice working to advance self-reliance, all relevant stakeholders have not yet coalesced around a shared understanding of the concept. There is significant variation in what encompasses 'self-reliance' when described by different actors, both in terms of the objective, as well as the pathways through which it can be achieved. Across the literature, we find that there are two dominant clusters of self-reliance definitions: one that is policy-oriented and the other that is program-oriented. And while the two are closely related, each falls short of reflecting certain critical elements related to self-reliance, which in turn leads to divergences and conflicts in ensuing discussions and approaches.

## Lack of definition or too many definitions?

In the last 15 years, self-reliance has been increasingly referenced as a goal in refugee response at the national, regional, and international levels [26; 73; 38; 126-148]. Most prominently it is featured as one of the four key objectives of the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees [33]. Notably, there is little debate in the literature about whether self-reliance is a relevant, appropriate, or feasible objective to set for humanitarian assistance to refugees [33; 48; 52; 34; 65]. However, despite the increased momentum around pursuing self-reliance as an objective in refugee response, there is no broadly agreed-upon definition of the term.

There are multiple ways in which self-reliance is defined in the literature, reflecting different and evolving objectives and approaches that translate into substantially different programs and policies, some of which are hard to reconcile [82; 141; 80; 16]. The use of different definitions of self-reliance matters because it tends to shape at least three crucial discussions around refugee issues in the literature: (1) a discussion between humanitarian and development actors about their respective roles in refugee response and related approaches to programming [140]; (2) a discussion between refugee-hosting countries and donor countries on their respective responsibilities vis-à-vis refugees and related policies [2]; and (3) an (often implicit) discussion between refugees themselves and the broader international aid system around expectations and possible solutions to displacement [127; 16; 33].

Different stakeholders tend to focus on aspects of self-reliance that are most aligned with their own pre-existing incentive structure and positioning in regard to refugee responses [67; 101; 12]. These incentives vary by stakeholder and may sometimes lead to opposing interpretations. For example, by understanding self-reliance as "a move away from dependency", donor states tend to focus on independence from international assistance, which can be linked to considering self-reliance as an exit strategy from humanitarian programming for refugees [12]. Some refugee-hosting states tend to interpret self-reliance as a move away from dependence on all types of institutional assistance (including assistance provided by hosting governments themselves) and may conclude that the aim is for self-reliant refugees to meet their needs only through market systems. For both, self-reliance is a worthwhile goal, but in pursuit of different ends. According to the latter conception, self-reliance programming is desirable insofar as it presents a solution for refugees that also lessens the "burden" on host states [12]. But according to the former conception, a move away from

dependence on international aid is in part made possible due to the inclusion of refugees in national and sub-national social protection systems by host states [71; 157; 64].

Beyond the different definitions in the literature, we also found that many documents refer to the term 'self-reliance' without presenting a definition or explanation, which can create ambiguity or often implicitly reduces the concept to only one dimension, frequently the economic dimension [67; 17; 26; 97]. This includes documents that discuss self-reliance incidentally and amongst other topics, but also many documents that center their discussion and findings on self-reliance [70]. Similar to varying definitions, the absence of a definition can also be problematic. This, in turn, has direct consequences on the types of policies and programs that are considered and discussed in these documents, and arguably designed and implemented by their authors. Documents that do not define self-reliance also often tend to conflate the term with other important, yet distinct concepts such as livelihoods, resilience, self-sufficiency, or even local integration [67; 44; 26]. This leads to further divergence in terms of what self-reliance is and how to enable it.

It is also worth noting that while many different stakeholder viewpoints are represented in the literature on defining self-reliance, we found very few attempts to incorporate the perspectives of refugees themselves [95]. While several resources highlighted that self-reliance is an objective that is called for by refugees [95], there does not appear to be any systematic effort to reflect refugee voices in defining the concept, describing what being self-reliant looks like for them, and/or what they need to get there [95]. Admittedly, this finding may be a result of a limitation in the methodology of this research project, which only included English-language resources and primarily included literature published by international organizations and academics. See Methodology & Bibliography for more details.

The lack of refugee voices in the self-reliance definition debate could be considered antithetical to the purpose of self-reliance itself, which arguably relates to creating an enabling environment for refugees to be able to make their own choices about matters that concern them and being able to shape their own future. While several authors point to the lack of participation of refugees and the lack of refugee voices in shaping the definition of self-reliance, there are few concrete suggestions in the literature about how to bridge that gap most effectively [95].

## Self-reliance in policy & programming

There are two main ways in which the concept of refugee self-reliance is mobilized in the literature: it is discussed as a policy objective and as a program objective.

### Policy-oriented Definitions

When used in policy discussions and contexts, refugee self-reliance is mostly described as 'a move away from dependency' [148; 13; 70; 115]. However, as discussed above, there is variation in terms of dependency on what and at times this is left unspecified and open to interpretation [148; 13]. The notion of refugee self-reliance was originally coined to reflect the ongoing dependency of refugees on short-term humanitarian aid designed for emergencies [2]. But self-reliance is also sometimes understood as reliance on support from any type of institution or system, including

host governments, social networks or local community support more generally. To what extent can refugees rely on social services and still be considered self-reliant? Is it sufficient for a refugee not to rely on international aid for one or more of their basic needs to be deemed self-reliant? Can a refugee that relies on support such as remittances or informal and formal social safety net mechanisms be considered self-reliant? These are some of the questions that divide various authors in the literature [103; 116; 125].

Overall, there is an increasing consensus in the literature that refugee self-reliance is about reducing dependency on international aid [148; 13; 70; 115]. At the same time, there is a general acknowledgment that self-reliant individuals – be they refugees or not – are typically dependent to some extent on access to and use of a variety of other systems, including but not limited to market systems and social protection systems [148; 13; 70; 115]. There is less examination of which systems outside of the international aid system (eg. labor market systems and social protection systems or only restricted subsets of these) are most critical for self-reliance and whether refugees that heavily depend on these systems can be considered 'self-reliant' [148; 13].

In the literature, policy-oriented definitions of self-reliance are often mobilized to make 'political' arguments for at least three different reasons. First, they inherently call into question whether the humanitarian system is fit for purpose, insofar as traditional humanitarian approaches tend to perpetuate a dependency on aid [124; 92; 106]. Second, they draw attention to the role, quality, and sustainability of social protection systems in host states, and whether their coverage should be extended to refugee populations, and if it is feasible to do so [42; 15; 117; 12]. Third, they highlight the responsibility of host governments in providing refugees with the set of rights to which they are entitled, and at the same time call into question the role of the wider international community in sharing these responsibilities [12].

Finally, another characteristic of these definitions is that they typically focus on policy-level solutions and changes to the policy environment to enhance self-reliance and less on programmatic interventions and adaptations [2; 148].

## Program-oriented Definitions

There are multiple conceptions of self-reliance that are used to define programmatic objectives or approaches. These range from definitions that solely focus on the economic capacities of refugees to those that emphasize consideration of more 'holistic' dimensions of a refugee's life [128; 66; 23]. Overall, the most-commonly referenced definition of self-reliance in the literature is one included in the 2005 UNHCR handbook on self-reliance, which defines self-reliance along social and economic dimensions [128]:

> *"Self-reliance is the social and economic ability of an individual, household or community to meet basic needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity."*

Most program-oriented definitions of self-reliance, including the 2005 UNHCR definition, focus on the idea of being able to meet one's own needs and do not refer directly to international aid (or the absence thereof) [92; 133; 123]. Similar to the policy-oriented definitions mentioned above, this leaves space for some to construe that self-reliance not only refers to independence from

international aid but also from assistance provided by the host state [6; 128]. However, in contrast to the policy-oriented definitions, program-oriented definitions typically point to what self-reliance and related programming looks like (i.e. social and economic components that foster access to basic needs, access to dignified livelihoods, etc.) [114; 145; 101]. In the next section, we further examine the contents of program-oriented definitions of self-reliance and their evolution over time.

## An old idea... that has evolved over time

The term 'self-reliance' has been increasingly invoked in the refugee space over the last 10-15 years [23]. Yet, the concept of self-reliance is not new. Mentions of self-reliance related to refugee populations have been traced back to the 1950s for policy use [Crisp 2003]. Humanitarians have been referring to self-reliance objectives for their programs since at least the 1960s [121]. Since then, there has been an ongoing evolution in how self-reliance is defined and correspondingly in the design of related programming, which has shaped the dominant understanding today of self-reliance as a multidimensional concept.

There are three notable phases in the evolution of how self-reliance is defined since the mid-20th century: from a primarily economic focus to considerations about the social and legal dimensions of self-reliance, to increased recognition of the multidimensional nature of the concept [121]. In our review of the resources on self-reliance that were published between 2005 and 2021, we find reflections on each of these phases. First, a significant number of resources tend to focus only on economic opportunities and typically equate self-reliance programming with livelihoods programming [120; 149; 17]. Second, many resources reference the 2005 UNHCR socio-economic definition of self-reliance, however, this usually doesn't involve further explanation or examination of the concept [131; 45]. Third, more recently, there is a growing number of resources that interrogate the notion of self-reliance, emphasizing the need to center refugee voices and context-specific considerations when discussing the concept and recognizing the importance of the multidimensional nature of the concept [23; 33; 52]. Overall, there seems to be a growing consensus that the economic dimension of self-reliance while central to the concept is only one component of a more complex concept [93].

A parallel evolution in programming practices can be observed through the literature. While self-reliance programming was initially and is still in large part focused on economic advancement, the understanding of how to promote better economic outcomes for refugees has gained increased nuance and complexity over time. More specifically, self-reliance was initially equated with self-sufficiency and the 'means of meeting basic needs', which included a focus on nutritional needs and food security programming [20; 123; 50; 51]. Eventually, self-reliance programming shifted to focus on the 'means of making a living' and livelihoods programming, albeit with significant changes over time in terms of what livelihoods programming encompasses [120; 149; 17]. Finally, there is increased acknowledgment that while livelihoods programming is a necessary component of economic inclusion, it alone is not sufficient to enable self-reliance. As a result, economic self-reliance programming has eventually extended beyond a sole focus on livelihoods interventions to also include financial inclusion, with an expanding focus on access to credit and savings [51; 124; 125].

Alongside the evolution of economic inclusion programming, there has been a shift from a purely economic focus of self-reliance programming to an approach that includes other dimensions. First

and foremost, this has manifested in self-reliance programming that includes not only economic but also social components [49]. Similar to how the economic dimension of self-reliance programming has been refined over time, there is an increasing nuance in what the social dimension of self-reliance programming encompasses. This is reflected in the growing variety of concepts mobilized to discuss social inclusion related to self-reliance: the social services that refugees need access to in order to meet their basic needs [12], the critical role of social networks for access to social safety nets but also in labor market integration [48], the impact of various levels of social cohesion within refugee communities and between refugee and host communities [128; 71], the importance of promoting social empowerment and participation of refugees in civil society [62; 109], and the potential for extension, expansion or diversification of formal and informal social protection systems to be more inclusive of refugees [37].

Most recently, the literature includes references to multidimensional, multi-level approaches to self-reliance, which can include individual components of protection, community-level components related to conflict or natural resource management, as well as system-level components around legal policy and advocacy on top of more traditional socio-economic components aimed at the household [109; 148; 105]. There is increased recognition of the role of policies and regulations (whether related to civil rights or legal rights), and of the policy environment more broadly in enabling (or hindering) self-reliance [105]. In other words, there is increasing recognition that the legal dimension of self-reliance programming is also critical, beyond the economic and the social dimensions [109]. In turn, a rights-based approach to self-reliance has prompted more systematic inclusion of advocacy components in self-reliance programming and has highlighted the importance for aid organizations to work with duty-bearers on inclusive policy frameworks for refugees [109]. For more details, see *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Components and Approaches).* Nevertheless, while most resources in the literature identify one or more dimensions of self-reliance, few explore in-depth how these various dimensions interact with one another.

## A complex relationship with Durable Solutions

In the literature reviewed, the link between self-reliance and Durable Solutions is often mentioned in two different ways: (1) self-reliance is mentioned as an alternative approach to traditional humanitarian programming for refugees prompted by the difficulty of achieving Durable Solutions in the near term, and (2) as a preparatory step for each of the three pathways towards Durable Solutions [44; 12; 127].

On the one hand, the increased focus and interest in refugee self-reliance arguably stems from the recognition that refugee crises are increasingly protracted and that Durable Solutions are inaccessible for the vast majority of refugees in the short term [16]. As a result, there has been a need within the community composed of donor countries, refugee-hosting countries, and development and humanitarian aid organizations to rethink how limited resources available for refugees should be allocated, as well as how the responsibility for these populations should be shared [128; 2; 12]. At the same time, refugee self-reliance programming is also often explicitly formulated as a preparatory step toward eventual Durable Solutions [127].

While much of the literature links self-reliance programming with solutions in general, we find that there is very little discussion of how self-reliance specifically relates to each of the three Durable Solutions.

Self-reliance programming is often presented as 'solution-neutral' and is rarely unpacked in terms of how it relates to reintegration, local integration, and resettlement separately and possibly in different ways [100; 37; 108]. The existing ambiguities in the relation of self-reliance to durable solutions arguably result from an implicit tension [108]. If self-reliance programming were to be seen as a step towards local integration (rather than returns for example), then hosting governments might be less keen to support refugee self-reliance and accordingly adopt legislative and policy frameworks that are inclusive of refugees [100; 108]. On the other hand, refugee rights advocates have raised concerns that self-reliance may be a 'lower standard' informally replacing the protections and permanence associated with durable solutions [68]. Several resources emphasize the idea that self-reliance programming should neither be considered as a proxy for Durable Solutions nor simply as an exit strategy from providing refugee assistance for humanitarian actors and donors [12].

**Author's note**

Self-reliance has become a prominent goal in refugee response and is notably one of the four key objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. Having a shared understanding of the concept of self-reliance is important for being able to meaningfully design programs and policies that advance self-reliance and to track progress, evaluate impact, generate evidence, and to compare the results of those efforts. And yet, in our review, we found a range of self-reliance definitions that focus on different aspects of the needs and well-being of refugees. Frequently, we found that the term 'self-reliance' was used without reference to a definition or description of the term.

Examining the conceptual evolution of self-reliance and related programming approaches over time reveals that self-reliance is increasingly understood as being related to more than just economic wellbeing and instead depends on several interdependent aspects of a refugee's life. The definition most commonly cited in the literature reviewed is the 2005 UNHCR definition that emphasizes social and economic dimensions of self-reliance. Still, we found that the majority of the literature on self-reliance focuses on economic advancement for refugees.

