



LESSONS FROM TRICKLE UP AND UNHCR

# Applying a refugee lens to Graduation

Key factors in determining appropriateness

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

AVSI	Association of Volunteers in International Service
BPRM	US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
CGAP	Consultative Group to Assist the Poor
CoP	Community of Practice
GA	Graduation Approach
HH	Household
IDP	Internally Displaced People
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PEI	Partnership for Economic Inclusion
PoC	Persons of Concern

# Executive Summary

According to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, both the number of people affected by forced displacement and its duration have consistently increased since 2011. At the same time, the funding gap for humanitarian assistance required by populations experiencing protracted displacement is widening. To address this growing need, the international community is increasingly advocating for, and engaging in, building the self-reliance of displaced populations as a sustainable solution to long-term humanitarian crises.

As part of this global movement, UNHCR started working with Trickle Up to design and implement the Graduation Approach (GA or Graduation). Graduation is an effective, time-bound, and multipronged intervention to help people create sustainable livelihoods and overcome extreme poverty in 2013. In 2016, the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BRPM) provided a three-year grant for Trickle Up's *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project. Through this project, Trickle Up has supported the design and/or implementation of Graduation programs in 10 UNHCR country operations in Argentina, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Malawi, Mozambique, Sudan, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, as well as to AVSI Foundation in Uganda, Caritas Switzerland in Jordan, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Jordan (forthcoming), and World Vision Iraq.

In evaluating the *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project, factors that influence the appropriateness of the Graduation Approach for refugees were identified. This report proposes an analytical framework that looks at the refugee context, arising challenges and opportunities, and programmatic responses at three levels—local, institutional, and individual. It further includes recommendations for how organizations can apply a refugee lens to their programs to address the specific vulnerabilities and capabilities commonly arising in refugee contexts. The analysis presented here focuses on refugees and, to some extent, asylum-seekers, the two groups that were included in UNHCR Graduation programs. It does not consider other displaced populations.

As part of the analysis of the projects supported by Trickle Up, the first part of this report discusses the appropriateness of the GA for refugees. The second section presents an analytical framework for the analysis of the refugee context and how organizations can respond to the needs of refugees through the GA. The final section concludes and presents additional ideas for the community of practice going forward.

## The Graduation Approach in a refugee context

The Graduation Approach has been increasingly adapted, implemented, and found to be 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.

Experience from the 10 Graduation programs implemented by UNHCR suggests that **the GA may not be appropriate in a refugee emergency situation**. At a *local level*, government systems may be under

pressure amidst a surge in displaced people. This may lead to additional barriers to refugees' meeting basic needs and obtaining relevant refugee status. At an *institutional level*, organizations may deprioritize medium and long-term solutions over the need to respond to more pressing basic needs. *Refugees and other displaced populations* may also be too vulnerable to engage in sustainable economic activities.

Even outside of a refugee emergency, it appears that **a period of normalization is required before refugees can effectively engage in the Graduation program**. This period – in which support to stabilize refugees is often provided by UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations – is required for new arrivals to normalize their status and to meet their most pressing needs. The time required may vary.

Experience from the *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project indicates that **the GA can be made to work in varied refugee contexts**. Whether the Graduation Approach is appropriate may depend on design and requires that organizations develop a thorough understanding of the needs of refugees. It also requires the program to have the necessary resources and be designed to be responsive to the challenges and opportunities emerging in a given refugee context.

## Understanding and responding to the refugee context through the Graduation Approach

While there are significant differences across contexts, several issues have emerged as prevalent in the refugee settings where UNHCR and Trickle Up worked together. This report identifies the main challenges and opportunities for refugees and suggests the programmatic responses that may be required to address them in each of the three levels.

### The local level

The **local** context is driven by the interplay 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

- **Right to work:** Refugees may not be entitled to work or may only be allowed to do so with restrictions (e.g. in certain economic activities). This will inevitably affect the economic opportunities that may be pursued by refugees and poses one of the main challenges for the economic inclusion and self-reliance of refugees.
- **Mobility:** Refugees are not allowed to leave some camps and settlements, or may have restrictions to doing so. This will limit the employment opportunities available in the camp as well as affect the viability of self-employment. In off-camp settings, refugees tend to move more than local populations, which may lead refugees to drop out of the program.
- **State of the economy:** Livelihood opportunities are determined by the economic environment where the GA is implemented and may range from urban areas with more vibrant economies,

to camps or settlements that are well connected to markets, to remote camps located in economically depressed areas.

- **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.
- **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. This may create additional demands on Graduation programs in terms of having to facilitate the integration into the new culture.

## PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSES

- **Advocate:** Engage in advocacy efforts to influence changes in regulations that pose barriers to refugees, including acquiring the right documentation, accessing key services, and the right to work and be mobile.
- **Build markets:** Build markets to expand economic opportunities, including market and value chain development, as well as linkages to private employment opportunities.
- **Include host populations:** Include host populations to help build buy-in within governments to support efforts to scale up and foster social integration.

## The institutional level

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

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- **Assistance targeted to refugees:** In refugee settings, there is often humanitarian assistance specifically targeted to refugee populations and designed to meet refugees' basic needs. Increasingly, organizations working with non-refugees are targeting their livelihood programs to refugee populations as well. This presents an opportunity to leverage existing systems and programs to implement Graduation.
- **Barriers to service access:** Even in enabling local environments, refugees may face both formal and informal barriers to services, such as lack of access to documentation or financial services. In addition, refugee and host community members are often unaware of refugees' rights to access services.
- **Vulnerability to discriminatory and exploitative practices:** Refugees are often offered discriminatory and sometimes illegal working conditions, such as having longer work shifts for the same pay as host community members, working on the base of oral contracts, receiving in-kind payment, or not being paid at all. Refugees may have no other choice than to accept these conditions, especially if livelihood opportunities are otherwise limited.

## PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSES

- **Leverage UNHCR's operations:** While UNHCR is shifting to playing the role of convener in the GA community of practice. Any organization working with refugees should understand how to leverage UNHCR's efforts.
- **Build on existing systems:** Successful GA programs build on existing systems as much as possible to avoid creating parallel structures and duplication, while ensuring the services provided by others can be aligned to the purpose of the GA and the particular needs of refugees.
- **Strengthen the humanitarian and development nexus:** Strengthen coordination within and across organizations to ensure a holistic and coherent response is provided to program participants. This is particularly important for refugees given the psychosocial vulnerabilities that many face. Coaching through a case management approach provides one way of strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus. This requires enabling coaches to identify both protection risks and livelihood support needs, and to refer participants to the services and components they may use to address them, either within the organization or through linkages to others.
- **Sensitize strategic organizations about refugee issues:** An important element of the GA in a refugee context is advocacy with organizations, employers, and service-providers for the inclusion of refugees in their programs and services. This includes sensitizing stakeholders about legal and administrative barriers refugees may face to effectively access the services they provide.

### 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

- **Heterogeneity:** There may be significant cultural, social, and economic differences amongst refugees and between refugees and host populations. This may present a more complex picture than when working with local populations, requiring additional capabilities by implementing organizations to address differentiated needs.
- **Refugees' skillset and evidence of qualifications:** The extent to which refugees' experience and skillsets match economic opportunities may present an advantage or barrier, and is determined by the local market conditions and the regulatory environment. Often, certification from another country is not recognized in host countries which can limit refugees' employment options.
- **Psychological impacts linked to the refugee experience:** Refugees are often victims of persecution, violence, xenophobia, and social discrimination that may lead to psychological

effects such as grief, depression, and anxiety. This can affect refugees' ability to engage in economic activities, participate in support networks, and have a positive outlook for the future.

