



PROJECT BRIEF

# Building Self-Reliance for Refugees

Trickle Up helps people in extreme poverty and vulnerability advance their social and economic well-being. We drive large-scale change by partnering with governments, global institutions, and local organizations. Since 1979, we have helped more than one million people transform their lives and graduate out of extreme poverty.

trickleUP



As of 2018, over 70 million people have been forced to flee their homes to escape persecution and conflict according to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

This is the largest number since World War II and includes more than 25 million refugees. Forced displacements are not only increasing in number, but also in length of time - 26 years on average. As a result, institutions once focused on emergency response are feeling pressure to broaden their scope to better address the expanding needs of those who have spent decades of their lives as refugees. This is happening alongside a multi-billion dollar funding gap that is straining organizations' ability to provide reliable services to both new refugees and those confronting long-term displacement.

In response, UNHCR and other stakeholders are encouraging closer coordination of humanitarian and development responses through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit Grand Bargain commitments, the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Humanitarian Development Nexus. These entities have begun working together to promote self-reliance and resilience through strategies that complement and eventually replace indefinite reliance on humanitarian aid to sustainably meet refugees' short- and long-term needs.



# The Building Self-Reliance for Refugees Project

In 2013, UNHCR engaged Trickle Up to design, implement and test the Graduation Approach (GA) in refugee settings in Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, and Zambia.

With additional funding from the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) in 2016, Trickle Up launched the Building Self-Reliance for Refugees project, expanding its support to 10 UNHCR country operations and four INGO partners. In addition to testing the appropriateness of the Graduation Approach for refugees and other persons of concern, the project aimed to increase the capacity of Trickle Up, UNHCR, and

other NGO or government actors to implement livelihoods development programs in refugee settings.

This project brief summarizes an independent evaluation of Trickle Up's performance against four project objectives; the appropriateness of the GA for refugees; and initial recommendations on how organizations can apply a refugee lens to Graduation programs.

## Impact against Project Objectives

Overall, the evaluation concluded that Trickle Up made good progress towards delivering on the project targets, with the expectation that Trickle Up will achieve or exceed all its targets by the end of August 2019, when the project comes to an end. Highlighted project objectives and achievements were to:

- 1. Increase Trickle Up's capacity to provide effective technical assistance (TA) to UNHCR and to recruit, train, support and second livelihoods staff to UNHCR.**
  - Trickle Up built an effective team to deliver high-quality TA.
  - The team utilizes a facilitative approach and effectively builds learning and iteration into their work.
  - More formal and intentional processes are in development to enhance learning between different programs.
  - Trickle Up demonstrated mixed evidence of successful adaptive management.
  - The institutional benefits of secondees' association with Trickle Up was limited.
- 2. Increase Trickle Up's capacity to document lessons and disseminate information and resources.**
  - Documentation is improving as a result of hiring staff to support knowledge management.
  - Trickle Up produced a wide range of information and resources that are publicly available on a dedicated website.
  - Capture of lessons across programs has not been systematic.
  - Trickle Up lacked easy access to data produced during the project due to non-standardized monitoring and evaluation systems within UNHCR programs.
- 3. Increase capacity of UNHCR to design and implement the Graduation Approach.**
  - The project increased awareness and understanding of the GA in most country operations.
  - Trickle Up successfully supported staff to build practical knowledge and manage implementation of the GA.
  - Most secondees deployed to country operations played an important role supporting GA implementation and regional secondees successfully supported UNHCR livelihoods operations.
  - Staff rotation and turnover at UNHCR limited retention of increased Graduation capacity.
- 4. Provide TA support, in conjunction with UNHCR, to NGOs or governments.**
  - Trickle Up's experience executing the project increased its capacity to support NGOs.
  - Several NGO partnerships have been or are in the process of formation.
  - Government partnerships were not a feature of Trickle Up's work with UNHCR.





## The Graduation Approach in a Refugee Context

The Graduation Approach has been increasingly adapted, implemented, and found effective in a variety of contexts, including in fragile and conflict-affected areas.