It is therefore difficult to conclude that there is a shared understanding of the term 'self-reliance' and more work is needed to arrive at a common definition that reflects its multidimensional nature. As a start, we recommend that any discussions of refugee self-reliance in programming, policy or research should include an explicit definition of the term.

Importantly, it is critical that refugees contribute to shaping the concept of self-reliance. We did not find any systematic efforts to incorporate refugee perspectives into defining the term and recommend prioritizing research that compiles refugee perspectives on self-reliance.

# IMPORTANCE OF A NUANCED UNDERSTANDING

There is general agreement that refugee self-reliance is a worthwhile objective, whether for aid agencies, donors and host governments, or for refugee populations themselves [12]. Most publications reviewed for this project take that assumption as a starting point and dedicate relatively little discussion to the limitations of self-reliance. Yet, recognizing that self-reliance is not a panacea, an increasing number of publications have started to critically examine in which contexts and for which refugee populations it is an appropriate and feasible objective [33].

From our review of the literature, we conclude that it is essential for the community of practice at large to adopt a more nuanced understanding of self-reliance, which takes into account not just the multidimensionality of the concept, but also how it inherently encompasses certain quality standards, how various support systems enable and contribute to refugee self-reliance; and how the potential for self-reliance in a given area is dependent upon the local context.

## What counts as self-reliance programming?

There is broad recognition that traditional humanitarian programming, be it emergency or 'care and maintenance' approaches, are not primarily designed to lead to self-reliance [124; 92; 106]. However, we did not find a clear categorization in the literature of what types of programming can be considered as 'self-reliance programming'. As discussed above, the concept of self-reliance has evolved towards a more holistic view, addressing many interdependent dimensions of a refugee's life, including social, economic, and legal aspects. In the 2005 UNHCR definition of self-reliance, these various dimensions are described as relating to the ability of refugees to "meet their basic needs". Yet, it is important to note that the UNHCR definition doesn't simply list these needs, but also qualifies how they are to be met: "in a sustainable manner and with dignity" [128; 133].

These quality characteristics provide guidance on what types of programming count as enabling self-reliance. Let us consider for example the livelihoods components of an intervention aiming to support refugee self-reliance (with the understanding that livelihoods is but one aspect of self-reliance programming, yet possibly the most frequent and systematic): not all types of jobs and livelihoods are dignified or desirable. It is possible to meet basic needs while depending on exploitative income sources [128]. The guidance in the UNHCR definition suggests that livelihoods interventions must lead to sustainable, decent, and diversified work opportunities for refugees to contribute to self-reliance [128]. Therefore, the notion of 'decent work' as promoted by ILO can be considered a key aspect of self-reliance programming [92]. Self-reliance program interventions must also aim at creating sustainable livelihoods for refugees, that is job opportunities that are designed around real, market-based opportunities [126; 148].

Beyond program activities, these quality characteristics also guide self-reliance policy and advocacy priorities, such as addressing structural barriers to labor market integration by supporting and developing labor market systems and working with and through local private sector actors [12; 16].
See *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Components and Approaches).*

**Self-reliance and resilience**

While sometimes used interchangeably, self-reliance and resilience are distinct, but related concepts [103; 80; 50; 51]. Self-reliance can contribute to building resilience, that is the ability to cope with and recover from shocks. For example, interventions that allow families to save for the future or develop diversified income streams can strengthen their resilience in the face of shocks such as a loss of employment.

At the same time, the 2005 UNHCR definition of self-reliance highlights that it involves meeting one's needs in a sustainable manner, which indicates that it is also related to being able to weather shocks or changes in circumstances over time. In other words, resilience can help sustain progress made towards self-reliance in the face of shocks and longer-term trends, such as climate change or cyclical economic downturns. For example, being connected to community networks such as a local church, or to formal social protection systems such as national health insurance schemes, can provide a safety net during a crisis that may prevent a family from slipping back into dependency on aid.

## Self-reliance is a systems-based concept

Defining self-reliance has prompted a reflection in the literature about the various systems on which people depend (eg. market systems, community systems, family systems, national systems or humanitarian systems, etc.) and the role that these systems play in enabling and sustaining self-reliance. When taken at face value, the term self-reliance can be seen as referring to the complete independence of individuals, households, or communities from any type of external support [62]. Some authors argue that the focus on self-reliance is a result of growing neoliberal development policy that expects refugees to only depend on market systems to meet their needs [46]. However, in the literature, it appears that the term is broadly recognized as not referring to a complete disconnect from external institutions or systems in the context of refugee response [46].

It is important therefore to recognize that self-reliance is also a system-based concept- being self-reliance is related to having access to and being able to use a variety of systems that support and enable one to meet their basic needs (i.e. market systems and trade, but also health, education and social protection systems and other public goods, community-based support systems and solidarity, etc.). This becomes particularly evident when considering local host populations in refugee contexts that are 'self-reliant' and all the systems upon which they depend to maintain that status. Inclusive access and effective use of these systems by refugees can be fostered by building and leveraging the capacities of refugees to do so, as well as by supporting, strengthening, or developing the functionality of the systems themselves. The fact that self-reliance is a system-based concept also has implications for the unit of analysis for self-reliance (eg. individuals, households, communities).

Looking at non-displaced populations prompts another observation that helps nuance the understanding of refugee self-reliance- there is no homogeneous level of self-reliance across all individuals in any given society [33; 52]. As in any population, within refugee populations there will always be some individuals that are more dependent on external support and some that are less so

[52]. For example, some individuals with special needs or protection concerns may never be able to achieve autonomy in meeting their basic needs. In fact, without sufficiently assessing needs, in some cases moving towards self-reliance oriented programming could conflict with protection and do no harm principles [57]. This has implications for targeting in self-reliance programming, something which is examined in more detail in *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts and Populations).*

## Self-reliance is also a context-specific concept

In gaining a nuanced understanding of self-reliance and self-reliance programming, it is also important to reflect on what an achievable standard of self-reliance for refugees could be in a given context and at a certain point in time. For example, self-reliance for an urban refugee in Jordan will look different from self-reliance for urban refugees in Kenya based on the differing economic and political conditions in each country [57]. The broader point to be made here is that, because self-reliance is a system-based notion, the potential for self-reliance of any individual, household, or community in a given area is directly dependent upon the existence, health, and functionality of the various existing support systems [12]. Differences in self-reliance by context are explored in more detail in *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts and Populations).*

In that regard, one important assumption behind self-reliance programming for refugees is that refugee populations are less self-reliant than other population groups, insofar as they have less access to the various systems that could help them meet their basic needs, such as market systems, social protection systems in the host state or community-based support systems [12]. At the same time, recognizing that in refugee-hosting areas, local host populations can often be as much or more vulnerable than their refugee neighbors, many agencies include host communities in their programming, with the aim to improve self-reliance outcomes for both hosts and refugees [116; 35; 51]. In that sense, it is also useful and important to consider the potential for self-reliance in a refugee-hosting area, encompassing both refugees and local host populations.

The vast majority of literature reviewed examines specific barriers that refugees face in accessing or using various support systems and subsequently in achieving self-reliance [157; 57; 97; 98; 16]. The most commonly cited barriers that refugees face compared to other population groups include the restrictive policy environment (access to documentation, right to work, freedom of movement, etc.) [157; 98; 16], but also social network effects (that are often lost or weakened during displacement) [16; 39; 81], as well as contextual effects on employability that affect labor market integration (mismatch of skills or lack of recognition/certification, language barriers, biased hiring practices, etc.) [157].

One way to consider the potential for self-reliance in a specific refugee-hosting area at a given point in time is to examine the level of self-reliance non-refugee population groups are able to achieve. Yet, there are limited discussions in the literature about the level of self-reliance of non-refugee populations in refugee-hosting areas, be they the host community or other forcibly displaced populations such as IDPs or asylum seekers.
Such comparisons could serve to set a useful standard for what could be an achievable level of self-reliance in a specific context and at a given point in time. Several authors emphasize that such a point of reference is much needed, in particular, to help manage expectations about the potential outcomes of self-reliance programming and help define realistic targets in various settings [25; 34].

This would also help clarify the objectives of self-reliance programming for refugees as twofold: (1) bridge the gap in self-reliance between refugee populations and local populations (refugee response), and (2) contribute to increasing the potential for self-reliance for all populations in a given refugee-hosting area (poverty alleviation). This distinction further highlights the difference in roles and responsibilities of different actors along the humanitarian-development nexus in self-reliance programming.

**Author's note**

As part of building a shared understanding of self-reliance, there are a number of important nuances that are worth highlighting.

A nuanced reading of UNHCR's 2005 definition of self-reliance highlights that there are key quality characteristics such as sustainability and dignity standards that distinguish self-reliance programming from broader humanitarian programming. This can provide useful guidance for designing and implementing programming and policies that will be effective in strengthening self-reliance of refugees.

Another important nuance is clarifying that refugee self-reliance is intended to reduce long-term dependence on international aid and not necessarily from all support systems that can contribute to helping people meet their basic needs. Self-reliant refugee households are not expected to be disconnected from family, community or other institutions and only depend on market systems to meet their basic needs. Instead, it is instructive to look at non-displaced populations living in the same areas as refugees to gain additional clarity and nuance on the concept by considering the systems that enable and sustain self-reliance such as general government safety nets, community safety nets or labor markets.

Our review also highlighted that context matters when setting objectives for self-reliance. It's important to consider self-reliance through two complementary perspectives: 1) the current level of self-reliance of a given household in a given context; and 2) the potential of the local context to support self-reliance.

We therefore recommend that discussions of refugee self-reliance in programming or policy should systematically take into account (1) the multidimensional nature of self-reliance; (2) the quality standards that are inherent to self-reliance programming; (3) the various local support systems that enable self-reliance; and (4) the potential of the local context to support self-reliance.

# PROGRAMMING FOR SELF-RELIANCE:

## COMPONENTS AND APPROACHES

# PROGRAMMING FOR SELF-RELIANCE: COMPONENTS AND APPROACHES

## WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOES NOT?

In this evidence brief, we present the findings from our review of the available literature on program components and approaches for refugee self-reliance: What types of programs exist to support self-reliance? What works best? What evidence is there around successes and failures to facilitate self-reliance for refugees?

## KEY FINDINGS

Self-reliance programs typically include economic and/or social inclusion interventions. Legal inclusion is increasingly acknowledged as an enabler of refugee self-reliance.

- Livelihood interventions are widely considered to be a central and necessary component of economic inclusion programming in support of refugee self-reliance. However, not all livelihood interventions for refugees are necessarily conducive to self-reliance. Rather, interventions that are market-based and aim at providing decent, sustainable and diversified livelihoods are considered more effective in supporting self-reliance. Emerging in the literature is also the importance of providing consumption support and promoting financial inclusion, alongside livelihoods support.
- Social inclusion programming for refugee self-reliance comprises multiple components: social empowerment - comprising building social capital and improving social cohesion - and extending social protection. These components differ in their objectives and in the needs they respond to, but all contribute to fostering self-reliance.
- Legal inclusion is typically pursued via advocacy efforts to improve the policy framework for refugees in contexts where it is restrictive, and via programming support - in particular legal assistance - to support refugees to claim their rights.

Implementing agencies use different combinations of these components when designing self-reliance programs. While the literature primarily discusses program components (e.g. livelihoods interventions, social network development, etc.) in isolation, it also highlights the importance of considering the needs of refugees holistically in program design.

There is increasing recognition that the level of self-reliance that refugees can achieve in a given context is highly dependent on the policy environment and the macroeconomic environment.

Beyond individual and household-level interventions, identifying structural barriers impacting refugees and designing system-level interventions that contribute to the broader development of refugee-hosting areas are also critical elements of self-reliance programming.

Advancing self-reliance depends upon the engagement of multiple stakeholders in program design and implementation, including humanitarian actors, local authorities, the private sector, civil society and development actors.

- Local authorities have a central role both at the national and the sub-national level to influence and create a more inclusive and enabling policy environment (especially in terms of the right to work and freedom of movement) that can support refugees to become self-reliant.
- There is also a recognition of the role that development actors can play in fostering the local economic development of refugee-hosting areas, for example by ensuring that foreign aid flows to these regions and by working with local authorities to ensure that national development plans take the needs of these areas into account.
- Finally, there is increased emphasis in the literature on the ways in which the private sector and civil society can each support refugee self-reliance, and the need to engage and partner with them in refugee self-reliance programming.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Implementing agencies should focus on responding to the holistic needs of refugees and promote social and legal inclusion alongside economic inclusion to achieve self-reliance. When doing so it is useful to draw inspiration from holistic frameworks such as the Graduation Approach originally developed by BRAC, which outlines four pillars - livelihoods promotion, financial inclusion, social protection, and social empowerment - and promotes self-reliance programming that leaves no one behind.

**Recommendation 2:** Implementing agencies should consider designing programs that strengthen self-reliance at different levels, including:
Considering the complementary objectives of (1) how to bridge the gap in self-reliance between refugee populations and local populations, and (2) how to contribute to increasing the potential for self-reliance for all populations in a given refugee-hosting area.
Using systems approaches to ensure that self-reliance programming for refugees is market-based and that design of interventions is cognizant of broader systemic and structural issues in the policy and macroeconomic environment.

**Recommendation 3:** Implementing agencies should systematically design self-reliance programs through strategic partnerships and in coordination with the refugees and their hosts, the local authorities, the private sector, civil society, and development actors. In particular, there is space to learn more about and potentially leverage the role diaspora networks can play in supporting refugee self-reliance.

**Recommendation 4:** All stakeholders should invest in generating evidence (e.g. systematic evaluations) on effective self-reliance programming components and approaches. This also includes generating evidence on timing (when in the response should we start programming towards self-reliance) and type of funding mechanisms conducive to supporting self-reliance programming (e.g. flexible, multi-year, cross-sector).

**Recommendation 5:** All stakeholders should support host governments that have made progress with inclusive policy frameworks for refugees to (1) further support the implementation of the policy changes; (2) share their experience with other governments that currently have more restrictive policy and legal frameworks through peer-learning opportunities.

**Recommendation 6:** Development actors and host governments should support local economic development in support of refugee self-reliance by directing adequate resources to refugee-hosting areas.