- **Lack of support networks:** Refugees often lack family and other forms of support networks and may feel socially isolated. They arrive knowing few, if any, other people in a context that might not be very welcoming. They may also be wary of socializing with other refugees, even those from the same country. This isolation may further exacerbate emotional and psychological stress and impede their ability to engage socially and economically.

## PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSES

- **Include host populations:** Including both refugees and the host community in GA programming helps reduce xenophobia, avoid frictions between locals and refugees, and foster integration.
- **Adapt to different profiles:** Given the greater heterogeneity among refugees and between refugees and host populations, the Graduation Approach may require adaptations in the intensity of components and methodologies to respond to the needs of participants with different profiles.
- **Be sensitive to protection needs:** Build capacity within the program to identify and address protection needs as they arise and avoid protection risks. Assessment exercises conducted prior to implementing the program and by coaches can help identify which opportunities are likely to create protection risks for refugees, such as discrimination and harassment. Coaches can also identify what programs or services may be offered by other organizations to help protect refugees.
- **Provide psychosocial support:** Regular visits to refugees can help coaches track, identify and address psychosocial issues that may be prevalent amongst refugees, such as grief, depression, and anxiety. Strengthening refugees' social networks also becomes particularly important to help address refugees' social isolation. When necessary, coaches can refer participants to more intensive psychosocial support services offered by other programs or organizations.
- **Create a self-reliance mindset:** Creating a mindset of self-reliance from the outset is a key factor in participants' success. Coaches and core capacity building activities have a significant role to play. This process may involve building awareness about refugees' rights and empowering participants to exercise them. This is particularly important for refugees given their lack of social network and familiarity with local structures, and the psychological impacts resulting from the refugee experience. It is especially important to build participants' understanding and buy-in where Graduation programs aim to reduce dependency on services that refugees are used to receiving as part of humanitarian assistance, such as consumption support.

In practice, organizations must understand how factors affecting refugees are interwoven and jointly shape opportunities and challenges to achieving self-reliance. This will determine how the Graduation program needs to be designed and how its components need to be adapted. Further, implementing

Graduation for refugees will benefit from exploring ways to integrate programs into government social protection systems to reaching scale and remove barriers to refugees' economic and social inclusion. Finally, research and evaluation must be integrated into programs to build a stronger understanding of some of the innovations and adaptations that may be required to respond to the differentiated vulnerabilities and capabilities of refugees.

# Background

According to 2018 estimates, about 70 million people have been forced to flee their homes to escape persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations, and the figure continues the upward trend seen since 2011.<sup>1</sup> Forced displacements are not only increasing in number (nearly 24% increase in 2018 compared to 2017) but also in length of time. The percentage of refugees in protracted situations,<sup>2</sup> which include camps, settlements, and self-settlement settings, increased from 66% in 2017 to 78% in 2018.<sup>3</sup> This is happening alongside a widening funding gap, leading the global community to call for sustainable solutions to long-term humanitarian crisis, with a number of initiatives supporting the bridging of humanitarian and development responses, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit Grand Bargain commitments, the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Humanitarian Development Nexus.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and other humanitarian organizations began supporting refugees and other persons of concern (PoC) to develop livelihoods through market-based interventions that could effectively build refugees' economic self-reliance.<sup>5</sup>

As part of this effort, in 2013, UNHCR began engaged Trickle Up to design and implement the Graduation Approach. Together, they tested Graduation in refugee settings in Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, and Zambia. Building on this initial work, in 2016, the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BRPM) provided a three-year grant for Trickle Up to support UNHCR and a number of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to test the design and implementation of Graduation programs for refugees, through the *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project. Through this project, Trickle Up has supported the design and/or implementation of Graduation programs in 10 UNHCR country operations, including in Argentina, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Malawi, Mozambique, Sudan, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, as

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<sup>1</sup> Of these, 41.3 million are internally displaced people, 25.9 million are refugees (of which 20.4 million are under UNHCR's mandate) and 3.5 million asylum-seekers. (UNHCR, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given host country. (UNHCR, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Definitions of the different types of refugee settlements are not consistently used and differences may not be clear-cut. Camps are "purpose-built for refugees and administered by UNHCR and/or host governments. Food, water and services such as schooling and health care are provided by relief agencies." Settlement is a "deliberate and coherent package and administrative measures whereby a group of refugees is enabled to settle on land, usually in an uninhabited or sparsely-populated area". Self-settlement refugees live inside a host community, often in an urban area. They may also receive assistance from UNHCR or other humanitarian organizations. (Idris, 2017)

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR (2018), European Commission (2019)

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR (2014)

well with AVSI Foundation in Uganda, Caritas Switzerland in Jordan, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Jordan (forthcoming), and World Vision Iraq in Iraq.<sup>6</sup>

In Spring 2019, Trickle Up commissioned an evaluation of the *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project with the purpose assessing its overall performance, but also of systematizing lessons learned through the project.<sup>7</sup> This report discusses the appropriateness of the GA for refugees. The second section proposes an analytical framework to understand the refugee context as relevant to the implementation of Graduation, and provides initial recommendations on how organizations can apply a refugee lens to their programs to address the specific vulnerabilities and capabilities commonly arising in refugee contexts, and concludes with ideas for the community of practice going forward.

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<sup>6</sup> At the time of this publication, the programs planned by Caritas Switzerland, NRC Jordan, or World Vision Iraq had not yet started. The focus on the programs implemented to date has been on refugees and, in some cases, asylum-seekers.

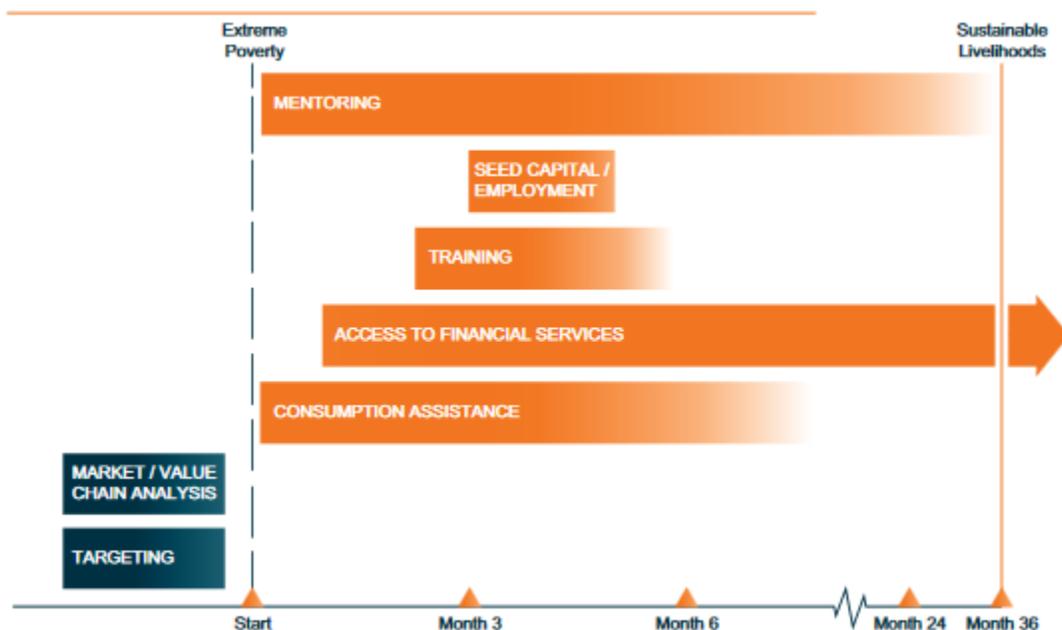
<sup>7</sup> The evaluation focused on capturing lessons based on the perspectives and experiences from program staff in order to identify the key issues that affect the appropriateness of the GA for refugees. This report, thus, does not provide an in-depth review of each context and the relative strengths and weaknesses.

