



NGO ExCom Side Event – 13 October 2023

## Holistic approaches to expanding third country solutions: Exploring refugee protection and self-reliance.

### Summary

#### Introduction

On 13 October, The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) in collaboration with [RefugePoint](#), organized an NGO side event in the margins of UNHCR 74<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee entitled '[Holistic approaches to expanding third country solutions: Exploring refugee protection and self-reliance](#)'.

After opening remarks from [Davina Saïd, Head of Forced Migration at ICVA](#), the panel was eloquently moderated by [Ms. Simar Singh, Chief Program Officer at RefugePoint](#).

The panel by aimed to explore the links between protection interventions and self-reliance programmes in countries of asylum and third country solutions and discussed in depth how and why the connections between them should be more explicit. In the lead-up to the second Global Refugee Forum, reflections were framed around Objective Two (Enhance refugee self-reliance) and Three (Expand access to third country solutions) of the Global Compact of Refugees, and looking at education pathways, labor mobility and family reunification and protection programmes in countries of asylum.

The efforts to advance self-reliance should be considered as a foundational step in the journey towards durable solutions and solutions for refugees in both host countries and third countries. Here, there are strong opportunities to accelerate, expand and multiply the impact on objectives Two (Ease the pressures on host countries) and Three (Expand access to third-country solutions) of the Global Compact on Refugees by linking them together both conceptually and in practice.

The multistakeholder pledge on economic inclusion and social protection<sup>1</sup> was one of the examples shared to seek to drive momentum on self-reliance over the next four years through commitments that will advocate for inclusive legal and policy frameworks, effective programming and the generation of data and evidence on what works to enable self-reliance. The [NGO statement on international protection](#) delivered during the UNHCR Executive Committee was another example made to strongly call for taking collective action and apply a holistic approach to expand access to all solutions. It was highlighted as an invitation to all to think outside of the usual silos and think of ways to forge creative partnerships and find new ways of working together to open more opportunities for refugees to access solutions.

#### Overview of presentations

[Ms. Hilda Namakula, Programme Manager at Windle International Uganda](#) – discussed the linkages between efforts to expand refugee access to higher education and self-reliance,

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<sup>1</sup> Multistakeholder pledge: [Economic inclusion and social protection](#) – led by the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) and UNHCR with the United States, Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa, Denmark, and Germany



notably through the multistakeholder pledges currently under development ahead of the Global Refugee Forum on refugee higher education and self-reliance<sup>2</sup> and on developing skill-based third-country solutions<sup>3</sup> that will include a component on higher education pathways. Windle is a leader in the education sector in Uganda and has a strong partnership with international organizations, including UNHCR. Through these partnerships, Windle supports refugees to have access to education at all levels, ranging from technical coursework and vocational training to preparation for higher education. Refugee young people are prepared for third countries in multiple ways. For instance, through a Double-Shift School System (DSSS) in primary schools and the Vocationalisation of Secondary Education with vocational education mainstreamed into formal education, which is supported by different community structures. Administrative support with documents and language test preparation for third country curriculums is also provided, resulting in multiple success stories for refugees. Scholarships and sponsorship programmes in which young people between the age of 18 and 25 from Uganda are resettled to Canada. They are fully sponsored for the first year in school and are provided with the opportunity and support to access part-time employment to be able to pay for the rest of their higher education. In most cases, students who have benefited from this sponsorship programme attest that they have applied the skills gained through vocational secondary education to make extra money in Canada. Among them, they have learned customer care, financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills that are essential to 'maneuver' life in a third country. This programme has effectively helped young people to gain self-reliance while pursuing their undergraduate diplomas and be able to have multiple income generating activities to sustain themselves and their families and eventually settle in Canada while contributing to the third country's society and economy.

**Mr. David Manicom**, *Director of Global Advocacy for Displaced Talent* at [Fragomen](#) and [Talent Beyond Boundaries](#) reflected on what can be done in countries of asylum to ensure the greatest possible number of refugees are in a position to benefit from labor mobility pathways. For example, the multistakeholder pledge on labor mobility has a strong focus on advocating for policy changes within immigration pathways and generating interest amongst employers. First, Mr. Manicom highlights that those working on complementary pathways, must be the loudest voices calling for additional resettlement spaces. He emphasized the point that employment-based pathways and self-reliance programmes can and should be mutually reinforcing, building human capital for multiple purposes, whether it turns out to be a third country solution or voluntary return. He further insists that labor mobility programmes are humanitarian programmes, in purpose and design and the fact that they use the power of the labor market to find a safe home for refugees does not make them less humanitarian. It is crucial to recognize that refugees do create an economic benefit in the countries hosting them and understand that skilled versus vulnerability are not mutually exclusive and are not opposed categories – their skills are portable.

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<sup>2</sup> Multistakeholder Pledge (GCR Objective 2): [Achieving 15% Enrolment by 2030 to Expanding Refugee Access to Higher Education and Self-Reliance](#) – led by Open Society University Network (OSUN), Times Higher Education, Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN), Global Academic Interdisciplinary (GAIN)

<sup>3</sup> Multistakeholder Pledge (GCR Objective 3): [Skills-Based Complementary Pathways](#) – led by the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility and the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways



Talend Beyond Boundaries has currently about 80,000 refugees in their growing [database](#) for matching skilled refugees with companies – a number that is both too big, given the ratio of job placements currently available, and too small to build a large scale system needed to find the right fit.