In this brief we discuss (1) program components, and (2) programmatic approaches (i.e. how these components are combined together) that enable self-reliance, based on the findings from our review of the literature. Despite the humanitarian community having years of experience implementing self-reliance programming, we have found little structured discussion in the literature of what works or efforts to distill best practices relating to program typologies that support self-reliance. Most resources are limited to descriptions or evaluations of individual projects in specific locations. In particular, the Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya has been extensively studied and is discussed in multiple resources. While some comparative case studies examine the impact of different policy environments, there is limited systematic comparison of the impact of different types of programming on self-reliance outcomes. As a result, it remains difficult to establish the broader applicability of the findings and best practices highlighted in various evaluations, beyond their impact on a specific project in a specific context and at a specific point in time.

However, regardless of which best practices are documented, when designing program interventions, it is important that these components should be adapted and tailored to specific contexts, populations and their circumstances. We discuss considerations for adapting and tailoring self-reliance in more detail in a different brief, *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations).*

# SELF-RELIANCE PROGRAMMING: COMPONENTS

The most-commonly cited definition of self-reliance is one coined by UNHCR, which highlights economic and social dimensions of the concept:

> *"Self-reliance is the social and economic ability of an individual, household or community to meet basic needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity."*

Both economic inclusion programming and social inclusion programming are central to improving refugee self-reliance [144; 128; 78]. Program components, lessons learned, and best practices for both are discussed in the sections below, insofar as the literature shows that they contribute to refugee self-reliance. That said, not all economic or social inclusion programming leads to self-reliance, and neither is usually sufficient on its own to enable self-reliance for most refugees [95; 81]. In addition, although not emphasized in existing definitions of self-reliance, the legal dimension of refugee self-reliance and the importance of programming towards legal inclusion for refugees to become self-reliant is repeatedly highlighted in the reviewed literature. See *Evidence Brief – Defining Self-Reliance* for a more in-depth look at the UNHCR definition and alternative definitions, as well as a broader discussion of what counts as self-reliance programming.

# Economic inclusion

Economic inclusion programming is defined by the World Bank as "a bundle of coordinated, multidimensional interventions that support individuals, households, and communities in their efforts to increase their incomes and assets [4]." While there is increasing recognition of the other dimensions of self-reliance, and that there are needs that cannot be addressed with money, economic inclusion is seen as crucial for meeting economic needs, as well as some social needs (e.g. health, safety etc.). In fact, the pursuit of self-reliance for refugees has long been viewed primarily through an economic lens. See *Evidence Brief – Defining Self-Reliance* for a discussion of the evolving understanding of self-reliance.

There is general agreement that helping refugees pursue income-generating activities through livelihoods programming is central to any self-reliance strategy, and consequently supporting livelihoods has often been the main or even sole focus of self-reliance programming [101; 115; 38]. Yet, it is interesting to note that the economic dimension of self-reliance programming is increasingly being referred to in the literature as "economic inclusion", signaling a general agreement that the approach is broader than just livelihoods, and also includes complementary elements such as financial inclusion or consumption support [38; 13; 141].

## Livelihoods programming

Several literature reviews have taken stock of lessons learned from livelihoods interventions implemented with refugee populations, including in relation to self-reliance programming [37; 90; 8]. In fact, access to livelihoods - be it through wage employment (employment in existing enterprises) or self-employment (entrepreneurship) - is the most studied aspect of self-reliance programming [121; 52; 120]. Various types and components of livelihoods interventions aimed at supporting refugee self-reliance are described at length in the literature [157; 124; 125]. In particular, there has historically been a strong focus on skills training and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs [68; 77]. Overall, livelihoods interventions are widely recognized as an essential component of self-reliance programming, to the point that self-reliance and livelihoods have sometimes been used interchangeably in the literature [38]. However, there is also increasing evidence that not all livelihoods programming is conducive to self-reliance, and on their own, livelihoods interventions are usually not sufficient to promote holistic self-reliance outcomes [78].

### Key components of livelihoods programming

Within self-reliance programming, key livelihood interventions include employment support and business support at the individual-level. Employment support to job-seekers and business support to entrepreneurs looking to start up Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are the most-commonly discussed livelihood interventions in the literature [64; 120].

Employment and business support have somewhat similar program models, insofar as they seek to match individuals with work opportunities, whether that is wage employment or self-employment. They both involve considerations regarding targeting, selection, and outreach of beneficiaries that balance vulnerability (i.e. level of need) and ability (i.e. likelihood of success) [4]. They both also typically include a sizable skills development component, although focused on different sets of skills (technical skills and soft skills related to a specific vocation, and/or business and entrepreneurship skills) [3].

Building skills that are transferable and relevant across different labor markets, is one of the ways in which self-reliance programming could also serve as a preparatory step to eventual durable solutions, which might include repatriation or resettlement, and consequently the need to adapt to a different labor market [73, 128].

In the literature, the importance of including supporting or complementary components to skills development is emphasized, with a focus on financial services (see also below the section on financial inclusion), the development of networks and market linkages for self-employment interventions, and employability services and concrete job linkages for wage employment interventions [18; 81]. Another notable lesson learned for livelihoods interventions is the benefit of including a component of individualized career counseling or mentoring [147, 70]. Such support has positive outcomes for entrepreneurs and business owners to receive feedback on a start-up or scale-up business plan and for job-seekers looking for wage employment to receive information and feedback on possible and desirable vocational choices [47].

Beyond individual-level livelihoods interventions, system-level approches, which aim at building specific labor market systems, entire value chains, or the business environment at large are increasingly gathering interest, especially because they open the possibility of programming for self-reliance at a larger scale, and have the potential to benefit both hosts and refugees [19, 101].

**Achieving self-reliance through market-based livelihoods**

Importantly, there are key characteristics that make some livelihoods interventions more suitable for self-reliance than others. See *Evidence Brief – Defining Self-Reliance* for a discussion of the quality standards inherent to the concept of self-reliance.

The literature shows that programs that focus on linking refugees with market-based livelihoods opportunities, and that correspond to present and long-term economic opportunities, are considered more effective for improving self-reliance [148, 101]. A good practice identified to design sustainable livelihoods interventions is the systematic undertaking and use of a market systems analysis that maps market actors, accounts for their existing dynamics, as well as considers the broader market environment, including support services, infrastructure, rules and regulations [101, 70]. This enables the design of livelihoods programs to select sectors and markets based on identifiable gaps between demand and supply, and decide on appropriate program tracks (wage employment, or self-employment) based on an informed analysis of the selected markets for goods and services or selected local labor markets, and the legal environment [148].

While there is consensus in the literature about the importance and usefulness of leveraging refugees' own preferences and existing skills in the design of livelihoods interventions [70, 101], there are also indications that it is important to focus on informing those preferences and project design appropriately through market analyses [73]. Refugees often have a more nuanced knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of local markets than aid organizations. But they may also lack the macro-economic analysis of which sectors and markets offer sustainable employment opportunities. In response, the dissemination and sharing of market information with refugees has been identified as a good practice, in particular when linked to career counseling [101]. Doing so can inform program design by accounting for target populations' preferences in training design after they have been informed about real labor market opportunities [101].

Livelihoods interventions aimed at supporting refugee self-reliance are increasingly targeted at contemporary jobs and livelihoods. For wage employment, this can mean focusing on developing in-demand skills, including training to boost digital literacy. Where the regulatory environment and existing infrastructure permits, pursuing digital and IT service-related employment opportunities can be effective in improving self-reliance of refugees because of the possibility of being home-based/working remotely, the access to potential global labor markets, and the potential for good wages [70, 40]. For self-employment, this can mean focusing, where possible, on business models that have the potential to reach markets beyond immediate local markets – since these can easily become saturated. That includes looking into online marketing and remote delivery services to extend potential markets and increase the likelihood of success of home-based businesses.

Yet, one cannot match refugees to jobs if job opportunities do not exist in the first place. Therefore, it can be productive to work with the private sector to create opportunities for refugee employment. This can be undertaken locally or more broadly and at a larger scale through the use of system-level livelihoods program models. The literature highlights a number of relevant system-level interventions including targeting specific market systems and working with lead firms – for example Multinational Corporations – by developing strategic partnerships around job creation [84] and working along entire value chains and increasing the market power of small producers by organizing them into cooperatives and creating linkages with retailers, exporters, or distributors, etc. [101].

**Quality standards for livelihoods programming**

Decent work is a critical aspect of livelihoods that support self-reliance [57]. However, not all livelihoods opportunities accessible to refugees stem from decent work opportunities. Rather, some livelihoods can include exploitative and negative coping strategies [78]. To counter this, there is evidence that it is important to systematically work on the supply-side (with job-seekers and with entrepreneurs) but also the demand-side of labor markets (with employers and with existing businesses) [82]. Doing so can help ensure that existing employment opportunities or newly-created opportunities accessible to refugees abide by the ILO's decent work standards. Recognizing that many refugees work in the informal economy, a significant challenge is extending checks and implementing guidance on decent work in informal labor markets. See *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations)* for more detail on best practices for informal labor markets.

Diversification of income sources is also an important element of strategies to strengthen and support self-reliance [51, 4]. It is useful to consider income diversification in the design of self-reliance programming at two different levels. First, at the area level, the literature points to lessons learned in terms of saturation of labor markets due to livelihoods programs that train refugees in a single trade in a given location [70, 101]. A related good practice is to build on the heterogeneity in existing skills among refugee populations. Many refugees already have employable skills, and they can be leveraged and integrated in program designs provided that appropriate time is dedicated to mapping these existing skill sets and finding creative ways to effectively use them [157], even when refugees do not have a written proof (e.g. certificate) of their competencies. See more on best practices around specific population characteristics in *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations).*

At the individual or household level, the diversification of skills and income sources, particularly when taking into account age, gender, and other considerations, improves self-reliance by enabling more resilient livelihoods in case of subsequent or compounding shocks [78]. The literature highlights that income diversification is a livelihoods strategy that is sometimes applied by refugees themselves at the household level and should be supported through appropriate program interventions [39, 50].

## Financial inclusion

Having access to financial products and services is increasingly recognized as essential to building refugees' ability to become self-reliant [141]. There is growing evidence that having the ability to receive, store, and spend money securely and flexibly significantly increases one's sense of security and well-being, as well as the capacity to appropriately plan for expenses over time [63]. Access to savings, loans, or credit can help smooth consumption if a shock occurs, and it can also serve to make small productive investments [58, 90]. As such, financial inclusion as part of self-reliance programming can also help increase refugees' resilience and the sustainability of their livelihoods strategies.

Yet, the literature highlights that a lack of knowledge, understanding, and trust in financial products and services is a barrier to its uptake at the individual-level [63, 90]. Financial literacy training for refugees helps address some of the fears about financial products and services [63].

Emerging best practices in financial inclusion include linking interventions that leverage both informal and formal financial mechanisms wherever feasible, relevant, and appropriate [4]. For example, an intervention could start with the set-up of informal financial services like Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) to build financial literacy, trust, and understanding. Successful participation in VSLAs can be increasingly leveraged to build credit history and linked to access to formal financial services like microfinance institutions, banking and loans.

At the system-level, many countries have policies that create impediments for refugees to hold formal bank accounts or access formal financial products and services, in particular with regards to the necessary identification and status documents to meet Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements. See the section on Legal Inclusion below, for a related discussion on programming to improve the policy environment of a host country.

Beyond the regulatory environment, financial inclusion of refugees in self-reliance programming will also depend upon the level of development of formal and informal financial systems locally, and on working with Financial Service Providers (FSPs) to ensure that appropriate financial services and products exist and are available and adapted to the needs of refugees. There are promising best practices around working with FSPs to increase their understanding of refugee populations and lower their product risk profiles, for example through a combination of credit guarantee facilities and screening of loan applicants that encourage lending to refugees while reducing risks of default [51].

## Consumption Support

There is a growing recognition that many refugees are not immediately ready to pursue income generating activities and therefore, livelihoods interventions are not always a suitable first step in self-reliance programming. Often, introducing a consumption support component prior to or alongside introducing skills development or income generation opportunities can ensure that refugees are better prepared to engage in livelihoods interventions. Doing so helps avoid the use of negative coping strategies while more decent, sustainable, and diversified livelihoods are being built [149, 38]. Similarly, it can also help with kick-starting the savings component of financial inclusion [4, 38]. Consumption support can either be provided in-kind or in cash [88]. However, there is an increasing move towards the use of cash [88]. There is ample evidence from the last 15 years related to the use of temporary Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) to cover basic needs as the first step of transition towards self-reliant livelihoods [4, 70, 125]. The International Rescue Committee is currently testing different models of layered services (eg. Cash only / Cash + services / Cash + livelihoods) to improve self-reliance outcomes for refugees as part of the Re:Build project in East Africa.

**Author's note**

The existing literature is rich in examples of program components contributing to economic inclusion. While each component in isolation can contribute to effectively building productive assets, we found that economic inclusion programming leading to self-reliance is in essence multi-dimensional: it combines financial and non-financial services for improved impact. For entrepreneurs and business owners, including a component of financial support (grants in-cash or in-kind or loan facilitation) is often critical, but so are components of other, non-financial business services (such as horizontal and vertical market linkages, legal support for business registration, etc). For job-seekers, including services that support direct job linkages (either through work-based learning, internships, apprenticeships, or through job placement, job matching, job fairs, etc.) is essential, as well as other services aimed at increasing employability (e.g. (re-)certification, legal support to access civil documentation, etc.). In addition, programs that combine consumption support and livelihoods services have demonstrated that it is possible for people who initially appear to lack the capacity or readiness to benefit from livelihoods programming, to thrive with the proper support and intervention. See below on holistic approaches for additional discussion on this point.

We also found that taking a systems-based approach is critical for effective economic inclusion programming. In particular, the decision to focus on a specific market should balance considerations about economic viability and dynamism with considerations about specific constraints and opportunities related to context and to target population. Refugees should not be trained in specific trades (like tailoring or hairdressing) just because that is the type of training that the organization has typically previously carried out in that area, or even simply because that corresponds to refugees' initial preferences. Livelihoods programming should unlock real, market-based opportunities to engage in an economic activity over time. The use of systems-thinking encourages the consideration of both demand-side and supply-side interventions to support sustainable livelihoods. It enables the diversification of livelihoods opportunities (e.g. grant inputs and resources to successful SMEs to provide them with the capital to expand and thereby increase the number of employees hired). It fosters work with current and potential employers to ensure that the job opportunities that exist are accessible to refugees. This includes working with employers on refugee rights and decent work standards awareness and on unbiased hiring practices. Finally, systems-based approaches help identify entry points into financial market systems to increase financial inclusion.