# Appropriateness of the Graduation Approach for refugees

## Rationale and effectiveness of the Graduation Approach

The GA consists of a carefully sequenced and time-bound package of services that typically combines elements of social protection (including consumption support and coaching), livelihood development (seed capital and technical and vocational skills training) and financial inclusion (savings and financial literacy). See Figure 1 for the standard components included in a typical Graduation program.

Figure 1. The Graduation into Sustainable Livelihoods Approach



Source: CGAP (2016)

The GA has been increasingly implemented worldwide, both as standalone programs and integrated into government social protection programs.<sup>8</sup> Part of the surge in Graduation programming owes to the small but mounting body of evidence showing strong positive results on a wide range of wellbeing indicators, including households' food security, income, consumption, assets, savings, and aspects of psychosocial wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> Follow-up impact studies are also showing impacts are sustained over time.<sup>10</sup>

#### Text Box 1. Persons of Concern to UNHCR

Persons of Concern (PoC) is a term used by UNHCR to refer to the population groups that are affected by displacement and fall under its protection mandate. These include refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, returnees, and internally displaced people (IDP).

Of the 70.8 million people that are currently displaced globally, there are 25.9 million refugees, persons in refugee-like situations, and returnees. Of these, 20.4 million are under UNHCR's mandate and the rest are under UNRWA's, 41.3 million are IDP, and 3.5 million asylum-seekers. In addition, there are approximately four million stateless people according to UNHCR data.

Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/ph/persons-concern-unhcr>

The GA has been adapted and used with a range of extremely poor and vulnerable people, including youth, people with disabilities, and indigenous groups, and has been demonstrated to work in a range of different contexts, including rural, urban, pastoralist. A recent study has also found the GA to work in fragile and conflict-affected areas.<sup>11</sup>

The Graduation Approach simultaneously addresses multiple sources of vulnerability, including the lack of or very limited access to livelihood opportunities, lack of assets, low skills, and marginalization. The program can help extreme poor households transition into sustainable livelihoods provided the Graduation package is a sufficiently 'big push' to break the cycle of poverty.<sup>12</sup>

## Responsiveness of the Graduation Approach to different contexts

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<sup>8</sup> PEI's State of the Sector report in 2018 indicates the number of Graduation programs implemented worldwide nearly doubled from 55 programs in 2015 to 99 in 2017. Along with the expansion of Graduation implementations worldwide, there is growing interest amongst donors, governments, and practitioners in targeting specific subgroups of the extreme poor, including youth (43% of programs mapped in 2017), people with disabilities (30%), indigenous populations (29%) and those affected by forced displacement (16%) See Arevalo et al. (2018)

<sup>9</sup> See for example Bandiera et al (2013) and Banerjee et al (2015)

<sup>10</sup> Balboni et al (2015), Banerjee et al. (2016)

<sup>11</sup> Bedoya et al (2019)

<sup>12</sup> Barret et al. (2018)

In recent years, Graduation programs have increasingly introduced significant innovations and adaptations.<sup>13</sup> They are often directed at finding cost effective ways to respond to the needs of differentiated target populations and contexts. While the core elements of the approach are generally similar across contexts, the scope, intensity, and delivery structure of a Graduation program varies. This is necessary to respond to the different capabilities and vulnerabilities of the target population, the cultural and structural norms and the interface of this with local markets and services, the physical environment, and existing institutional capacities. For this, developing a deep understanding of the context in which a program is implemented becomes essential.

## The Graduation Approach in a refugee context

Through the *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project, Trickle Up provided technical assistance to Graduation programs implemented across a wide range of contexts. While UNHCR works with various forced displaced population groups (see Box 1), the UNHCR Graduation programs supported by Trickle Up have primarily targeted refugees, with the exception of Ecuador and Costa Rica where asylum-seekers were also included.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the analysis presented in this report focuses on refugees and, to some extent, asylum-seekers.

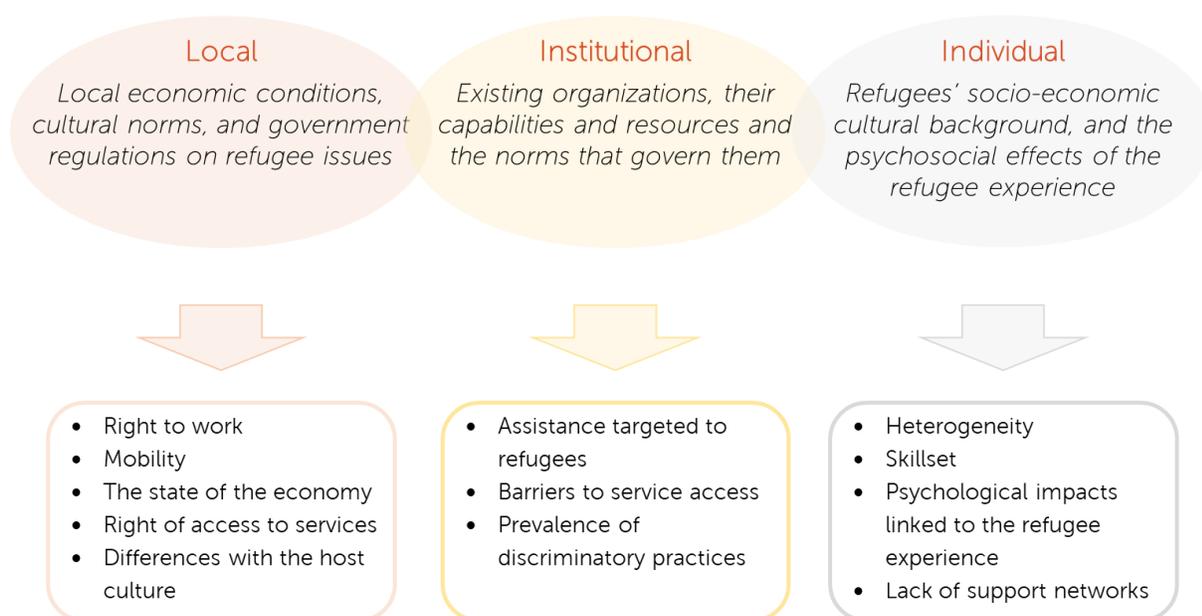


Figure 2: Analytical framework for analysis of refugee context

Understanding the refugee context requires looking at three levels: **local**, **institutional**, and **individual**. The interplay between these three levels results in a range of factors that affect refugees' ability to

<sup>13</sup> De Montesquieu and Sheldon (2014) and Arévalo et al. (2018)

<sup>14</sup> Most of the programs supported by Trickle Up also targeted host communities. However, the work of Trickle Up and implementing partners serving host communities is not discussed in this report. The program planned to be implemented by World Vision Iraq will target returnees.

develop sustainable livelihoods and fully integrate into the host country. While there are significant differences across contexts, the issues highlighted in Figure 2 have emerged as prevalent in the refugee settings where UNHCR and Trickle Up worked together.

While the majority of this report explores how these factors connect to influence the refugee experience in different contexts, there are also some generalizable conclusions about the appropriateness of Graduation in refugee contexts.

## Lessons

### THE GRADUATION APPROACH MAY NOT BE APPROPRIATE IN A REFUGEE EMERGENCY SITUATION

Experience from the 10 Graduation programs implemented by UNHCR suggests that **the GA may not be appropriate in a refugee emergency situation**. At a *local level*, government systems may be under pressure amidst a surge in the number of displaced people. This may lead to a significant increase in the time required to regularize refugees' status. In some cases, governments may consider introducing additional barriers to refugees' regularization process. For example, given the large influx of Venezuelans, the Government of Ecuador is currently considering replacing the regional Unasur visas, which grant citizenship status, including right to live and work in the country to those from these countries, with humanitarian visas which do not entitle them to work.<sup>15</sup>

At an *institutional level*, the need to respond to more pressing basic needs may prevail over organizations' efforts to deliver medium and long-term economic development solutions. For example, since UNHCR started implementing the GA in 2014, there have been several instances (including Ecuador and Sudan) where funds and staff have had to be diverted to be able to respond to emergencies.