Organizations can better understand the refugee context by focusing on the dynamics between local, institutional, and individual settings. The interplay between these three levels results in a range of factors that affect refugees' ability to develop sustainable livelihoods and fully integrate into the host country. While there are significant differences across contexts, the issues highlighted below have emerged as prevalent in the refugee settings where UNHCR and Trickle Up worked together.

Experience from the 10 Graduation programs implemented by UNHCR, Trickle Up, and local implementing partners suggests the following conclusions:

**The Graduation Approach may not be appropriate in a refugee emergency:** Government systems may be under pressure amidst a surge in displaced people, which may lead to additional barriers for refugees' meeting

basic needs and obtaining relevant refugee status. Humanitarian organizations may prioritize meeting more pressing basic needs over medium and long-term solutions. Further, refugees and other displaced populations may be too vulnerable to engage in sustainable economic activities.

**A "normalization" period is required before refugees can effectively engage in the Graduation program:**

This period – in which UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations often provide support to stabilize refugees – is required for new arrivals to meet their most pressing needs and normalize their status.

**The Graduation Approach can work in varied refugee contexts:** Whether the Graduation Approach is appropriate may depend on design and requires that organizations develop a thorough understanding of refugees' needs and have the necessary resources to be responsive to challenges and opportunities emerging in a given refugee context.

# Understanding and Responding to the Refugee Context through the Graduation Approach

While every refugee setting will have its own contextual factors, this section highlights prevalent challenges and opportunities, along with some of the key programmatic responses, that may further influence the appropriateness of the GA in a refugee setting.

## The Local Level

The local context includes dynamics between the surrounding economic environment, the government's response to refugees, the diverse cultural norms and structural factors of the refugee community, and how these relate to host communities.

### Challenges and Opportunities

- 1. Right to work:** Refugees may not be entitled to work or may only be allowed to work with restrictions.
- 2. Mobility:** Refugees are not allowed to leave some camps and settlements, or may have restrictions to doing so, limiting economic opportunities.
- 3. State of the economy:** The economic environment determines livelihood opportunities.
- 4. Right of access to existing programs and services:** The extent to which refugees have access to existing services will provide opportunities or pose additional challenges.
- 5. Differences with the host culture:** Cultural and language differences, as well as discrimination and xenophobia, may pose a barrier to economic and social inclusion for refugees.

### Programmatic Responses

- 1. Advocate:** Engage in advocacy efforts to influence changes in regulations that pose barriers to refugees, including related to documentation, access to key services, and the right to work and be mobile.

- 2. Build markets:** Build markets to expand economic opportunities, including market and value chain development, as well as linkages to private employment opportunities.
- 3. Include host populations:** Include host populations in GA programming to help build buy-in within governments to support efforts to scale up and foster social integration.

## The Institutional Level

The institutional context is the ecosystem of organizations present in the refugee context, their capabilities, and the norms that govern their programs and services.

### Challenges and Opportunities

- 1. Assistance targeted to refugees:** Organizations working with non-refugees are increasingly targeting their livelihood programs to refugee populations, presenting an opportunity to enhance existing humanitarian interventions.
- 2. Barriers to service access:** Refugees may face both formal and informal barriers to services, including lack of access to documentation or financial services and lack of awareness of refugees' rights to access services.
- 3. Vulnerability to discriminatory and exploitative practices:** Due to limited options, refugees must often accept discriminatory and/or illegal working conditions such as working longer shifts for the same

pay as host community members, or receiving in-kind payments or none at all.

## Programmatic Responses

- 1. Leverage UNHCR's operations:** Any organization working with refugees should understand how to leverage UNHCR's efforts.
- 2. Build on existing systems:** Successful Graduation programs build on existing systems to avoid duplicative structures while ensuring the services provided by others align to the particular needs of refugees and Graduation objectives.
- 3. Strengthen coordination between humanitarian and development actors:** Stronger coordination within and across organizations ensures program participants experience a holistic and coherent response.
- 4. Sensitize organizations about refugee issues:** Help organizations, employers, and service-providers understand the issues affecting refugees and the importance of including them in programs and services.