# Social inclusion

Although sometimes overlooked in the past, addressing social dimensions of refugee self-reliance and including components of social inclusion when designing programs is increasingly recognized as equally important to focusing on economic dimensions [106; 49]. Social inclusion is defined by the World Bank as "the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity." For the purpose of this study, social inclusion programming comprises the following components: social empowerment - comprising building social capital and improving social cohesion - and extending social protection. These aspects of social inclusion differ in their objectives and in the needs which they respond to, but all play a role in fostering self-reliance.

Forced displacement typically affects social relationships in three fundamental ways: (1) lost/ reconfigured social capital (social networks, relationships, etc.); (2) lack of social cohesion, or tensions between refugee and local populations often related to competition for limited resources, and (3) weakened community resilience mechanisms and social protection/safety nets [18; 28; 38]. Each of these areas has the potential to pose a barrier to self-reliance for refugees, or if addressed, to strengthen and promote it [18; 28; 38]. In *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations),* we offer a more detailed discussion of how youth in particular are affected by the lack or loss of social inclusion.

## Social Capital

Social capital, or access to social networks, membership in formal and informal groups, and/or relationships of trust, plays an important role in enabling self-reliance [18; 49; 48]. Social networks and connections are important sources of information and play a role in building trust and credibility, and as such they can be critical in finding a job or being able to effectively engage in trade [48]. Moreover, social networks can also provide access to informal safety nets that strengthen resilience to shocks (e.g. charity from local church groups etc.) [49]. Finally, with social inclusion and tighter, richer social networks also comes a sense of well-being, participation, and belonging to a community [48].

There are typically two ways in which the social capital of refugees can be built in refugee response programs: first, through interventions that focus on building one-on-one relationships (such as mentoring, coaching etc.), which has proven to be effective in increasing labor market integration, or second, through interventions that look at collective approaches and strengthening group relationships (such as working with existing civil society organizations, youth groups, etc.), which has shown promise in terms of community-building, participation, and social empowerment [70].

Despite a growing base of literature that highlights the role and importance of networks in supporting refugee self-reliance, there are not many examples of diverse program interventions that specifically seek to develop, support and/or leverage the multiple social networks available to refugees [48]. Leveraging local refugee networks is recognized as important, but with still little research on how informal solidarity and support systems exist and operate in different contexts [117, 18]. Examples of success in the literature show that network-strengthening programming can be especially effective for social empowerment and financial inclusion (e.g. through setting up VSLAs), but also to some extent for livelihoods development and social protection (e.g. through remittances from diaspora networks) [115].

***Role of diaspora networks***

*Social capital in the form of remittances has been identified as a critical source of income for many refugees, and the literature highlights that support for refugees from diaspora communities can play a sustaining role in the face of shocks [18, 39]. At the same time, there is also ambivalence in the literature around whether remittances should be considered as an unstable, undesirable form of support (as it creates a dependency on external support) or whether it should rather be viewed as an informal social safety net (similar to reliance on other community-based mechanisms) [14, 103]. There are also some suggestions in the literature that the diaspora could be engaged in self-reliance programming through other channels for more sustainable outcomes, and in particular as private sector partners in livelihoods interventions to uplift refugee economies [64, 39]. But there is still little evidence or examples of such programming that are extensively discussed in the literature to date. It would be worthwhile investing in better understanding the role of diaspora networks in advancing refugee self-reliance, as beyond their role in providing a safety net (via remittances schemes), they lead advocacy campaigns, are a source of investment and serve as mentors.*

## Social Cohesion

There is broad recognition that relations with members of the host community can positively or negatively impact the ability of refugees to become and remain self-reliant [38; 128; 43]. Consequently, the literature emphasizes that self-reliance programming should also include components aimed at strengthening social cohesion between refugees and host populations [43].

The most common approach to social cohesion interventions in self-reliance programming is to include host communities as program participants alongside refugees [125; 106, 42]. The objectives of this approach are to strengthen relationships and understanding between both groups, and also to increase self-reliance outcomes for both groups, by taking an area-based approach to programming [144, 94]. The literature studying the success of such efforts on social cohesion, however, remains very thin. Beyond inclusive targeting, there is also mention of conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding techniques, particularly those that are community-led, incorporated into self-reliance programming [5, 58]. There is discussion of the effectiveness of such techniques in both conflict and non-conflict refugee settings to create inter-communal dialogue and mitigate tensions with the host community [42, 128]. However, the literature also highlights failures in attempts to build social cohesion between refugees and host populations, even where those were explicitly identified as key program components, such as in Kalobeyei [19; 20].

**Author's note**

Promoting social empowerment should systematically be considered in the design of self-reliance programming for refugees, as in many circumstances, it does not occur spontaneously. Considering how an individual or a household fits into a given community is paramount to fostering their self-reliance.

Though the literature does not extensively document the positive effects of building social capital, practice has since long demonstrated that it is a central component of an effective livelihoods approach (e.g. DFID's Sustainable Livelihood Framework). In particular, it is important to note that

some critical program components such as mental health and psycho-social support, that are recognized as good practice in building social capital at individual level, are not well-documented in the literature and as such have not been emphasized in this evidence review. Documenting the effectiveness of such interventions should be prioritized in future research and evaluations.

Likewise, it is essential to highlight that active participation in community networks has the potential to both build social capital and ensure social cohesion. Doing so requires understanding informal solidarity schemes (e.g. self-help groups, charity channels, etc.) and supporting them, before creating new ones. It is also crucial to amplify the recommendations of refugee-led organizations based on the needs they have identified within the communities in which they work and consider supporting and partnering with these organizations.

Self-reliance programming for refugees should take into account all of the different communities that refugees may be part of, including refugee networks but also the host community groups. It should actively cultivate networks with members of the host population, especially in terms of access to and management of productive resources. Conflict sensitivity should be built into self-reliance programming as there are likely to be specific conflict dynamics within refugee communities, and between host and refugee communities, especially in areas where productive resources are scarce. For more information on inter-community relations, also see *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations)*.

## Social Protection

In the literature, social protection is frequently highlighted as a key enabler of self-reliance, especially in recent years [18; 77]. While there are multiple definitions of social protection, it is seen as broadly encompassing three components: support and care social services and programs to access them, employment policies and safety nets and transfers.

Access to essential (public) social services, including health care and education, has long been seen as a critical component to meeting basic needs [42]. A lack of adequate financial resources can be a barrier to accessing these services [42]. However, in many contexts, the broader systems that provide social services may be weak, overloaded or non-existent [47]. In addition, in some host states, refugees may be excluded from accessing social services [108]. To address this, self-reliance programming can include strengthening local social services where they exist or contributing to developing them where they do not [77]. Additionally, self-reliance programming can focus on ensuring that available social services are inclusive and accessible to refugees and take into consideration protection concerns of persons with specific needs [77]. A typical example of this kind of programming is support to local health care centers to ensure availability and accessibility to quality, affordable basic health care services for refugees [35] and ensure refugees know what services they have the right to use. Several refugee-hosting countries (such as Kenya) have begun to expand health coverage for refugees, but it remains an area for further growth and development. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the debate about access of refugees to health services and health insurance coverage and has also presented an opportunity for advocacy to governments around more inclusive social protection systems [40].
When linked to self-reliance programming, social protection components also include specific interventions such as humanitarian cash transfers, as well as broader efforts to advocate for

expanding, extending, or diversifying coverage of existing social protection systems so that they are more inclusive of refugees [125; 77]. The increasing use of cash transfers in self-reliance programming has also sparked discussions about how to avoid establishing parallel and concurrent structures by linking these interventions to formal social protection systems, or using cash transfers to shadow informal social protection systems and possibly build systems where they do not exist [42, 125]. These discussions also aim at ensuring that cash transfers do no harm to formal and informal existing solidarity mechanisms [117].

Discussions of social protection components in self-reliance therefore also relate to debates about the respective roles of humanitarian and development actors in self-reliance programming [88], as well as to discussions about durable solutions for refugees and in particular local integration [37]. See *Evidence Brief – Defining Self-Reliance* for a more detailed discussion of self-reliance and durable solutions.

**Author's note**

In recent years there has been an increased recognition of the need to link refugees to social protection systems where feasible and relevant, with a view to promoting self-reliance, building resilience to shocks and protecting self-reliance gains.

The public health crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the risks of not having refugees enrolled in social protection systems, for host governments (increased public health risks), for stakeholders engaged in refugee response (increased humanitarian need), and most of all for refugees themselves, in terms of compounding shocks impacting their progression towards becoming self-reliant.

This makes for a strong and timely case for self-reliance programming for refugees to actively promote the increased inclusiveness of social protection systems. In this respect, different interventions can be considered, including technical assistance to and capacity building of service providers to cater for the specific needs of refugee populations, or information provision to the refugees themselves about their rights and obligations.

## Legal inclusion

In addition to the economic and social dimensions of self-reliance, the literature refers to how the legal framework pertaining to refugees can act as an enabler or an inhibitor on their paths to self-reliance. Overall, the literature suggests that depending on how inclusive or restrictive the policy framework is for refugees in a given country, the legal dimension of self-reliance programming can be more advocacy-based or activity-based [34].

When the policy framework is restrictive and where the rights of refugees (to work, to move, to own property) are limited, it is important to work on policy influence and use advocacy and capacity exchange with duty bearers alongside direct programming to refugees [77, 90, 8]. Existing research on civil and legal regulations and how they impact refugees' ability to become self-reliant in specific contexts is instructive for programming [113]. For example, it provides insights on the domains of law

on which advocacy should focus, which includes labor laws in countries like Jordan where work is restricted to certain sectors for refugees, freedom of movement in particular in countries like Kenya where there are 'closed' encampment policies, asylum laws in countries like Turkey where obtaining civil documentation can carry a heavy administrative burden, property rights (and in particular the owning of land) in countries like Rwanda where refugees are mostly hosted in rural areas, but also increasingly basic financial freedoms (such as having a bank accounts, etc) in countries like Nigeria where access to the formal financial system is a major gap between refugees and host populations.

Where the policy framework is more inclusive and enabling, the focus can shift to including provision of legal aid and legal support in self-reliance programs [96]. While they can be implemented on their own, legal aid components are often successfully embedded into livelihoods interventions [9]. Related good practice includes the provision by specialized staff of legal counseling and / or legal assistance around documentation or business registration [96; 101]. It also encompasses more broadly the dissemination of legal information and awareness raising, such that individuals and groups know their rights and can make informed decisions for themselves [43]. Typically, legal information dissemination can support self-reliance programming by helping refugees navigate administrative environments that can be complex (and sometimes in a foreign language), as well as by providing them with general awareness about legal matters that can have a significant importance regarding their situation, such as labor laws and trade regulations [43] or process to get their diplomas and certifications recognized. Awareness-raising on legal matters has also proven to be effective when working with potential employers on decent work standards and inclusive hiring practices and can promote more inclusive and decent work opportunities for refugees [43].

**Protection & Self-Reliance Programming**

In the literature, addressing the policy environment through programming is often formulated in terms of the role for protection in self-reliance programming – either through advocacy relating to laws and policies (right to work, refugee status, freedom of movement, etc.), or through legal aid and activities that help refugees navigate existing rules and regulations (asylum, documentation, etc.).

The importance of protection work and the need for protection actors to be involved in the design and implementation of self-reliance programming is also mentioned in relation to social protection and the access and / or provision of social and care services [149, 18]. By contrast, we have found little mention in the literature of protection work within self-reliance programming that speaks to individual differences in vulnerabilities and to protection risks. In particular, there are surprisingly few lessons learned about self-reliance programming for individuals with special needs (with the exception possibly of the literature around the Graduation Approach that discusses the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the ultra-poor) [80, 147]. There is also little evidence overall about good practices for self-reliance programming and protection in terms of age, gender and diversity. Overall, we find a gap in the literature in terms of studying how protection work in self-reliance programming differs from protection work in other types of humanitarian programs (such as emergency or 'care and maintenance' programs).

# SELF-RELIANCE PROGRAMMING: APPROACHES

## Holistic approaches

Implementing agencies have taken a variety of approaches when selecting and combining the various components discussed in the first section of this brief to design self-reliance programs [70; 149]. For some time, the focus has been to take single-sector approaches to self-reliance programming, such as livelihoods, education, or health [149]. However, there is a growing consensus in the literature that appropriate and successful approaches for self-reliance programming are cross-sectoral and holistic [33].

Holistic approaches take into account the interdependencies and interplays of the different dimensions of self-reliance [144; 9]. These approaches consider a range of coordinated cross-sectoral services offered either by a single agency or by a consortium of agencies as particularly effective for improving self-reliance outcomes [80]. Typically, a holistic approach will involve multi-sectoral programming at an area-level, including through referral pathways across various activities [84]. For example, RefugePoint's Self-Reliance Runway approach, which provides a 'one-stop shop' of coordinated services to address housing, food, healthcare, psychosocial counseling, education, livelihoods for highly vulnerable refugees in Nairobi, Kenya, is an example of a holistic approach to self-reliance programming [123].

A notable aspect of most of the effective approaches to self-reliance programming discussed in the literature relates to the notion of 'graduating' from aid [107; 70]. 'Graduation' is the point that refugees reach when in theory they no longer need assistance from refugee-specific programs [107]. Insofar as self-reliance can be defined as "independence from international assistance", self-reliance could be viewed as the state achieved when graduating from assistance.

While different agencies take varying approaches to graduation programming for self-reliance, most are inspired by the Graduation Approach pioneered by BRAC and used extensively in anti-poverty programming in development contexts [147]. The Graduation Approach is built on four pillars: social protection, livelihoods promotion, financial inclusion and social empowerment, which can be adapted and combined in different ways based on local contexts and needs [147]. The Graduation Approach has been rigorously evaluated, mostly in non-displacement contexts, and is widely considered to be effective in increasing socio-economic resilience for those living in extreme poverty [147].

The four pillars of the Graduation Approach relate closely to the various components of social and economic inclusion that have been identified as relevant and effective for self-reliance programming in the first section of this brief. This suggests that when holistically selected and suitably integrated, these components could prove effective in helping refugees reach a point where they are ready to graduate from assistance. In the last 10 years, UNHCR and a number of agencies have adapted the Graduation Approach to refugee settings (See below: Self-reliance & the Graduation Approach). See also *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations)* for a detailed look at adapting the four pillars of graduation in different contexts and for different population groups.