*Refugees and other displaced populations* may also be too vulnerable to engage in sustainable economic activities. For example, they may lack access to adequate basic services, such as shelter and healthcare, or may be psychologically frail, as a result of forced displacement. It may also be unclear whether newly arrived displaced populations will decide to stay in the country where they first arrive. According to staff from Ecuador, for example, only a third of the Venezuelans arriving in Ecuador will stay. Until these issues are addressed, the Graduation Approach may not be the most suitable intervention.

### IN NON-EMERGENCY CONTEXTS, REFUGEES NEED A PERIOD OF NORMALIZATION BEFORE JOINING A GRADUATION PROGRAM

Even outside of a refugee emergency context, it appears that a period of normalization where refugees settle into the new context is important before they can effectively engage in the Graduation program. This period is necessary for new arrivals to normalize their refugee status and to meet their most pressing needs, which may include shelter, healthcare, children's education, and psychological

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.dw.com/es/ecuador-estudia-imponer-visa-humanitaria-a-venezolanos/a-48873440>

support. UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations provide assistance to help new arrivals address these issues. The time required by refugees to stabilize their situation may vary by context. In Zambia, for example, a decision was taken not to engage new arrivals in the Graduation program until they had received assistance for 18 months. In Ecuador this period is just two months.

It is worth noting that the initial stages of the Graduation Approach, including consumption support, linkages to basic services, and coaching, are designed to help participants normalize their situations. Specifically, these interventions aim to help stabilize consumption to meet participants' basic needs, address psychosocial barriers, and create the conditions where participants have the capacity to start investing. Thus, despite UNHCR taking the decision to delay interventions in many contexts, it may be appropriate to consider using GA at an earlier stage provided that the institutions and systems have the capacity to do so.

### APPROPRIATENESS DEPENDS UPON PROGRAM DESIGN AND RESOURCES

Beyond the need for a stable situation, the experience from the *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project indicates that the GA can be adapted to work in a variety of refugee contexts, including urban settings, camps, and settlements with a varying policy environments. The refugee context often creates additional challenges to building sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance for people living in extreme poverty, including the lack of valid documentation, weakened social networks, and barriers to livelihood development and service access. However, the formal recognition that refugees receive protection, rights, and support, creates a foundation on which the GA can be effectively used. Even in very challenging conditions, programs can find ways of addressing prevalent refugee issues. Therefore, appropriateness of the Graduation Approach depends on the extent to which the program has the required resources and is designed to be responsive to the needs emerging in a given refugee context.

# Understanding and responding to the refugee context through the Graduation Approach

This section provides a framework that organizations can use to identify the vulnerabilities and capabilities of refugees, based on an analysis of these three levels. While every refugee setting will have its own contextual factors, it highlights the main challenges and opportunities that have emerged as prevalent in the location where UNHCR, with support from Trickle Up, has implemented the GA.<sup>16</sup> In addition, this section presents 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 is driven by the surrounding economic environment, government's response to refugees, and the diverse cultural norms and structural factors of the refugee community and how these relate to the host communities:

**Government response to refugees:** The regulatory environment defines the rights and obligations of refugees in the host country, such as the right to work, the right to move, and the right to access basic government services, including health and education.

**Surrounding economic environment:** Local economic conditions are affected by geographical factors such as whether refugees are living in an urban or rural context; in a camp, settlement, or within a local community, close to vibrant markets or distant from markets, or, in an economically depressed or unstable area.

**Cultural norms and structural factors:** Refugees bring a variety of cultural norms such as expected roles of men and women, or cultural, religious or ethnic identity. These may vary between refugee groups, perpetuate or exacerbate existing divisions and tensions, or create challenges in relations with the cultural norms present in the host community.

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<sup>16</sup> This is by no means intended to be a comprehensive list of issues that may be prevalent in all refugee contexts. Further, these issues may not be unique to refugees. Yet, they have been found to be most prevalent within these contexts.

## Challenges and opportunities

### RIGHT TO WORK

Even if refugees have the right to live in the host country, they may lack the right to work or may only be allowed to work in certain economic activities. This poses one of the main challenges for the economic inclusion and self-reliance of refugees. For example, in Jordan, Syrian refugees are only allowed to work legally in selected occupations. This will inevitably affect the economic opportunities that may be pursued by refugees. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, refugees have no right to work, and either work illegally, where they often suffer low wages and exploitation, engage in self-employment in the informal sector, or, survive through agriculture-based businesses. In Sudan, refugees are only allowed to work as self-employed or in the private sector but not public sector, and they must apply for a work permit if they want to seek employment opportunities outside the camp.

### MOBILITY

In some settings, refugees are not allowed to freely move in and out of the camp or settlement. For example, in refugee settlements in Zambia and Zimbabwe, refugees can apply once per week for a gate-pass that allows travel for a limited amount of time (days or weeks). This affects employment and business opportunities and whether refugees will be limited to livelihood opportunities that exist within the camp. Limits to moving in and out of camps or settlements may also affect refugees' psychosocial wellbeing and their attitude towards self-reliance.

On the contrary, in off-camp settings, mostly in urban areas, refugees are allowed to move freely. With no roots in the host community, refugees tend to move more as they search for better economic opportunities. In a case such as Ecuador, refugees struggle to pay high rents often leading to eviction and therefore relatively high mobility for refugees. This creates a challenge for Graduation programs and may limit the organization's ability to continue providing access to the Graduation program.

### THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY

The programs supported as part of the *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project have been implemented in a variety of contexts ranging from urban areas with more vibrant economies (e.g. Ecuador and Costa Rica), to camps or settlements located in rural areas well connected to markets (e.g. Uganda, Mozambique, and Malawi), to remote camps located in economically depressed areas (e.g. Zimbabwe).<sup>17</sup> A weak local economy compounds the barriers that refugees face to building a sustainable livelihood. In such cases, there may be a higher prevalence of informal and subsistence livelihoods resulting in low wages, unstable income sources and a higher risk of exploitation. Strong local economies create an opportunity to connect refugees to market opportunities, for example through value chain development or market linkages.

### RIGHT OF ACCESS TO OTHER GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix A for the list of programs and refugee settings supported under the Building Self-Reliance for Refugees' project.

In some countries, governments make their services available to all people living in their territory, regardless of their nationality. For example, in Jordan, Syrian refugees have a legal right to healthcare and education, similar to that of Jordanian nationals. This presents an opportunity for refugees to be better protected. In some countries refugees may even have access to extension services or business training, which may help facilitate their economic and social inclusion. In other contexts, refugees have limited or no access to these programs and services.

## DIFFERENCES WITH THE HOST CULTURE

There may be significant differences between the host culture and that of refugees, such as expected roles for men and women. This may create additional demands on Graduation programs to facilitate integration into the new culture. In some settings, there are a mix of nationalities speaking different languages, which can pose a barrier to social and economic inclusion for certain refugees. For example, in southern Africa a predominance of Congolese refugees leads to Swahili becoming the primary language utilized in the camps and settlements. As a result, refugees who do not speak Swahili are often marginalized. In some cases, participation in a program may be affected if all staff or program volunteers speak one language. In some cases, differences in cultural backgrounds amongst refugees can also lead to inter-ethnic tensions, such as those amongst groups of Congolese living in the Zambian settlement.