## The Individual Level

The individual context includes refugees' socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, as well as the psychosocial effects of the refugee experience.

## Challenges and Opportunities

- 1. Heterogeneity:** There may be significant cultural, social, and economic differences among refugees, and between refugees and host populations, that require additional capabilities by implementing organizations to address differentiated needs.
- 2. Refugees' skillset and evidence of qualifications:** The extent to which refugees' skills and certifications match economic opportunities may present an advantage or barrier determined largely by local market conditions and the regulatory environment.

- 3. Psychological impacts:** Refugees often experience violence and discrimination that may lead to psychological effects such as grief, depression, and anxiety that affect their ability to engage in economic activities.
- 4. Lack of support networks:** Refugees often lack family or support networks, and may feel socially isolated, exacerbating emotional and psychological stress that may impede social and economic engagement.

## Programmatic Responses

- 1. Include host populations:** Including both refugees and the host community in GA programming fosters integration and helps reduce xenophobia and friction between locals and refugees.
- 2. Adapt to different profiles:** The Graduation Approach may require adaptations in the intensity of components and methodologies to respond to the diverse needs of participants.
- 3. Be sensitive to protection needs:** Build capacity within the program to identify and address protection needs as they arise and avoid protection risks.
- 4. Provide psychosocial support:** Regular household visits can help coaches track, identify and address psychosocial issues that may be prevalent amongst refugees.



# Conclusion

Trickle Up's Building Self-Reliance for Refugees project is on track to deliver on its objectives and meet or exceed all indicator targets, in spite of significant challenges faced to effectively adapt and implement the GA in refugee contexts.

While many of the project's Graduation programs focused primarily on individual-level interventions, working more intentionally to address challenges and opportunities at the institutional and local levels can help increase effectiveness. At the individual level, contexts vary and will continue to determine program design, including whether and how Graduation components may need to be adapted, whether to introduce additional services, and if affecting change at the market level is required. At the institutional level, the project has highlighted the need for any implementing partner to have the appropriate structures and resources in place for effective implementation. At a local level, Graduation programming has to do a better job of advocacy and market development in order to have a sustained impact.

A main opportunity arising from the refugee context in this respect is the existence of an ecosystem of organizations that can be leveraged to provide the required response. Donors, practitioners and technical assistance providers must step in to support the design and implementation of the GA for refugees. To

facilitate this, UNHCR and the World Bank's Partnership for Economic Inclusion (PEI) created the Poverty Alleviation Coalition (PAC), a group of 14 implementing and technical partners, including Trickle Up, to jointly work together through the GA to increase self-reliance, economic, and social inclusion of refugees and host communities by sustainably increasing income-earning opportunities.

Going forward, implementing Graduation for refugees will require Trickle Up, UNHCR, and implementing partners to explore ways to integrate programs into governments' social protection systems as a means to reach scale and remove barriers to refugees' economic and social inclusion. It will also be very important to have research and evaluation built into programs to build a stronger understanding of some of the innovations and adaptations that may be required to respond specifically to the differentiated vulnerabilities and capabilities of refugees.



Since 2013, Trickle Up has worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations to deliver practical livelihoods programs to refugee populations. *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* is a U.S. State Department-funded three-year learning initiative between Trickle Up and UNHCR to implement the Graduation Approach with 200,000 households of refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, and the forcibly displaced in 10 countries.

To learn more about our work with refugees, [visit refugees.trickleup.org](https://refugees.trickleup.org).

This brief is adapted from an external evaluation by Ines Arevalo Sanchez and Anton Simanowitz. [Click here to view the full evaluation](#), or visit [refugees.trickleup.org/resources](https://refugees.trickleup.org/resources).