Despite the rising interest in holistic programming, the intensive and high-touch nature of these approaches in practice raises questions about cost effectiveness, value for money, and scalability. This also links to debates about short-term humanitarian funding cycles that are incongruent with the multi-year nature of holistic programs, as well as a recognition that humanitarian financing is primarily sector-based and not set-up to support intensive and/or front-loaded integrated programs.

**Self-reliance & the Graduation Approach**

In 2014, Trickle Up and UNHCR piloted an adaptation of the Graduation Approach (GA), primarily aimed at ultra-poor refugees in urban settings. The GA is made up of a holistic, timebound, integrated and sequenced set of interventions and is focused on refugee households that are living in extreme poverty. Crucially, it provides a framework for sequencing program components related to the four pillars that can help move refugees to a point where they no longer need assistance to meet their basic needs.

Following positive results from the pilot, the GA is being widely adopted as a holistic program model for refugee self-reliance. For example, the Poverty Alleviation Coalition (PAC), a coalition made up of 15 INGOs and co-convened by UNHCR and the World Bank's Partnership for Economic Inclusion (PEI), has adopted the GA as its program model. The Coalition seeks to alleviate poverty and increase the self-reliance, economic and social inclusion of refugees and host communities by sustainably increasing income opportunities.

It is important however to note that the GA was designed for refugees living in extreme poverty, who require an intensive range of services and support in order to move towards self-reliance. Because the GA is the program model for self-reliance that has been the most extensively reviewed in the literature, we use it across the different briefs as an example and as a point of reference for self-reliance programming. However, it does not mean that it is the only existing or successful program model for refugee self-reliance, nor that this specific approach is necessarily desirable in all refugee contexts, for all refugee populations, or for all individuals within populations.

**Author's note**

Self-reliance is a multidimensional concept and as such there are various dimensions to self-reliance programming, relating to different sectors of humanitarian and development assistance. While specific sectoral interventions may contribute to improving one or more aspects of self-reliance, evidence suggests that only focusing on interventions in a single sector will likely be insufficient to support most refugees to become self-reliant. It is, however, important to note that holistic program models are not yet systematically documented, and efforts should be made towards documenting the impact of integrated programming in promoting self-reliance.

In addition, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to self-reliance programming. Broadly, it is helpful to consider approaches like the Graduation Approach that provide a useful holistic framework, which can then be adapted to meet local conditions and the needs of specific populations. This does not necessarily suggest though that every agency undertaking self-

reliance programming must shift towards holistic interventions. Instead, it encourages working in a coordinated manner across sectors to ensure that refugees receive support that is tailored to their needs and can lead to improved self-reliance.

## Multi-stakeholder engagement

The success of self-reliance programming is dependent to a large extent on the operating environment in the host country [102]. In particular, there is increasing recognition that the level of self-reliance that refugees can achieve in a given context depends highly on the policy environment and the macroeconomic environment [102; 155; 40]. Beyond individual and household-level interventions, self-reliance programming also includes identifying the structural barriers that impact refugees, and designing the system-level interventions that contribute to addressing them. This implies roles and responsibilities for actors working in the broader ecosystem, including host governments, development actors, and the private sector, towards creating an environment that enables self-reliance [54].

### Programming at the humanitarian-development nexus

Humanitarian programming aimed at improving refugee self-reliance is directly linked to efforts by other actors towards local economic development and poverty alleviation in refugee-hosting areas [35; 155]. In part, this relates to creating conditions in the macroeconomic environment that can enable meaningful economic inclusion for refugees [155]. As such, the literature highlights the complementary nature of self-reliance programming undertaken typically by humanitarian actors (refugee response), most often implemented on a short-term basis, and the work more traditionally assigned to development actors (poverty alleviation) which has longer timeframes [88]. Much of the traditional development work aims at addressing structural issues that affect the population at large (refugees and hosts alike), often both at the national and the sub-national levels [59]. In particular, development actors can facilitate local economic development by influencing the amount of development aid that flows into refugee-hosting areas, as well as work with authorities on general macroeconomic policies related to trade, employment, and taxation, all of which create an enabling environment for refugee self-reliance programming [59; 8].

The literature emphasizes that refugee-hosting areas are often in the first place less economically developed than other regions in the same country, particularly for rural or camp-based displacement settings [127, 90]. For refugee self-reliance programming to be effective over the long-term, beyond bridging the gap between refugees and host populations, there is therefore a need for interventions that affect system-level change of the local economic environment. For humanitarian actors, this can mean including system-level components in their interventions, such as the models of livelihoods programming discussed above aimed at affecting market systems, value chains and the business environment more generally [101]. For development actors, this can mean working with authorities on national development plans that effectively channel adequate support and appropriate resources to refugee-hosting areas [68]. In other words, there is a critical interplay between the microeconomic approach (support to individuals, households and communities and their livelihoods) and the macroeconomic approach to self-reliance programming (regional infrastructure development, and in particular the development of critical support functions to market systems with employment potential) [101].

Beyond local economic development, another aspect of building a conducive macroeconomic environment for self-reliance that typically falls under the expertise of development actors is the work that can be done with host states around the adoption of policy and legislative frameworks that are more business-friendly, such as tax incentives and simplified registration procedures [96]. While these policies are not refugee-specific (contrary to the policy framework discussed in the previous section), they still critically contribute to increasing the potential level of self-reliance achievable by both refugees and host populations.

## Programming with local civil society and the private sector

The importance of partnerships and coordination between multiple stakeholders in self-reliance programming is highlighted in the literature [64]. In fact, self-reliance programming can arguably only be achieved through such strategic partnerships, at the scale required to match the needs. Yet, many of the self-reliance programs reviewed still do not systematically or effectively build on the possible synergies between the multiple stakeholders working in the same area of operation. Historically, the focus of partnerships for self-reliance programming has primarily been on the interplay of humanitarian and development work [88]. Over the years, the literature has increasingly emphasized the importance for these actors to work closely with local authorities, and to do so both at the national and the sub-national levels [108; 71]. A good practice highlighted in the literature in terms of working in partnership with the public sector is to design programs that effectively take into account, build on and contribute to support national development plans and efforts [68]. This is also expected to increase the ability of the aid community to positively influence existing policy and legislative frameworks so that they become more inclusive of refugees and more responsive to their needs [68].

In addition to working with host states to address broader structural issues, the literature addresses the importance of developing strategic partnerships with civil society actors as well as with the private sector. These partnerships are in particular seen as key to achieving more sustainable self-reliance outcomes [73]. A related good practice is to work more systematically with local partners, and to adopt, wherever feasible, relevant and appropriate, facilitative approaches in the implementation of self-reliance programming where local actors take the lead [44; 42]. In line with the localization agenda, the implementation of social inclusion programming components through various types of local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and their active participation in program design is highlighted in many resources as a promising, though still under-developed, practice [71; 42].

Beyond sustainability, partnerships with the private sector also show promise in increasing the scale of self-reliance programming including through livelihoods programming and large-scale employment commitments [73], financial inclusion programming and high leverage over loans through credit guarantees [27, 89], and even alternative and blended financing models for self-reliance programs [27].

**Author's note**

There is a growing recognition that in addition to direct programming at the individual or household level, it is important to understand the broader ecosystem that has the potential to enable or create impediments to self-reliance outcomes for refugees.

Taking a systems-approach to self-reliance programming helps identify structural barriers

impacting refugees and the broader development of refugee-hosting areas. As a result, it can inspire programming that contributes to system-level change needed to achieve refugee self-reliance.

Taking a systems-approach can also help identify a wider range of actors in the ecosystem that can positively influence system-level change, by impacting the policy environment, contributing to local economic development or by improving social inclusion. As a result, it can facilitate effective coordination and complementarity in the work of these various stakeholders and encourage strategic partnerships and more facilitative approaches that will in turn increase the sustainability and scale of self-reliance outcomes.

# PROGRAMMING FOR SELF-RELIANCE:

## CONTEXTS AND POPULATIONS

# PROGRAMMING FOR SELF-RELIANCE: CONTEXTS AND POPULATIONS

## WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOES NOT?

In this evidence brief, we present the findings from our review of the available literature on refugee self-reliance: what types of programming work best to facilitate self-reliance in specific contexts and for specific populations?

## KEY FINDINGS

Achieving self-reliance doesn't look the same across all contexts or for all populations. Consequently, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to self-reliance programming. The literature emphasizes that contextualized and tailored designs are paramount to quality programming. Yet, there is relatively little research about self-reliance programming that is specifically segmented by differences in context and population. In addition, most of the existing literature focuses on documenting barriers and opportunities, rather than good programming practices. This makes it challenging to draw conclusions about whether effective program models can be applied to other contexts or populations that share similar characteristics.

Nevertheless, the literature does identify several key considerations by context and population group that practitioners can use to inform self-reliance program design:

- **Camp settings:** Noting that camps are often located in resource-scarce areas with limited potential for self-reliance for both displaced populations and their hosts, programming approaches that benefit all such as promoting local economic development and social cohesion are vital.
- **Rural settings:** In addition to supporting agricultural-based livelihoods in rural settings, it is critical to focus on diversifying livelihoods opportunities, including through investing in value chain development. Beyond livelihoods, facilitating access to enablers of holistic self-reliance that are often less prevalent in rural areas, such social and financial services, is also important.
- **Urban settings:** Programming should account for, and when possible, address structural issues in urban markets, including through systems-level interventions that can increase the number and quality of wage employment opportunities for refugees. In addition, designing interventions that support refugees to navigate the complexity of urban systems to access services, is crucial.

- **Informal markets:** Recognizing that informal markets are often easier for refugees to access but may present poorer working conditions and a lack of security, an important element of self-reliance programming is promoting decent jobs and livelihoods, such as through the promotion of workers' rights and access to social protection.
- **Developed economies:** In contexts with more developed and regulated economies, a central element of self-reliance programming is making the social protection and financial systems more inclusive of and accessible to refugees.
- **Gender:** It is imperative that program design accounts for traditional social and cultural norms around gender roles as well as considers how displacement may have shifted these roles in a household. In addition, ownership (or lack of) over household assets affects the potential of becoming self-reliant and must be considered in program design.
- **Youth:** Recognizing that refugee youth often spend their formative years in displacement, key components of programming should focus on continuity of education and opportunities to build social networks and develop critical skills.
- **Highly vulnerable and refugees with disabilities:** Program design should include approaches that ensure accessibility of services and promote participation in activities for highly vulnerable refugees as well as refugees with disabilities, including through the involvement of a social worker or case manager.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Practitioners should systematically consider the specificities of displacement contexts, e.g. location/geography (in camp and out-of-camp, rural and urban), socio-economic (low-, middle- and high-income settings) and political (restrictive versus enabling refugee policies) when designing and implementing self-reliance programs for refugees.

**Recommendation 2:** Practitioners should design self-reliance programs that take AGD-inclusive approaches and develop program models that are tailored to the needs of populations with specific age, gender and diversity characteristics.

**Recommendation 3:** Practitioners and researchers should focus on designing, implementing and testing systems-based approaches that have the potential to expand the reach of programming efforts and have large scale impact.

**Recommendation 4:** All stakeholders should prioritize generating robust evidence to fill evidence gaps on what works to help refugees become and stay self-reliant in specific contexts and for specific groups.

In this brief we discuss types of self-reliance programming for (1) different contexts; and (2) different populations. In our review of the literature, we have not found any attempts at providing a systematic overview of best practices for adapting the various components of self-reliance programming to specific characteristics of the implementation context and/or to the target populations. As such, the specificity of the examples discussed across various pieces in the literature makes it difficult to isolate which learnings can be scaled up or reproduced in different settings [38; 125; 81]. Similarly, the multitude of elements that vary from program to program makes it challenging to attribute the cause of a program success or failure either to the adequacy of the program model in general or to its appropriateness in a specific context. Part of these challenges stem from differing conceptions of what successful self-reliance outcomes look like, as well as from the lack of a common evaluation framework to compare different self-reliance programs across contexts. Another limitation is that the current evidence base on self-reliance focuses on a few specific contexts and target populations, which in turn influences which program approaches and objectives are most-commonly discussed and accepted as best practices.

Nevertheless, we can still learn from experiences about what works in different contexts and with different population groups. In order to do so, in this brief, we segmented the variation in context and population along specific characteristics and identified findings and good practices that are noted for each in the literature. Considering each of these contexts separately helps to identify specific characteristics, which in turn can inform how program components and approaches can be adapted more broadly. Rather than focusing on specific examples, this brief strives to extract good practices that are highlighted in the literature for a given context or a given population, using the holistic approaches identified in *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Components & Approaches)* as a reference.

# DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

The literature covers examples of self-reliance programming in different contexts: displacement contexts (in-camp and out-of-camp, rural and urban), socio-economic contexts (low-income hosting countries and middle-income hosting countries), and political contexts (enabling and restrictive legal and policy environments). Across the contexts considered, there are two elements that vary: (1) the local potential for self-reliance, which affects the level of self-reliance of both refugees and the host population; and (2) the specific challenges and opportunities that the context presents for refugees to improve their self-reliance [59; 54]. This section outlines both elements for each type of context, and emphasizes the associated best practices for improving self-reliance either for refugees specifically or for both refugees and the host population within the parameters of the local economic environment.

It is important to note that the findings highlighted below should be considered with nuance. While context characteristics are presented and discussed in a segmented manner for the sake of clarity, we acknowledge that in practice each context of implementation will correspond to a certain overlap of these various displacement, socio-economic and political aspects. This document aims to help practitioners identify which elements in their context analysis should guide their design of self-reliance programs. In addition, the good practices highlighted are not exhaustive and reflect the learnings that were emphasized across multiple sources in the literature.

# Displacement contexts

## Refugees in camps and settlements

Much of the literature focuses on camp settings and discusses the differences between encampment conditions across countries in terms of mobility and the host country's broader legal and policy framework. This section looks at the main characteristics that distinguish the context for refugees residing within and outside camp settings.

Unless camps completely restrict outside movement, populations in camps and settlements often have access to formal and informal markets in surrounding areas, where they have opportunities to interact with host populations and the local economy. However, these markets are often relatively thin compared to the markets that out-of-camp refugees are able to access [73]. With limited opportunities available, refugees can be forced to compete for jobs inside camps, many of which are low-skilled and low-paying [42]. The literature highlights that there are high levels of variation among refugee households living in camps in terms of their access to (internal and external) social networks and social capital [18]. There is, however, a gap in the literature regarding how these differences in social empowerment can be addressed and / or leveraged through social inclusion program components.