### Programmatic response

The challenges emerging in a refugee context may make it necessary to work towards affecting systemic change in addition to working with individual participants in order for Graduation to be most effective. This may include engaging with market structures, advocacy with the government to lessen legal barriers and administrative constraints, and inclusion of host populations as ways to influence the local context and change the status quo.

## ADVOCATE

Engaging in policy dialogue with the government can influence changes in laws and administrative processes that govern refugee status. Policy dialogue may include lobbying and advocating for the rights of refugees and sensitizing governments to the challenges faced by refugees and the value they could bring to the host country.

While advocacy may not be a feasible undertaking for many organizations, institutions such as UNHCR have a deliberate mission to influence governments to guarantee the rights of refugees. HIAS, the lead implementing partner for the Graduation program in Ecuador, highlighted the importance of leveraging UNHCR's advocacy efforts to ease some of the main barriers faced by refugees. These barriers may include acquiring the right documentation and eliminating barriers to service access. Graduation programs in a refugee context will be most effective if they leverage advocacy efforts by UNHCR and other institutions to enhance the enabling environment for Graduation.

## BUILD MARKETS

Developing sustainable livelihoods for refugees may require additional work on value chain development, links to private employment, and market development. This is important in challenging

economic settings like depressed economies or remote locations, but is also particularly important for refugees given their lack of networks, and knowledge about and access to local systems and structures.

To help overcome this challenge, the UNHCR Graduation program in the Meheba settlement in Zambia has made important efforts to link participants to services and organizations outside of the settlement to facilitate access to financial services, value chain development, and marketing. For example, savings groups are linked to local farmer associations to facilitate access to inputs and output markets.

## INCLUDE HOST POPULATIONS

It can be strategic and politically sensitive, or even required, to also target host community members for Graduation programming. Doing so can help build buy-in within government for future scale up efforts. The Government of Jordan, for example, requires all development interventions to target 70% Jordanians and 30% Syrian refugees. In Costa Rica, UNHCR targeted both refugees and indigenous women for its Graduation pilot. In response to positive results from the pilot, the Government of Costa Rica is including refugees and asylum-seekers living in poverty and extreme poverty into its cash assistance programs. This allowed UNHCR to build an adapted Graduation package around the government's cash assistance program, linking refugees that benefit from the government's program to the other Graduation components provided by UNHCR implementing partners.

## The institutional level

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

**Ecosystem of organizations, programs, and services:** Like in any context, there is an ecosystem of organizations that could potentially be involved in program delivery and may include humanitarian organizations, governments, the private sector, and/or NGOs.

**Capabilities:** These refer to the skills and capacities of organizations to support refugees' self-reliance. In a refugee context, there is a need to combine both humanitarian assistance and development support to build refugees' self-reliance. However, most organizations specialize in one or the other. It can therefore be challenging to ensure there is strong cooperation between the humanitarian and the developmental response required by refugees.

**Institutional norms and regulations:** These refer to organizations' behavior towards refugees and policies governing their activities. This might include whether discriminatory working conditions are normal practice, whether organizations have a strong social mandate and are sensitive to refugees' issues, and whether they require documentation that refugees may not have, such as valid IDs and education certificates. This shapes the opportunities and barriers to including refugees in an institution's programs and services.

## Challenges and opportunities

### ASSISTANCE TARGETED TO REFUGEES

The refugee context needs to be understood in relation to the formal role that UNHCR plays, as recognized in the Geneva Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>18</sup> UNHCR works to protect the rights of refugees, including the right to seek asylum, and facilitates durable solutions for refugees (which include returning to the home country, integrating in the host country, or resettling). UNHCR also provides humanitarian assistance to meet refugees' needs during displacement (including providing shelter, food, water, sanitation and healthcare).<sup>19</sup> This is the context upon which Graduation programs must build.

In addition to UNHCR, other organizations, including NGOs and other multilateral organizations, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), often provide humanitarian assistance for refugees. Increasingly, some of these organizations are targeting their existing livelihood programs to refugee populations. This opens the opportunity to leverage existing humanitarian and livelihoods systems and programs to implement the GA.

### BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SERVICES

Even if legally allowed, refugees often face both formal and informal barriers to services. For example, refugees may be excluded from accessing both government and private sector services through regulations that require documentation that refugees may not be entitled to access. In many countries, refugees are given refugee identity cards rather than national identity cards. This may lead to exclusion from government benefits like agricultural extension services, social protection programs and from private sector services. For example, refugees in Ecuador have the same legal rights as national citizens, but access to some government services and formal financial services is constrained by their documentation. While legally allowed to open a savings account, refugee and humanitarian visas (granted to asylum-seekers in Ecuador) are not accepted by financial service providers as valid proof of identity, which hinders refugees' ability to open a savings account. Similarly, the refugee visa has a numbering system that is not recognized by some of the registries that give access to certain government services.

### PREVALENCE OF DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES

In addition to the formal discrimination that many refugees face at the local level, such as restrictions to the right to work and mobility, refugees are often victims of discrimination at an institutional and individual level as well. For example, xenophobia between individuals often manifests as a result of widespread fears that refugees will take away job opportunities from host community nationals, that refugees unfairly benefit from the government services paid for by locals, and that their presence results in an increase in crime and violence in the host country. At an institutional level, xenophobia may result in refugees being unable to access services or find employment. Private sector employers may not be willing to hire refugees, for instance, or they may seek to take advantage of their vulnerability and lack of protection. Examples of this include discriminatory or illegal working conditions like having to work longer work shifts for reduced pay, insecurity from work based on oral

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<sup>18</sup> See UNHCR (2011).

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org>

contracts, and receiving in-kind compensation or none at all. Refugees may not have any other choice than to accept these unfair conditions if livelihood opportunities are otherwise limited.

## Programmatic response

### LEVERAGE UNHCR OPERATIONS' ACTIVITIES

There is a clear opportunity for Graduation programs to leverage UNHCR country operations' existing activities to support the GA. Many operations already provide many of the components included in a typical Graduation program, such as consumption support, capacity building, and livelihoods asset transfers, though they are not similarly sequenced and time-bound. Using the GA to build coherence and structure within UNHCR interventions was, in fact, an expected outcome from implementing the GA within UNHCR country operations.<sup>20</sup>

There is the opportunity – and need - to leverage operations' advocacy efforts as well, in order to support the success of GA programming. Some implementing partners noted the special weight that UNHCR carries when lobbying and advocating for the rights of refugees. In Sudan, UNHCR supports refugees applying for work permits and collaborates with the government office responsible for issuing work permits to facilitate the process for refugees. Engaging with UNHCR more intentionally around these regulatory efforts could help facilitate GA activities more broadly.

In spite of these opportunities, the *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project also highlighted challenges that a large humanitarian organization like UNHCR might face when implementing the GA. In the case of UNHCR, inadequate funding levels and structures, staff rotation, and conflicting priorities to respond to emergency situations, made it difficult for UNHCR operations to lead implementation of the Graduation Approach (see Text Box 2). These challenges have led UNHCR HQ to shift from directly implementing the Graduation Approach to convening other actors and advocating for the economic and social inclusion of refugees.

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<sup>20</sup> Ayoubi et al. (2017)

#### Text Box 2. UNHCR challenges relevant to humanitarian organizations implementing the Graduation Approach

The *Building the Self-Reliance for Refugees project* has generated relevant lessons learned around the challenges that a humanitarian organization with a focus on the protection of refugees, such as UNHCR, may face when implementing the Graduation Approach (GA) in a refugee setting:

**Institutional focus.** UNHCR has a primarily humanitarian focus, often resulting in lack of commitment to ensuring staff capacity of livelihoods programming and adequate resources to focus on GA.