Most camps are established in resource-scarce environments, typically in remote, rural areas [3, 65]. As a result, the general potential for self-reliance of the entire area – for both refugees and host populations - is also typically lower than where many refugees would likely choose to settle if they were not living in a camp [98]. As a result, economic competition with host communities is also more common, in particular around the governance and management of already scarce natural resources as well as in terms of accessing limited available jobs in labor markets [13]. Furthermore, refugees that live in camps are more likely to be targeted and stigmatized by the local populations than refugees living out-of-camps because they are more concentrated, more visible, and because they benefit from a range of social services, often for free, that locals may not be able to access [42, 73]. Additionally, a critical difference between programming for refugees in camp settings compared to out-of-camp settings is that within camps there are multiple organizations involved in service provision, usually as part of a visible and highly coordinated structure.

By contrast, the main characteristic of out-of-camp settings for refugees is enhanced freedom of movement [108; 105]. The ability to move freely is highly relevant in terms of adapting the design of self-reliance programs, both in terms of outreach, but also in terms of market access and the capacity to promote different types of livelihoods activities [98]. Compared to refugees in camps, refugees residing outside of camps have access to more robust markets (often in cities and semi-urban areas) [77]. This is in fact one of the main reasons that refugees migrate out-of-camps, and in particular to cities [42]. At the same time, those who leave camp settings typically incur additional costs, such as rent, food and other basic needs [77].

**Author's Note**

Experience has demonstrated that despite the constraints inherent to camp environments, there exist many opportunities to strengthen camp economies in support of self-reliance, e.g. relief substitution - that is, production of aid products, previously imported from outside camps, by the refugees themselves; designing projects aimed at growing and diversifying the in-camp

economy; skills development interventions for refugee incentive workers for advancement as NGO, UN or local government staff. Increasingly, economic inclusion programs are also adapted to movement restrictions considering online opportunities, remote marketing and delivery, etc.

Beyond the camps themselves, and given that encampment areas tend to be economically underdeveloped, a good practice is to design interventions that foster local economic development more broadly. We discuss investments in refugee-hosting areas in more detail in *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Components & Approaches).* Moreover, including a percentage of host community members in refugee-focused humanitarian programs and services is essential in building acceptance, social cohesion, reducing discrimination and xenophobia and positively supporting win-win partnerships across community groups.

Self-reliance programming increasingly includes a consumption support component that is instrumental in supporting refugees who do not have access to free social services (either because they live out-of-camps or because the services provided in camps are insufficient) and struggle to meet their basic needs, let alone invest in livelihoods development. Consumption support can be provided directly by humanitarian practitioners - in cash, voucher or in-kind, depending on feasibility and appropriateness - but implementing agencies can also play a role in linking with host government social protection mechanisms (e.g. via advocacy for inclusive social protection policies).

## Refugees in rural settings

Historically, refugee response programming has been most often implemented in rural or semi-urban contexts where refugee camps and settlements were established. Yet, the recent literature on self-reliance discusses rural settings (especially out-of-camp) significantly less than other settings. This may be due in part to the fact that the literature on refugee self-reliance from the 1960s to the 1990s mostly focused on rural settings, while this evidence review includes resources published after January 1, 2005, which increasingly focus on other contexts. Nevertheless, there are a number of important lessons that have been learned over time from refugee self-reliance programming in rural settings.

Self-reliance programming in rural contexts most significantly differs from non-rural contexts in the area of livelihoods. Jobs in rural areas tend to be limited to a few sectors (agriculture, construction, factory work or civil service, etc.) [39]. Although agricultural livelihoods such as crop, livestock, forests, and fisheries are critical in rural areas, it is good practice to expand economic inclusion efforts beyond these industries [4; 33; 39]. Diversifying opportunities by also promoting non-agricultural livelihoods (such as manufacturing, processing, repairing of manufacturing goods, trading, transportation, construction and all other service activities done on a commercial basis in the rural economy) helps build the resilience of refugee populations [42]. This includes focusing on adding value to the frontline producers' products (e.g. processing or milling the crop seed locally, growing higher-grade crops - including crops that have potential for exports) and investing in value chain development, considering the myriad of support services and inputs agricultural and livestock interventions require (e.g. veterinarians, crop extension workers, livestock feed supply sources, transportation networks, processing facilitating, marketing techniques etc.) [115]. When designing programs promoting resilient agricultural livelihoods, another good practice is to consider

subsistence farming approaches, alongside a commercial approach that links crop production to real market opportunities [4].

Because the interdependence of community members – be they refugees or hosts – is generally high in rural and remote settings (as there may not be as many 'outside' options to trade or source essential goods and services), social capital is typically expected to be strong on average in rural areas [18, 36, 39]. In terms of programming that builds social capital, and in particular insofar as it is related to economic inclusion, this translates into good practices for agricultural value chain development such as (1) reinforcing local potential for economic inclusion through stronger social cohesion with the development or strengthening of existing horizontal linkages (such as increasing the market power of local producers by helping them organize into cooperatives or other business associations) [45], or (2) building vertical linkages with market actors outside of the immediate local community (such as connecting local producers to urban retailers or exporters for their products). A critical issue for refugee self-reliance in rural and semi-urban contexts is the degree to which refugees have access to land and other natural resources. The development of rural livelihoods such as agriculture and pastoralism directly depends on the availability of and access to suitable land and other natural resources [39, 65]. When the land available is insufficient, many refugees engage in unsustainable farming practices, such as encroaching on land that they have no right to use or over-intensive grazing and cultivation [39, 14]. These types of activities can take a toll on the environment by causing deforestation, water pollution, and overuse of arable and grazing land [39, 14]. Limited land availability and environmental degradation can lead to a diminishing income from land cultivation, and to tensions among refugees and between refugees and the local population [39, 14].

Finally, in rural areas, it is more likely that there will be fewer agencies providing services to a given community [34; 36; 40]. The level of service provision is also generally lower and less varied in rural settings, with education, health and other social services more scarce and less easily accessible [33]. As a result, a critical consideration for self-reliance programs is to ensure comprehensiveness of the intervention design through the adoption of holistic approaches, or through building robust referral mechanisms [39]. Not only social services and social protection, but also formal financial services (e.g. banks, microfinance institutions, mobile money, etc.) are likely to be more scarce in rural areas. Financial inclusion, and in particular needs for savings and small investments, are thus often addressed through community-based informal mechanisms [4; 33; 144].

**Author's Note**

While in recent years refugees have increasingly been seeking refuge in urban settings, there remains a significant number of refugees that stay in rural - often remote - areas for years. These areas are often characterized by limited livelihood options (most often agriculture-based), scarce productive resources and poor service delivery. In these circumstances, making the most of the limited offer is instrumental in supporting progress towards self-reliance.

Refugee-hosting rural areas tend to be already vulnerable before being affected by displacement, which makes it imperative for refugee interventions to target based on needs rather than status. Any self-reliance programming in such settings should at minimum assess the pre-conditions in the host community (e.g. what services hosts have access to, what stresses and shocks affect their lives and livelihoods), and if possible include vulnerable host community

members in targeting. Support targeted at refugee populations in particular should ideally and systematically build in system-level programming that has potential to benefit the broader community, e.g. via increased access to services and resources, improved road network, etc.

With the acceleration of climate change, and environmental degradation more broadly, access to and use of productive resources has become a major pain point in displacement contexts where natural resources are central to livelihoods. As highlighted in the *Self-Reliance Evidence Review Methodology*, we found very little evidence focused on the connections between self-reliance and climate change, but we expect these will increasingly be documented in the years to come. Experience has already shown that interventions such as climate-resilient agriculture techniques (e.g. permaculture), community-led natural resource management, or advocacy for refugees' access to and ownership of land can play an important role in mitigating the risk that self-reliance programming contributes to tensions between the refugees and their hosts.

## Refugees in urban settings

In recent years, with over 60% of the world refugee population living in urban areas, an increasing number of publications focus on programming for refugees in urban settings [77; 78; 107]. Urban areas often present opportunities for self-reliance that do not exist in camp or rural contexts [77]. In terms of livelihoods, job opportunities in urban areas tend to correspond to more contemporary livelihoods and range widely both in terms of the diversity of skill sets and the level of qualifications needed [131]. The maturity of urban market economies makes them more resilient to shocks overall, however refugees often work in informal sectors where they are subject to exploitation and unprotected by formal crisis-response policies and safety nets [53; 77]. Therefore, programming that includes legal assistance to support refugees' access to services and their right to work, via securing work permits, business registrations, recognition of diplomas and certifications or access to financial services, is important in these contexts [64; 31].

Urban areas also typically present a number of challenges to achieving decent and sustainable livelihoods. In spite of the diversity of potential employers and income-earning opportunities, cities often consistently have higher levels of structural and frictional unemployment than rural areas [1; 151; 56]. Nevertheless, unemployed populations, including displaced persons from rural areas often migrate to cities in the hope that they will be more easily able to retrain and have better job prospects [77]. At the onset of a crisis – often with a large influx of displaced populations to urban areas because of perceived access to increased opportunities compared to rural areas – will often increase already steep competition for jobs and exacerbate existing social tensions [28]. In these situations, displaced populations and the urban poor risk facing additional exploitation, marginalization, and mistreatment [57].

It is important therefore that self-reliance programming accounts for, and when possible, addresses the structural issues in urban markets. For example, a focus on building contemporary and transferable skills (e.g. service industry, IT skills) helps broaden the opportunities available to refugees [52]. Similarly, systems-level interventions focusing on employers and job creation can increase the number and quality of wage employment opportunities for refugees [77].

The social empowerment component of self-reliance programming in urban settings can be quite

different from that in rural settings, both in terms of building social cohesion and social capital. Urban refugees in need of support are likely to be more scattered across cities, rather than concentrated in a single area, and they are often embedded in poorer neighborhoods alongside local populations [77]. This results in an overall higher level of daily interaction of refugees with local populations, and higher dependency on these relationships being cooperative [81]. To some extent, urban refugees can benefit from their relative 'invisibility' in terms of developing support and solidarity systems with local populations [68]. However, this makes targeting considerations for self-reliance programs generally more complex and outreach more resource-intensive in urban settings [70, 39]. Programming in urban settings often includes interventions aimed at supporting refugees in navigating the complexity of urban systems, e.g. service mapping, referral pathways, coordination mechanisms [25]. In particular, the likely exclusion of marginalized groups (e.g. women, minority groups) can be addressed by complementing the self-selection approach standard in urban outreach practices with outreach through community centers, ideally operated by established community-based or refugee-led organizations, or through refugee focal points who can proactively make connections with refugees in need [48; 117]. More broadly, local actors play a critical role in ensuring informed and effective community outreach and targeting approaches, which consider the holistic and diversified needs amongst refugees and hosts in a given area [117].

Urban areas also provide a greater depth and breadth of international, national, and local actors (including government, civil society organizations (CSOs), the academic community, and the private sector) with whom humanitarians and development practitioners might develop partnerships. This is especially true for the private sector, which often has a much more robust presence in urban areas [77;76]. All of these actors also have a deep understanding of how the city operates and provides services, as well as how legal and social frameworks affect the lives of urban residents. This also means that in terms of social protection and financial inclusion, many services to support access to formal banking, labor market access as well as care and support social services more generally are likely to be available in cities and have the potential to be made accessible to refugees [78].

Urban environments also pose a number of specific risks and opportunities for the self-reliance of specific minority and/or vulnerable groups that can be less visible and harder to reach [81]. For example, there are often more employment opportunities for women in urban areas and women may be less likely to face gender discrimination [151]. On the other hand, women are often more at-risk for violence and harassment if they have to travel to their place of work and, although they may have more employment opportunities, these opportunities may not be aligned with the standards of 'decent work' [151].

## Socio-economic contexts

There are also significant differences in self-reliance programming by socio-economic context, in particular between programming in low- and middle-income countries. In *Evidence Brief – Research Gaps*, we address the lack of examples from high-income countries in the available literature. In addition to Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, low- and middle-income countries typically differ in the density of their private sector and in the health and maturity of existing market systems. The literature also highlights differences between the two contexts in terms of how regulated labor markets are, and how much of job markets are composed of formal versus informal labor [54].

In low-income countries, whether in urban or rural contexts, there is often a high reliance on informal work [54; 1]. Formal labor market systems also tend to be less regulated, and opportunities for

decent work are generally thinner [17]. This means that the amount, diversity, and quality of market actors and systems, and of supporting infrastructure available to work with is likely to be lower [38]. Market deficiencies typically affect the support functions that are common to many labor market systems, such as telecom, transportation and energy infrastructures [64]. This has direct consequences in terms of what it means to promote decent and sustainable livelihoods [17].

When working on self-reliance programming in contexts with mostly informal labor markets, there is typically less focus on shifting refugees to the formal sector [38]. Instead, the focus is on promoting decent livelihoods and to ensure that programs lead to the upgrading of jobs [17]. Good practices involve the use of approaches that are comprehensive and complementary with informal livelihoods activities, such as the promotion of workers' rights through support to the constitution of workers' associations, social protection in the form of private or community-based work micro-insurance, and social dialogue between workers and employers [152]. See *Evidence Brief - Defining Self-Reliance* for discussion about quality standards in self-reliance programming and *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Components & Approaches)* for more details on how decent, sustainable, and diversified jobs are criteria for economic inclusion interventions leading to self-reliance.

In middle-income countries, social protection and financial systems are typically more developed and better resourced [44;57]. Programming often focuses on how to make those systems more inclusive of refugees or how to increase the benefits of those systems for refugees [44; 57]. In general, the overall potential for refugees to become self-reliant is higher, and the focus of programming can be seen as closing the gap in self-reliance between refugees and host communities more than raising the local potential for self-reliance [49]. There are more opportunities for refugees to meet their essential needs through markets in more developed economies, and there are typically more jobs in well-established labor markets [49].

Yet, the literature is divided over whether the conditions for self-reliance are more conducive in lower or middle-income contexts, because while there are generally more opportunities available in more developed economies, the economic environment often tends to be more regulated which may restrict access to refugees [6; 157]. Using the example of Jordan as a middle-income context, on the one hand it can be more difficult for refugees to access legal income generating activities because work opportunities in the formal economy are subjected to more quality standards and regulations (including the fact that employers have to pay for a work permit) [57]. On the other hand, and for the same reason, there are more opportunities for refugees to engage in decent, sustainable livelihoods in Jordan [84]. In other words, there may be more and easily-accessible job opportunities for refugees in low-income countries because of expansive informal labor markets than in middle- and high-income countries, where the labor market is formalized and protected. However, there may also be increased opportunities for self-reliance (in terms of diversity and quality of jobs) in middle-income countries because they have a more robust economy.

## Political contexts

Having It is important to also examine the variation in refugee policy by contexts, namely whether and/or how restricted refugees are in terms of movement and in terms of legal access to formal or informal work, what rights and protections do they have access to, and whether or not there is an encampment policy [128; 57; 68]. There is agreement in the literature that variation in the political

context along each of these aspects greatly impacts the potential for self-reliance [98; 99; 100; 23]. There are several pieces in the literature that study specific variation in political contexts, insofar as it affects the design, the implementation and the outcomes of self-reliance programming. In particular, the contexts of three countries in East Africa have been often compared in this regard: Uganda (which is considered as a model of liberalism in terms of refugee policies), Kenya (which is often presented as a counterpoint to the former in terms of having more restrictive policies), and Ethiopia (which has started undergoing a change from more restrictive towards more liberal policies). Most variation in political context is studied across countries (at national level), yet some studies have attempted to control for other differences in context by comparing variation in refugee policy within the same country across different regions.

The policy environment (laws and regulations, policy commitments, etc.) of host states determines what kinds of interventions are feasible and what self-reliance looks like in that context (e.g. do refugees have the right to free movement, can they get work permits, etc.) [73; 84]. In host countries with restrictive refugee policies, programmatic interventions around social and economic inclusion of refugees, however well-designed, can only go so far [128]. In countries where access to documentation and legal frameworks are more restrictive, refugees will tend to work more in the informal economy, all other things equal, and they will be more prone to shocks [102]. The recent literature that examines the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis noted that, whether in rural or in urban markets, refugees tend to work in sectors that are more sensitive to crises [56]. This can be attributed to formal legal regulations that restrict the access of refugees to certain sectors of the economy, as well as to informal rules and norms that similarly favor the hiring of nationals in more decent and resilient jobs.

Restrictive laws in host states are barriers to self-reliance that are systematically highlighted in the literature [56; 151; 78]. There is agreement that self-reliance programming in the absence of rights and protections for refugees can yield important, but limited results, and that there is a need to simultaneously pursue policy influence with host governments [77]. Yet, the broad effectiveness of advocacy efforts to persuade host states to improve rights and protections for refugees is a matter of debate [34; 77]. Other avenues explored to influence policy frameworks include working with national and sub-national authorities to strengthen social protection systems and through capacity-building [127]. However, even here, there is little evidence regarding the effectiveness of these approaches in yielding more favorable policies towards refugees [33].

In practice, several countries have changed their policy frameworks to include progressive policies that are more inclusive of and permissive towards refugees [57]. Uganda, Ethiopia, Zambia, Ecuador, Costa Rica and Mexico are typically recognized as such ‘success stories’ and are often presented as counterpoints to more ‘closed’ and restricted policy environments for refugees (such as Jordan or Kenya) [93]. Yet, to date it remains difficult to measure the extent to which the specific favorable policies have resulted in positive outcomes for refugee self-reliance, especially in countries where the implementation of these policies is a challenge (e.g. for lack of human or financial resources).

**Author’s Note**

In order to establish the replicability of a particular self-reliance program, it is important to distinguish which constraints on self-reliance programming stem from the socio-economic context and which are related to the political context. Yet, doing so is not straightforward as

there is often overlap between the two and more robust market systems often are in the same locations where there is a more restrictive political environment hindering refugee self-reliance [151; 38]. There is, however, a critical difference between contexts where refugee employment is limited because labor markets are saturated in general, like Kampala, and, on the other end of the spectrum, because refugees do not have the right to work, like in Nairobi and New Delhi [151; 38]. Understanding that difference is required to design appropriate self-reliance programming.

Practitioners should consider context segmentation when designing a self-reliance program as it will help determine which program components are most relevant and effective. A given context is going to be an overlay of displacement context, socio-economic context and political context. So it is helpful to understand which characteristic of each type of contexts yields which recommendation, so that one can decide how to appropriately adapt a program model.

Context segmentation should also be considered more systematically in research for evidence generation. In particular, this would help identify findings that may be linked to specific types of contexts and that can be generalized broadly across other contexts that share the same characteristics. It will also help identify research gaps on self-reliance and self-reliance programming, in terms of contexts and geographies. Finally, generating such evidence may support advocacy efforts demonstrating to host states the benefits of social and economic inclusion for refugees.

# DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR DIFFERENT POPULATIONS

Considerations for self-reliance programming not only varies across contexts, but also within them. The level of self-reliance that can be achieved and the pathways through which self-reliance can be improved are not the same for every household and individual in a given location [77].

As with all humanitarian programming, it is important to recognize that some refugees may face specific protection concerns or barriers to becoming self-reliant on the basis of their age, gender, disability status and/or other factors. It is equally important for refugee response agencies to move towards operationalizing these specific considerations within programming to promote inclusion and increased access to all refugees [109].

We have found relatively few studies that focus on the self-reliance programming for particular population sub-groups, with one exception being a focus on the Graduation Approach for ultra-poor refugees [147]. However, the literature still provides broadly useful guidance about how program design can be tailored to meet the needs of specific populations [128]. In this section, we discuss how the needs of various displaced groups can impact which types of self-reliance program components are most relevant.

**Who is the main target of self-reliance programming?**

How do we decide which refugees to support with self-reliance programming? As many as possible? The most ‘vulnerable’? The most ‘viable’? There are different ways in which

this question can be answered and just as many ways to tailor program approaches.

Both the literature and practice suggest that components of effective self-reliance programming are different for refugees that are more vulnerable and for those that are more stable. In fact, some people facing extreme vulnerabilities, whether displaced or not, may never become fully self-reliant.

Appropriate targeting is a crucial step in self-reliance programming as groups with different needs and initial levels of self-reliance will require different types and combinations of social and economic interventions.

## Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs)

While this project did not specifically review literature on internally displaced populations (IDPs), there were still surprisingly few resources that compare self-reliance program approaches for refugees and IDPs. In general, the literature on refugee self-reliance has limited discussion of other displacement-affected populations, despite the existence of several contexts – in particular urban contexts – in which different displaced populations overlap [77; 151; 152]. This gap in the literature may be related to the fact that the use of the terminology 'self-reliance' is less common in the literature on IDPs and other non-refugee displaced populations. However, comparing self-reliance for refugees and IDPs can help clarify which barriers to self-reliance are related to displacement itself, and which are related more specifically to the legal framework related to cross-border asylum. In turn, this can help inform self-reliance programming.

## Gender

While a number of resources address gender considerations in self-reliance programming, few provide substantial evidence on how programming interacts with gender and/or gender identity and thus how it might lead to varying outcomes for people of different genders living in the same household. Notably, much of the literature equates explicit "gender" considerations with considerations for women and girls, implying that men and boys are the default target group. There was a noticeable gap in the literature pertaining to self-reliance programming for LGBTQIA+ refugees.
Existing gender norms may restrict refugee women's participation in certain self-reliance interventions [90]. At the same time, families experiencing displacement also often experience shifting gender roles and norms within the household [25; 90; 150; 39]. Understanding community norms around women's social and political participation—alongside their economic engagement—is a vital way to strengthen program effectiveness [24]. Interventions should consider women's household roles and responsibilities, their level of control over different household resources, and their access to safe and sustainable labor opportunities in a given context [24, 58].

Practitioners who use a "gender-responsive" approach partner with participant women to design programs that meet their expressed safety needs, while also fostering social and cultural norms that will improve women's economic opportunity during the time of household transition [148]. The literature also references a "gender-sensitive" approach, or a baseline awareness of how program policies and activities may positively or negatively impact women's participation and program effectiveness, as well as their vulnerability to household and public violence as a result of participation [42; 153]. Some examples of gender-sensitive program policies include providing childcare (or funding for external childcare) and

access to safe transportation [150; 42; 78]. Another aspect of gender-sensitive programming is ensuring that the outcomes of programming chosen for evaluation align with refugee women and girls' own conceptions of empowerment and self-reliance [82].

Several resources suggest that for programming that relates to livelihoods, financial inclusion, and social empowerment, it can be effective to design and implement initiatives focused on women and/or heads of household [25; 77]. Targeted support for working refugee women, and particularly those who are already the breadwinner in their household, can bolster their earnings and ability to support their families [39]. Group spaces that are single-gender can be an effective way to enable participation and social empowerment for women. For example, facilitated women's groups or collectives have been shown to generate income, foster knowledge and skill exchange, facilitate resource sharing, and build women's social capital—all important aspects for sustained self-reliance [39].

To ensure the sustainability of refugee women's empowerment within their broader environments, a good practice is situating targeted socioeconomic support for women and girls into broader community-centered programming [82]. For example, the evaluation of one mixed-gender cash grant and protection program in Palestine found that the community-based process bolstered women's' decision making, self-esteem, and bargaining power; at the end of the program, participants considered women the most trusted to receive and manage grant funds to improve overall community resilience [58]. Meanwhile, an evaluation of a cash transfer program designed to empower mixed-gender entrepreneurs living in refugee camps found that female-headed businesses had a statistically significantly higher probability of obtaining a business license than male participants, indicating women's potential success in such programs [124].

However, the literature also reveals the harmful gendered outcomes of self-reliance programs, and particularly those that withdraw support too soon post-training or focus on skills unaligned with the labor market [42]. Such missteps can quickly compound debt for refugee women, who in some contexts have more limited labor market options than men and may be exploited based on their legal situation in order to make household ends meet [42]. It is well documented that strengthening the socioeconomic position of women can also increase the risk of intra-household tensions or intimate partner violence [24; 153; 78; 82]. Even if women become the primary household earner through livelihoods interventions, that alone may not translate into changed household dynamics [24; 153]. In some cases, it may threaten long-held norms associated with masculinity, leading to increased control of women's movement [82]. In some humanitarian settings, women may prefer to receive alternative forms of compensation in programming to mitigate money-related tension in the household, for example vouchers, food, or other resources [150]. Self-reliance programs may lead to women's increased participation in the external labor market without lessening their domestic workload, leading to 'double employment' and increased distress [82; 150]. Thus, a relevant good practice in microfinance or other livelihood interventions is to anticipate gendered consequences at the household level and co-design gender-responsive—rather than gender-neutral—programming alongside women to promote their socio-economic empowerment [25; 150].
Finally, it is important to consider how gender impacts self-reliance differently within different intervention contexts. For example, in urban areas, women typically have more transferable skills, such as housekeeping, child-care, and cooking, which are in demand, whereas men often require more specialized skills to find work, especially those who come from rural areas [25]. However, women may face specific social and cultural barriers to labor market integration, especially in urban activities that are non-traditional among many rural refugee women, such as construction [42]. Further, many of the occupations women enter with transferable skills are unsafe, too far from home, poorly paid, and/or have limited potential for an upward career trajectory [25; 148; 42].

## Youth

Due to the protracted nature of most recent displacement crises, youth are a critical demographic for self-reliance programming [118; 99; 63]. While in practice there is an increasing focus on self-reliance programming specifically for youth, there is not a lot of self-reliance literature that considers the specificities of youth as a target group. Refugee youth often grow up in displacement environments, which includes formative years in terms of education, socialization, and early employment [110]. As a result, youth are especially vulnerable to isolation and in some contexts, potentially radicalization. Overlooking youth in self-reliance programming has the potential to create a 'lost generation' of refugees that are not given the opportunity to develop critical skills. A good practice for self-reliance programming is to focus on building social networks, education, and skills development for refugee youth [68]. In particular, developing refugee youth's transferable skills builds their potential to pursue and benefit from durable solutions upon return, in their current context, or upon resettlement in another context [63, 152]. Overall, this is the demographic for which the 'investment' logic of self-reliance is the most salient and who have high potential to contribute to the local economy [152].

Best practices for self-reliance programming that foster social empowerment include designing interventions that include both refugee and local youth, as well as implementing mentorship programs where youth are matched with community members that have experience in their desired profession [152]. While noted as a best practice for all groups, focusing on contemporary livelihoods and building advanced technical skills is particularly important when designing programming for youth [152]. It is also effective to include program components on social empowerment and participation in civil society to combat likely marginalization [99]. Finally, it is important to have programs that support socialization and network building for youth, such as safe spaces [152].

## Persons with disabilities

It is important to ensure that self-reliance programming is inclusive of and accessible to refugees with disabilities. The literature included references to the importance of designing appropriate programming for refugees with disabilities that are able to engage in income generating activities as well as for those who are not.

Some strategies to increase participation of refugees with disabilities in livelihoods activities include reorganizing work content, using audio and visual methods when promoting job opportunities, adjusting wages, and ensuring flexibility in timetables and program design [128]. Further, agencies providing livelihood training or education activities should ensure that their program location is accessible to adults and children with disabilities [73]. Some holistic, graduation approach models incorporate a social worker or case manager to ensure that refugees that would benefit from intensive support are able to access relevant services [146, 123].

For refugees that are not able to earn an income, there are still aspects of self-reliance programming that are relevant, particularly related to social protection and social empowerment. Those implementing urban self-reliance programming, for example, might consider providing long-term or permanent eligibility-based social cash transfers for refugee households that are headed by an elderly, chronically ill or person with a disability who is unable to work [77]. Additionally, formal programs should recognize and strengthen the informal mechanisms that communities and households already implement to care for their members with special needs, for example, fostering or sheltering unaccompanied children or

elders, sharing food harvests with disabled neighbors who are unable to work, or blending families into a single household [109]. Promoting opportunities to develop social capital and social networks among vulnerable refugee groups can be empowering and bolster self-reliance [151].

The literature also addresses considerations in the domain of education. One report on education programming among Syrian refugees and host community members in Jordan found that refugee students with disabilities or special learning needs experienced discrimination among educators [42]. In camp settings where aid agencies often provide education, teachers may not be well trained in how to adjust lessons for refugee students with disabilities [73].

When designing programs, practitioners should promote social inclusion by building awareness, fostering inter-agency partnerships, and amplifying the perspectives of refugees with special needs [128.5]. It is best practice for practitioners to be trained in how to recognize special needs in individuals and to understand their rights and available services [54]. Programs should work to balance the targeting of refugees with special needs to ensure their participation with socially integrating these groups into broader programming [128]. Finally, programs should provide periodic counseling and ongoing monitoring to populations with special needs to understand how their self-reliance needs are evolving over time [146].