**Staffing.** UNHCR has low numbers of livelihoods personnel with high staff rotation and turnover rates; this constrains UNHCR's capability to build staff capacity and expertise in GA.

**Short-term project focus.** UNHCR has traditionally focused on immediate and short-term humanitarian and relief assistance. The GA requires a significant planning period to ensure component design and sequencing, which does not fit well with UNHCR's yearly activity planning.

**Funding cycle.** Likewise, UNHCR's annual funding cycle does not align with the requirements of GA (18-36 months), which means frequent funding gaps during programming cycles.

**Funding.** Given that UNHCR's core mandate is protection, funds are often prioritized for humanitarian response over livelihoods interventions. This is further compounded by UNCHR's declining budget alongside an increasing number of refugees and other displaced populations.

**Monitoring and Evaluation.** UNHCR's Global M&E system does not include indicators needed for monitoring participant progress over a project period (their system works on annual cycle). As a result, a separate M&E system was required to monitor GA. However, challenges in setting up such a system led to insufficient monitoring data to manage programs or adequately capture learning.

### BUILD ON EXISTING SYSTEMS

Beyond UNHCR, there are other organizations, including governments, non-governmental organizations, multilateral agencies and the private sector, that may already be addressing some of the needs of refugees. Successful GA programs build on existing systems as much as possible to avoid creating parallel systems and duplication. This involves assessing what existing systems and services can be leveraged and what potential role each of these actors could play to provide the required response to the specific refugee context.

When doing so, programs need to ensure the services provided by others can be aligned to the particular needs of refugees and the purpose of Graduation. Important considerations include the need to avoid protection risks and harmonize selection criteria to link refugee profiles and the profiles prioritized by organizations such as female-headed households or households with children, etc. In addition, understanding institutional capacity and priorities when linking to other organizations is a

critical part of ensuring the right level of funds and appropriate staffing for core Graduation programs and linked services.

Text Box 3. Leveraging existing systems for the implementation and scale up of the GA

**When possible, UNHCR Graduation programs leverage WFP's food assistance to develop the consumption support component.** In some of the UNHCR Graduation programs supported by Trickle Up, WFP's food vouchers act as the GA consumption support component. In Ecuador, UNHCR tops up the food assistance provided by WFP with a cash stipend to help refugees meet basic needs beyond food, including shelter and education. Moreover, UNHCR Ecuador was able to make the case to WFP to expand its geographical target to continue offering food vouchers to Graduation participants once UNHCR Ecuador scaled its GA program nationally. Other operations have faced challenges engaging WFP. Despite an initial agreement to do so, UNHCR Sudan was unable to engage WFP to provide food consumption support. Given that UNHCR Sudan lacked additional funds for this component, consumption support was not provided to Graduation participants, in spite of the need.

**In Zambia the Graduation program leverages Government ministries** to provide technical skills training for agricultural and enterprise livelihood opportunities.

**In Costa Rica and Ecuador, UNHCR is working with the government to integrate refugees into national governments' social protection systems and scale up the Graduation Approach.** UNHCR Costa Rica signed an agreement with the government to include refugees and asylum-seekers living in poverty and extreme poverty into the government's cash assistance program. This allowed UNHCR to build an adapted Graduation package around the government's cash assistance program, linking refugees that benefit from the government's program to the other Graduation components provided by UNHCR implementing partners, including livelihood promotion activities (implemented by Fundación Mujer) and coaching (led by RET International).

In 2018, UNHCR Ecuador signed an agreement with the Ministry for Economic and Social Inclusion to test a Graduation adaptation, incorporating elements of the GA to one of the government's flagship social protection programs, *Misión Menos Pobreza, Más Desarrollo* (Less Poverty, More Development Mission), which already included a cash stipend and some form of coaching.

Examples of some of the UNHCR programs that have sought to build on existing systems for the implementation of the GA package are included in Box 3, with a mix of successes and failures.

## STRENGTHEN THE HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT NEXUS<sup>21</sup>

Awareness and understanding of the humanitarian responses required to support refugees, including psychosocial counselling, addressing and preventing sex and gender-based violence, and harassment prevention, are critical to successfully implementing Graduation for refugees. Further, because the GA is anchored in market-based responses to facilitate economic inclusion, organizations need to have

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<sup>21</sup> Strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus was identified by the majority of stakeholders as a top priority at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), including donors, NGOs, crisis-affected States and others, and it received more commitments at the WHS than any other area. The New Way of Working as outlined in the Secretary-General's Report for the WHS and the Agenda for Humanity represents an approach to put this into practice (OCHA, 2017)

the capacity to assess markets, the socio-economic profiles of refugees, and determine market-based responses most suitable for refugees in a given context. Effective coordination within and among organizations is necessary to ensure a holistic and coherent response, and is particularly important given the psychosocial vulnerabilities associated for refugees' experiences.

#### Text Box 4. Strengthening and Humanitarian and Development Nexus in Ecuador

In Ecuador, UNHCR and its lead implementing partner, HIAS, established mechanisms to facilitate coordination across organizations and from the national to municipal levels. Both organizations agree that these coordination structures are fundamental for internal learning and effective program implementation. Such coordination mechanisms include regular inter-institutional meetings, working groups to track progress and identify required responses, organizational structures that facilitate supervision of field offices by the head office, and ongoing communication channels between head and field offices. HIAS also created the role of Graduation Program Coordinator who supervises the work of frontline staff, oversees the implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system, and liaises with UNHCR and other partners.

Having coaches act as case managers was key to effectively linking the psychosocial and livelihood support in the program in Ecuador. In addition to guiding participants through the Graduation program process, HIAS coaches, known as "social promoters," assess participant households' needs holistically, including protection, livelihood development, and other basic needs. Coaches then identify which services can be provided to meet the needs of participants, in addition to what they receive as part of the Graduation package. This may include support provided by other departments within HIAS, such as livelihoods, psychology and social work; by other partners within the program; or by external actors, including the government. Coaches thus develop a holistic understanding of the needs of participants, facilitate coordination within the program, and help provide a more structured response. In this way, coaching forms the backbone of the Graduation program in Ecuador.

UNHCR and HIAS also worked to better integrate the humanitarian and development support provided to refugees by developing a two-tiered coaching mechanism wherein participants work with livelihoods advisors in addition to coaches. Coaches and livelihoods advisors share the same cases to facilitate coordination and to provide a more holistic response. During the pilot, support from the livelihoods advisor started after the consumption support (month 12). However, HIAS and UNHCR recognized the need to engage livelihoods advisors earlier on in order to help participants shift focus toward building their self-reliance. Now, coaches introduce the idea of developing a livelihood plan to program participants from the outset, and participants begin engaging with livelihoods advisors around month 2 or 3 of the program.

*Source: Trickle Up (2019) Applying a Refugee Lens to Graduation in Ecuador.*

Taking a case management approach to coaching participants provides one way to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus. This process requires enabling coaches to identify both protection risks and livelihood support needs of participants, and to refer participants to the services and components that may be used to address them, either within the organization or linking them to external services. In this way, coaches can develop a holistic understanding of needs and responses provided to refugees. The coaches' role in helping refugees develop a vision for their future is particularly important, as is supporting a mindset of self-reliance, and helping bridge the transition from protection to promotion. In this sense, coaching provides a platform for integrating both the

protection and promotion lenses, ultimately facilitating coordination and the protection-promotion nexus.

## SENSITIZE STRATEGIC ORGANIZATIONS ABOUT REFUGEE ISSUES

An important element of the GA in a refugee context is to advocate with organizations to include refugees in their programs and services. This includes sensitizing them about the legal and administrative barriers refugees may face to effectively access their services. In Zambia, for example, Self-Help Africa lobbied NatSave, a government savings and credit bank with a financial inclusion mandate, to include refugees. These advocacy efforts resulted in the development of a new product targeted at refugees that was approved by the National Bank of Zambia. The *Karibu* (meaning “You are welcome” in Swahili) account accepts refugee identification documents in place of the national ID and has a low minimum balance and fees. The account offers both individual and group savings, and potential access to loans. NatSave also opened points of sale in the settlement.

## The individual level

At an individual level, understanding the refugee context involves looking at refugees’ socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, as well as the psychosocial effects of the refugee experience.

**Socio-economic and cultural background:** This refers to the skills, experiences, and assets refugees bring with them. They may be affected by a refugee’s country of origin, the region within the country where refugees come from, and other factors like sex and age.

**Psychological impacts:** A refugee’s experience is shaped by the events that lead people to flee their home countries such as persecution and conflict, as well as the refugee’s experiences upon arrival, which may include harassment or exploitation, physical and emotional violence, uncertainties about the future, and social isolation. These events may lead to depression and anxiety that impedes refugees’ ability to engage in social and income-generating activities.

## Challenges and opportunities

### HETEROGENEITY

Discussions with staff and participants from the programs supported by Trickle Up highlight that there can be significant differences amongst refugees and between refugees and host populations. For example, there can be significant variation in terms of the amount of money and assets that refugees arrive with, and whether or not an individual has ongoing connections with their country of origin. In addition, less tangible factors such as a refugee’s socio-economic background (especially whether they previously lived in poverty), skillsets and previous work experience, and whether an individual has connections with family and friends, are important in providing a platform to build and protect a livelihood in their new context. These differences may present a more complex picture than when working with local populations, requiring additional capabilities by implementing organizations to address potential differentiated needs.

## REFUGEES’ SKILLSET AND EVIDENCE OF QUALIFICATIONS

In some cases, there may be a mismatch between the skills and experiences that refugees bring and the livelihood opportunities that prevail in the market. For example, many Congolese refugees arriving in Zambia had largely been involved in trading and therefore lacked the farming skills necessary to take advantage of agriculture-based opportunities in the camps. On the other hand, some refugees may have an advantage compared to host communities, bringing new skills and ideas to the market or being more educated or skilled than host populations. For example, Congolese refugees in Mozambique brought entrepreneurial skills that led to the refugee camp becoming a vibrant market center frequented by members of the host community.

In addition, refugees' may not have the certification necessary to engage in certain activities. As a result of fleeing, refugees often arrive without a formal proof of their skills and education. When they are able to present such certification, it may not be recognized in the host country. Both of these situations may limit an individual's opportunity to engage in wage employment or to pursue further formal education.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS LINKED TO THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

Refugees are often victims of persecution and violence that may lead to psychological effects such as grief, depression, and anxiety. This can affect refugees' ability to engage in economic activities, participate in support networks, and have a positive outlook for the future. Xenophobia may also reduce chances for refugees to interact and build bonds with local populations, while also undermining their psychological wellbeing. Further, sex and gender-based violence (SGBV) appears to be prevalent amongst refugees, both within households and in communities; this is due to increased stress, breakdown of social bonds, and higher vulnerability to sexual and other forms of harassment.<sup>22</sup>

Some UNHCR and partner staff shared the perception that reliance on humanitarian assistance over a protracted period can lead to a mindset of dependency, particularly in camps and settlements where refugees may lack motivation or incentives to develop sustainable livelihoods and become self-reliant.<sup>23</sup> For example, staff in Zambia reported that many refugees lack a vision for the future and/or feel that their experience is temporary. This was as a major barrier to motivating them to participate in the Graduation Approach. Other refugees hope for resettlement in a third country, usually Europe or North America, despite a relatively small number being resettled internationally. While participation in GA has no direct bearing on a refugee's eligibility for resettlement, some refugees in Zambia who were identified as eligible for the graduation program based on their socioeconomic status opted not to participate as they preferred to maintain their state of vulnerability and poverty rather than risk being deemed not vulnerable enough for resettlement. Of course, there are many examples of refugees who seized upon the opportunities provided by the Graduation program and made significant improvements in their livelihoods.

## LACK OF SUPPORT NETWORKS

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<sup>22</sup> Women's Refugee Commission (2016)

<sup>23</sup> Idris (2017)

Refugees often lack family and other forms of support networks and may feel socially isolated. Many arrive into a context that may not be very welcoming, knowing few or no other people. Refugees may be wary of socializing with other refugees, particularly in self-settlements in urban areas and among those from the same country. Frequent movement by refugees may further impede the development of social networks and a sense of belonging. This may further exacerbate their emotional and psychological status as well as their ability to be socially and economically included.

During the pilot in Ecuador, it proved extremely challenging to establish savings groups, an approach typically followed by Graduation programs to enhance financial inclusion. Part of the reason stems from the fact that in urban settings there is often a less cohesive community and lack of trust. The experience from the pilot in Ecuador helped Trickle Up identify the need to build social networks for refugees and include network engagement as a component as part of the Graduation package for refugees.

## **Programmatic response**

### **INCLUDE HOST POPULATIONS**

Including participants from the host community is considered important to reduce xenophobia, avoid frictions between locals and refugees, and foster integration by establishing connections between communities. This is especially important when refugees live in the same community as host community members, and when the host community suffers from poverty.

### **ADAPT TO DIFFERENT PROFILES**

The refugee context often brings together people from different nationalities, ethnic groups, household compositions, and previous livelihood experiences. This often requires the program to modify the intensity of components and the methodologies used to deliver the program for different types of participants.

Practically, many Graduation programs address heterogeneity by allowing some flexibility in how coaches respond to individual needs. Coaches may provide more frequent visits to those requiring greater support, for example, or adaptations may emerge. In Zambia, stronger and weaker participants were matched in group-based livelihoods activities. In Costa Rica, which targeted both local indigenous women as well as refugees and asylum-seekers, all participants received the same interventions related to coaching home visits and financial education, while adjustments were made to livelihoods support services to better respond to differentiated needs. While refugees and asylum seekers faced barriers to employability related to a lack of documentation, Costa Rican participants were often female heads of household and the issue of childcare was relevant. To respond to these varied needs, refugees received ongoing training and support on refugee rights to employment and documentation support services, while local women were encouraged to engage in self-employment opportunities that were compatible with child-care.

### **BE SENSITIVE TO PROTECTION NEEDS**

Being protection-sensitive means leveraging the expertise that humanitarian actors already have in these contexts, as well as building capacity within the program, to avoid protection risks and address

needs that may result from participation in the Graduation program. Assessment exercises conducted prior to implementing the program can help identify which job opportunities are likely to create protection risks for refugees, such as harassment or exploitation. For example, in Egypt, home-based businesses were a preferred option for Syrian women to avoid sexual harassment at work. Through the Graduation Approach, UNHCR Egypt was even able to negotiate home-based wage employment opportunities for women.

In addition to being trained to identify protection needs, coaches are in regular contact with, and trusted by, Graduation participants, which positions them to identify protection issues. They can then, in turn, refer refugees to necessary protection services. Since the GA shifts the analysis of protection needs from the individual to the household level, coaches are also able to identify intra-household dynamics and assess protection needs more holistically. For example, as women in Ecuador became more empowered through the GA, in some instances, tensions within the household arose. Coaches were able to spot and work on this with families, revealing the need to work within the household to empower both men and women without creating conflict. UNHCR and HIAS in Ecuador acknowledge that refugees who participate in the Graduation program are better protected than those who do not.