Recognizing the intersections of displacement and disability should also include a broadened focus on how programming can sustain collective self-reliance (such as via universal access to education, food, housing, etc.), in addition to focusing on individual vulnerabilities [109].

## Education and Skill-levels

Much of the literature emphasizes the need for program design to account for a diversity of education and skill-levels. This research emphasizes that many refugees have existing experience and expertise and, therefore, self-reliance programs should be more responsive to existing skills and preferences [151]. This would entail tailored career counseling and individual case management, as well as advocacy for recognition of existing diplomas, rather than only offering basic skills training [128].
In addition, the literature also mentioned the need to consider building pipelines of skilled talent and creating opportunities for refugees to acquire advanced skills in order to access other segments of the labor market [68]. Much of the literature focuses on creating opportunities for youth and young adults in particular to develop advanced skills, as well as promoting advocacy efforts to facilitate access to higher education [68]. This approach is especially relevant in middle- and high-income countries where an important challenge is moving refugees up the occupational ladder and building their careers, rather than settling for prolonged periods in low-paid, unfulfilling, and precarious employment situations [49]. Some program models focus on refugee populations that are most likely to achieve self-reliance without additional support beyond livelihoods programming [131]. For example, entrepreneurship-focused programs target ‘viable’ refugees or those deemed likely to succeed without additional support beyond start-up capital or business training [49, 123].

While valuable, this approach misses out on a large section of refugees who are not yet at that point, but with some tailored support could become viable as small business owners, entrepreneurs or workers. It is therefore also important to focus on interventions for refugees who need additional support in order to benefit from livelihoods programming [123].

**Author's Note**

While there is agreement in both literature and among practitioners that self-reliance interventions must be tailored to the individual needs, skills, capacities and priorities of target populations, the fact that the effects of self-reliance programming tend to be assessed and documented at household level means that there is only limited evidence of what works at individual level for specific groups. For example, more evidence is needed to understand how gender influences both the targeting and outcomes of self-reliance programming, as well as the impacts for those with intersectional marginalization based on their ethnic group, race, nationality, sex assignment at birth, ability, sexual orientation, religion, education, and legal status, among other identity dimensions. As such, agencies should improve transparency around the types of tailored support services that they provide for refugees, and disaggregate evaluative findings by socioeconomic ability status to better understand and address these needs.

One important point that emerged in our review of the literature is that individual and household level approaches to self-reliance may at times be conflicting, and self-reliance interventions should strive to mitigate the potential negative impact of one approach over the other. As such, programming that combines both individual-level and household-level interventions, e.g. cash programming covering the food needs of the entire household, livelihoods interventions that target all adult members of the household recognizing that multiple income streams may be required to meet their needs, is likely to have more positive and durable impacts on the entire household.

Another important point to highlight is the need for self-reliance interventions to look at alternatives for individuals that will never be entirely self-sufficient due to specific needs (e.g. disability, age, etc.). For refugee populations, it will often mean putting strong emphasis on linking people with specific needs to national social protection systems to ensure their needs can be met sustainably.

# CONCLUSION

There is no universally achievable standard for self-reliance. Instead, the ability to become self-reliant and the extent to which self-reliance is possible is highly dependent on the individual refugee and the context in which they live. The needs of different refugee population groups are different, which in turn determines which programming components are most relevant and effective. Therefore, any programming that universalizes the path to self-reliance will likely not address the needs and challenges of each population group.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the needs for self-reliance programming far outpace the reach of current efforts. There is an existing tension between the broad extent of needs for self-reliance programming and the relatively limited reach of existing self-reliance programming efforts [66]. There are tailored programs that reach a smaller target group with intensive programming (e.g. consumption support, mentoring, career counseling, case management) and also broader programs (e.g. employment policy reform, access to social protection systems) that have greater reach but cater less deeply to individual needs. A self-reliance program may reach hundreds of individual refugee households in a context; however, many programs are not designed to address the structural changes

needed to achieve community-level or population-level self-reliance sustained across generations [65]. As a result, the question of scalability is critical to the future of self-reliance. However, it is also complex because there is a fundamental difference between determining what works for large groups and what works for specific target groups.

The literature also emphasizes that attempts to undertake self-reliance programming at scale may undermine the high heterogeneity in the skills, capacities and aspirations of refugee populations [157]. This then suggests, contrary to the need for larger-scale programs, that we should employ a tailored approach to self-reliance programming focused on specific populations [123]. Tailored approaches have high success rates, where success is defined by the proportion of the target groups that actually becomes self-reliant [123]. There is further research needed on using tailored approaches in tandem with systems-level approaches.

# GAPS IN THE SELF-RELIANCE EVIDENCE BASE

# GAPS IN THE SELF-RELIANCE EVIDENCE BASE

In this brief, we highlight the key gaps that we identified in the available evidence on refugee self-reliance with the goal of informing future research priorities. In doing so, we examine whose voices dominate the self-reliance debate and which populations the research has overlooked (the 'who'), which geographies and contexts are missing from the research on self-reliance (the 'where'), what works to facilitate self-reliance (the 'how') and, how to assess the 'value for money' of self-reliance programming (the 'how much'). Addressing the evidence gaps highlighted will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of refugee self-reliance that can be used to inform program and policy directions and guide funding investments.

## EXPLORING SELF-RELIANCE IN MORE DEPTH

### The 'who?'

The evidence review found few resources that center refugee voices when discussing what self-reliance looks like and how it should be measured. Overall, less than a quarter of the resources reviewed meaningfully included refugee voices and perspectives, beyond including survey data. Furthermore, the majority of resources reviewed originate from a small number of primarily European or North American organizations, with 90% of resources being published by only 15 organizations. Increasing the diversity of perspectives contributing to the evidence base on self-reliance, with a focus on amplifying community-based perspectives and refugee voices, will impact how we understand and define self-reliance, what types of program designs are considered effective for different contexts and populations and how we perceive 'success' of these efforts.

The evidence review did not identify much specific research on how self-reliance can be successful for diverse population groups, including, but not limited to, IDPs, women, youth, and people with disabilities. There are, for example, few resources comparing self-reliance for refugees to self-reliance for IDPs. Yet, comparing self-reliance for refugees and IDPs can help clarify which barriers to self-reliance are related to displacement itself, and which are related more specifically to the legal framework related to cross-border asylum. There is also limited evidence on best practices of gendered or age-related self-reliance programming. Much of the current evidence base about what works to support these populations fails to unpack implicit assumptions about gender norms, behaviors, and differences and to recognize how these assumptions underlie targeting strategies and theories of change for self-reliance programming in different contexts.

Finally, while some analysis on self-reliance focuses on the wider community where refugees live, there remains scant evidence comparing self-reliance potential of refugees with that of the local host community. Overall, the literature on refugee self-reliance suggests that refugees are largely unable to achieve a greater level of economic or social stability than members of the host

community because the threshold for self-reliance is often at least partly reliant on the policy and economic context of the local area. As a result, further research that includes the host community in studies of the potential for self-reliance of an area can provide valuable insights for what conditions are required to achieve self-reliance.

## The 'where?'

Existing evidence on self-reliance is overwhelmingly focused on refugee-hosting countries in East Africa, and the Middle East. Outside of these contexts, evidence on self-reliance remains relatively sparse. Without a broader diversity in contexts—or studies that provide cross-context comparison—the applicability of promising practices and lessons learned remains obscured. Similarly, the vast majority of the literature that was reviewed focused on low- and middle-income refugee-hosting countries. Comparatively, there is little about self-reliance programming in high-income countries. This is, in part, due to the fact that programming in higher income countries is often in the context of resettlement and, though similar to traditional 'self- reliance' programming, is not viewed as such because it is not connected to the international aid system. Additionally, conceptions of 'self-reliance' across high versus low- and middle-income countries may be infused with different cultural ideologies that influence government decision-making as it relates to self- reliance policy. Given an increase in refugee flows to higher income contexts such as countries in Western Europe, this is a useful area for further research.

## The 'how?'

Our review found that the publicly-available literature capturing evidence on effective self-reliance programming is surprisingly thin. Through our own practical knowledge and experience at RefugePoint and DRC, and through the broader RSRI network, we recognize that the literature is lagging behind practice, a sentiment that was shared in key informant interviews with practitioners from other agencies.

While agencies have been conducting self-reliance programming for many years, systematic efforts to rigorously measure the impact of these interventions are few and far between. The vast majority of self-reliance programs in the resources reviewed do not use tools or conceptual frameworks that have been specifically developed to measure or evaluate refugee self-reliance. Instead, most used project-specific indicators that were selected as proxies for self-reliance, such as levels of income, number of job placements, or access to basic services. While these measure the results of individual program interventions, they provide an incomplete picture of the self-reliance standing of a refugee, which is dependent on numerous interdependent factors, and ultimately fail to shed light on effective programming approaches that promote self-reliance.

Much of the literature on self-reliance only makes a passing reference to measurement, usually highlighting the need to create robust measures and acknowledging the complexity of doing so.

However, in the last few years there have been some promising attempts to bridge this measurement gap, notably through the Self-Reliance Index, developed by the Refugee Self-reliance Initiative and through research undertaken by the Refugee Economies program at the University of Oxford.

We also found that self-reliance is typically measured in line with 6 or 12 month humanitarian program cycles, usually at the baseline and/or endline. However, these short program cycles are not well aligned with the longer timeframes that are typically needed to observe changes in self-reliance outcomes and may not adequately track the progression of refugees towards self-reliance. In addition, since self-reliance is understood as transitioning off dependence on aid, it is important to measure the self-reliance status of a household extending past the end of a project cycle to understand the sustainability of results. However, there are few systematic efforts to do so, driving a gap in the evidence that may perpetuate ineffective interventions and thus a widespread, cyclical dependence on aid.

To build the evidence base of what does and does not work to improve refugee self-reliance, practitioners and researchers there is a need to invest in and undertake robust evaluations of the impact of different types of programming over time. It is also imperative that results - successes and failures, and the broader knowledge and learning gained from research studies, evaluations and assessments be publicly shared to support building the evidence-base for effective practices that support refugee self-reliance. This collective learning can inform adaptations to organizational processes and programming, thus increasing the potential for improved refugee self-reliance outcomes.

## The ‘how much?’

In the literature reviewed, many resources assumed that self-reliance programming has better value-for- money than other types of humanitarian programming. Yet, we found little research or in-depth discussion on how to calculate the value-for-money of self-reliance programming. This is likely connected to the fact that there remains a lack of broad consensus on the outcomes of self-reliance.

When value-for-money of self-reliance programs is discussed, it is usually conceptualized in terms of cost- efficiency, and implicitly compared to other types of humanitarian programs for refugees such as care and maintenance programs. Instead, comparing the long-term costs of traditional assistance programs and/or the cost of doing nothing could provide a more robust evidence base on the value-for-money of self-reliance programming.

Our review also found relatively little information on the costs of self-reliance programming. A notable exception is a subset of documents that focus on the Graduation Approach, however these also had relatively little discussion about the cost-efficiency of such programming in displacement contexts specifically.

# EXPLORING SELF-RELIANCE IN MORE BREADTH

The evidence review uncovered few connections between self-reliance and connected agendas and emergent topics such as durable solutions, climate change and localization.

## Shocks

Further research is needed on how short- and long-term external shocks can affect self-reliance outcomes as well as social cohesion dynamics in refugee-hosting contexts. Two examples mentioned in the literature—but worthy of further examination—are the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

At the time of our review, evidence illuminating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugee self-reliance was just emerging. Resources that addressed this issue focused on reduced access to funding for self-reliance programming and a decrease in social protection. Other research discussed how refugees were more likely to lose their livelihoods due to COVID-19 shutdowns because of their employment in service and manufacturing sectors. Researchers should review this emerging evidence base and use lessons learned to prepare for and respond to future disease-based shocks.

A small number of the resources reviewed included brief mentions of climate change or environmental disasters as a potential 'external shock' that could affect the progression of achieving self-reliance for refugees. Overall, the literature is missing comprehensive studies on how climate change affects ongoing self- reliance programs as an external shock and whether self-reliance programming for 'climate refugees' is feasible and/or appropriate. Research on how different aspects of climate change (natural disasters versus more permanent environmental changes) impact refugee self-reliance can support greater understanding of whether and what types of self-reliance programming is the best approach for affected contexts.

## Localization

Despite an increasing focus on localization in the development and humanitarian sectors, we found surprisingly few resources that linked refugee self-reliance to the localization agenda. Those that did, primarily focused on making recommendations to international organizations to coordinate with and transition responsibility to local/national institutions when implementing self-reliance programs, but few details were provided on best practices.

## Durable Solutions

The evidence review found some discussion on self-reliance programming in relation to durable solutions, but there is little examination of how it specifically contributes to each of the three pathways, leaving many critical questions unexplored. Overall, the literature highlights the value of self-reliance in the context of increasing and increasingly protracted displacement. When refugee self-reliance is discussed in relation to durable solutions, there are differing opinions as to whether self-reliance programming should be seen as a preparatory step toward a durable solution or as a substitute when durable solutions are not feasible. Yet, while self-reliance is discussed in relation to durable solutions as a whole, there is relatively less attention dedicated to how it relates to each individual durable solution pathway. Many of the resources reviewed, implicitly or explicitly link self-reliance with local integration. Furthermore, many of the resources highlight the positive impact self-reliant refugees have on local economies, but there is little research on how that may also spark tension with host communities and in local labor markets. As such, there is little examination in the literature on how self-reliance is linked to voluntary return and third-country resettlement.

# CONCLUSION

As global forced displacement continues to increase and shocks from COVID-19 to climate change reverberate and transform social, political, and economic dynamics around the world, strengthening the self-reliance of refugees becomes increasingly vital. Key to this effort is building a robust and accessible evidence base on what works to promote self-reliance, so that practitioners and policymakers are implementing and scaling up effective, evidence-informed policies and programs. To do so, organizations and funders must support the production of evidence that addresses the identified knowledge gaps highlighted in this brief, including by funding self-reliance monitoring efforts beyond the end of a program intervention, and filling research gaps including comparisons of the effectiveness of program interventions across different contexts and population groups. It is also important that the production of research and evidence centers the voices and perspectives of refugees including through research that is led by refugees and other displaced persons. Finally, all stakeholders should publicly share the knowledge, learning and results - be they positive or negative - gained from research studies, program evaluations and assessments to build the evidence-base of effective practices that support refugee self-reliance.

The Self-Reliance Evidence Review and related outputs are available at:
https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/evidence-review