### PROVIDE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Regular visits to refugees can also help coaches identify, track, and address psychosocial issues and intra-household violence and tensions arising due to lack of family support systems, social discrimination and xenophobia. Coaches in many operations receive training on how to identify and refer participants to specialists for support. In Costa Rica, UNHCR provided additional legal and psychological support to those who were survivors of SGBV.

Strengthening refugees' social networks also becomes particularly important in addressing refugees' social isolation and psychological wellbeing. In some cases, this involves facilitating involvement in networks where there are opportunities to engage and integrate with the local community, such as organizing local festivals or doing community works. This can also be a way of improving the perceived contribution of refugees in the local community and help reduce xenophobia, particularly in urban contexts.

A key mechanism for network engagement in rural and camp settings are savings groups, which bring together participants for savings and credit, and also provide a platform for training, problem solving and building cohesion and positive relationships between members. In the Zambian refugee settlement Meheba, for example, many refugees arrive without family or friends. While Congolese are the majority, there is a mix of ethnic groups and nationalities. Program participants highlighted the role savings groups play in building social connections. They described "family-like" support across different ethnic groups, nationalities and religions, creating a network of people who can provide advice or comfort when problems are experienced.

### CREATE A SELF-RELIANCE MINDSET

In protracted settings where a sense of dependency has developed, helping individuals develop a positive vision for the future becomes particularly important to the GA. Creating a self-reliance mindset may be a key factor in driving the achievements of the most successful participants and

should be encouraged from the beginning of the program. Coaches in Zambia, for example, help participants recognize that consumption support is temporary and to plan for how they will be able to manage once it ends. This focus on self-reliance is also a key part of the messaging in core training provided to groups and through the regular support of coaches.

Creating a self-reliance mindset also requires building awareness about rights and empowering participants to exercise them. While seeking to empower participants may be common to other Graduation programs targeting specific vulnerable groups, such as women, it becomes even more important for refugees given their lack of social networks, unfamiliarity with local structures, and the psychological impacts resulting from the refugee experience.

In Ecuador, coaches initially led participants to access government services to which they are entitled. Coaches would go with refugees to the health center to support participants and ensure they have access to healthcare. Over time, the program determined that as part of the process to empower participants, coaches needed to be less assistance-oriented and instead focus on enabling participants to access services by themselves.

In pursuing refugees' self-reliance, it appears to be particularly important to build awareness about the objectives of the program and role of each component. Managing expectations may be particularly important for components that are typically provided to refugees as part of humanitarian assistance.

# Conclusion

Based on the experiences and lessons gathered through Trickle Up's *Building Self-Reliance for Refugees* project, this report has identified the factors that influence the appropriateness of the GA for refugees. Appropriateness depends on understanding and responding to what is required for refugees to develop sustainable livelihoods, as well as the capacity of organizations to combine both humanitarian assistance and development approaches so as to be able to effectively respond to the issues affecting refugees in a particular context.

Assessing the appropriateness of the GA for refugees thus requires developing an understanding of the specific vulnerabilities and capabilities that refugees face in a particular setting. This is a product of the interplay between the local, institutional and individual levels.

The UNHCR Graduation programs supported by Trickle Up as part of this project have been implemented in a wide range of contexts and through their experience, this report concludes that:

- **The Graduation Approach may not be appropriate in a refugee emergency situation.** In these circumstances, governments' systems to respond to refugees and asylum seekers may be under pressure, which may lead to situations where refugees' rights are further constrained. At an institutional level, organizations may shift their focus from long-term solutions to meeting pressing basic needs. At an individual level, refugees and other displaced populations may be physically and/or emotionally too vulnerable to work towards building a sustainable future for themselves.
- **In a non-emergency situation, refugees need a period of normalization before joining the Graduation Approach.** This period is required to normalize their refugee status and meet their most pressing needs, including shelter, healthcare, and psychological support. In this sense, the GA, which often starts with a set of social protection elements designed to assist participants to meet their basic needs and create the conditions where participants have the capacity to start investing, is aligned with the needs of new refugees. The time that is needed before refugees can be effectively engaged in Graduation programming will vary by context, including the time required to ascertain their legal status.
- **Beyond the need for a stable situation, appropriateness is determined by program design.** Whether Graduation is appropriate depends on the extent to which the program has the required resources and is designed to be responsive to the needs emerging in a given refugee context.

While many Graduation programs for refugees have focused primarily on individual-level interventions, effectiveness can be enhanced by working more intentionally to address the local and institutional levels as well. The three levels provide an analytical framework that organizations can use to frame their understanding of the refugee context in relation to the GA. At the institutional level, the project has highlighted a set of challenges specific to UNHCR, which highlight the need for any

implementing partner to have the appropriate structures and resources in place. At a local level, Graduation programming has to do a better job of advocacy and market development in order to have a sustained impact

Organizations must understand how factors affecting refugees are interconnected and how they jointly shape the opportunities and challenges in building refugees' self-reliance. Even if refugees are entitled to work, getting a formal job remains a challenge for reasons that may include limited market opportunities, skills mis-match between refugees' background and employers' needs, discrimination against refugees, or a lack of awareness on the part of employers about refugees' right to work or about the legal processes required to hire them.

Contexts vary and will determine how the Graduation program needs to be designed, including whether and how GA components may need to be adapted, whether additional services may need to be introduced or sought outside of the program, and whether affecting change at the market level is needed to increase the effectiveness of the approach for refugees.

The 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. While the refugee context needs to be understood in relation to the formal role that UNHCR plays, UNHCR's evolving livelihood strategy means other organizations, including 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 Global Coalition to Alleviate Poverty amongst Refugees and Host communities (Coalition). The Coalition brings together UNHCR and PEI, as convening members, and 11 implementing and technical partners, including Trickle Up, to jointly work together towards increasing self-reliance, economic, and social inclusion of refugees and host communities by sustainably increasing income-earning opportunities.<sup>24</sup>

Implementing the GA for refugees will require exploring 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 specifically respond to the differentiated vulnerabilities and capabilities of refugees.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://alleviate-poverty.org/>

# Appendices

## Appendix A: List of Programs and Refugee Settings

Country	Refugees <sup>25</sup>	Asylum-seekers <sup>26</sup>	Refugee Setting	Program Status	Program Coverage (HH)	Program Funder	Lead Implementing partner
Argentina	3,468	6,149	Self-settlement	Ongoing	20	UNHCR	N/A
Burkina Faso	25,122	44	Self-settlement	Completed; no scaling	297	UNHCR	N/A
Costa Rica	4,547	32,618	Self-settlement	Government adaptation with UNHCR involvement	651	UNHCR	RET Internacional
Ecuador	101,564	17,050	Self-settlement	Institutionalized & scaled	2,978	UNHCR	HIAS
Egypt	246,749	68,184	Self-settlement	Completed & limited application	3,652	UNHCR	Several
Malawi	13,782	23,141	Camp	Ongoing	200	UNHCR	CARD
Mozambique	4,907	21,139	Camp	Ongoing	118	UNHCR	Kulima
Sudan	1,078,287	17,622	Camp	Ongoing	300	UNHCR	Sudanese Red Crescent Society
Uganda	1,165,653	25,269	Settlement	Ongoing	6,629	USAID	AVSI
Zambia	49,879	3,306	Settlement	Ongoing	105	UNHCR	Caritas Czech <sup>27</sup>
Zimbabwe	7,797	10,210	Camp	Ongoing	125	UNHCR	GOAL Zimbabwe

<sup>25</sup> This includes people in refugee-like situations, defined by UNHCR as “groups of persons who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained (UNHCR, 2018b). Same applies to the second column.

<sup>26</sup> This is the number of people whose application is still pending. End of 2018 figures (UNHCR; 2018b)

<sup>27</sup> Previously Self-Help Africa

## Appendix B: References

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