A challenge in putting such a system in place is the capacity needed in countries of asylum to assess skills accurately at scale – language skills and certification are a very good example. There are similar issues in all areas of skill certification, upskilling and reskilling. For instance, the EU funding in Belgium is providing Flemish language training for employment-based pathways on arrival. To conclude, Mr. Manicom reminds that to find ways to develop skills and training at scale in some industries, we are going to need to break the mold. Whether it is in healthcare, solar panel installations or the hotel industry, a consortium of industry sectors, funders, and States should gather into a coalition to leap over pilot projects to respond to the growing needs of the large-scale system and therefore to build the human capital in countries of first asylum to help them find protection with dignity and purpose.

**Mr. Zaid Hydari**, *Executive Director and Co-Founder* at [Refugee Solidarity Network \(RSN\)](#) has spoken about how RSN provides protection interventions in countries of asylum and how the organization can make connections between protection and pathways such as those mentioned and family reunification. RSN has been partnering with national protection actors, primarily directing their attention and efforts to secure legal status and documentation for refugees in host countries. Their experience working in Turkey has helped them understand the linkages with onward pathways. While working engaged in a legal assistance programme in partnership with [Refugee Rights Turkey](#) since 2015 and having helped unaccompanied minors, RSN has learned a lot about what it means to link national protection efforts with onward opportunities for family reunification. RSN has witnessed the critical role national protection actors play in identifying cases that can be eligible for onward opportunities, not only for family reunification, as they are able to screen for eligibility for such programmes and are able to do so early in the process. Additionally, such actors play a crucial role in disseminating information about programmes and in assisting with procedures that are complex and often pre-requisites to being able to access onward opportunities such as exit permits or other procedural bureaucratic processes that would normally require legal assistance. By liaising with international community member advocates working in destination countries, national protection actors have an essential role to play in the advocacy discussion around onward opportunities. Mr. Hydari highlighted the importance of bringing the host community perspective into this conversation that is often being held at the global level to ensure effective responsibility sharing and that entry points for constructive engagement with respective host governments are known. In particular, he reminded the importance to clarify that this conversation around onward pathways is not at all aimed a trading onward opportunity against access to territory and asylum procedures.

**Ms. Bahati Maganjo** has experienced and navigated through all three of the mentioned pathways – being a *DAFI Scholar, a RefugePoint Consultant, DAFI Scholar & Member of Global Task Force on Labour Mobility* she brings a unique perspective to this discussion. Ms. Maganjo explains how she was able to access education through her parent’s own access to skills building programme. She then benefited from a DAFI scholarship to go to a nursing school and



has since built her professional profile through initiatives while interning at a hospital and her path culminating in her accessing labor mobility pathways federal programme in Canada. To her, her successful path boils down to three things. First, over the course of 25 years, she played an active role in creating her own durable solution through all these stages, gaining more control over the options laid out in front of her. Secondly, noting there are very clear linkages between these programmes feeding into each other which are missing in this space. It is important that siloes are broken to avoid missed opportunities and so more explicit linkages are made between each of these. Thirdly, it is essential to recognize that all this was possible through a 25-year journey in a host country and most importantly that it originated from programming opportunities in the country of origin, through the funding of education or skills building programmes, as was the case for Ms. Maganjo's mother enrolled in a programme teaching women how to sow to make a living so that they can take their children through schooling. In summary, all these programmes enabled Ms. Maganjo to have the tools to settle in Canada. The systems need to be in place, and they need to be conducive. There are inefficiencies at many stages, but Ms. Maganjo considers herself a good example of how her own sense of agency has helped her make her way through these and why this conversation needs to be started and the approaches changed to make the system more efficient to provide the same opportunities to more refugees.

### **Discussion**

Following the panelists' initial remarks, they collectively reflected with participants in the room on what more can be done to develop stronger, more deliberate, and more systematic linkages between protection interventions and complementary pathways discussed.

### **Increased investment/resources & complementarity**

In relation to education, a considerable increase in investments in higher education is needed, including sponsorship and scholarship opportunities as it is clearly a pathway to self-reliance. Investing in enabling innovations like the vocationalisation of formal education. Additionally, more sustainable partnerships and links between labor, protection and education are needed, emphasizing that health, both physical and mental goes hand in hand with having the right conditions to gain skills through education.

The pledges to be made for the Global Refugee Forum should target resources and funding to ensure that efforts going forward are equally able to strengthen capacity at the national level as well as on the part of international actors working towards this end.

### **Linkages in programming**

The panelists highlighted that more connection points between all programming are needed, making clear what the potential onward opportunities are, what openings are available after a programme and what are the requirements to initiate a new one. Programming should be enhanced in various ways, linked to refugees acquired human capital and programming with a focus on upskilling for generic skills, mainly language skills as it is the greater barrier for some skilled refugees to access income generating activities. In particular, labor pathways should be more connected to the destination labor market needs – noting for instance a number of green economy projects in Europe are delayed or deferred due to the lack of skilled labor, and the huge number of job vacancies available in the hospitality sector in the United States. Programmes could be more targeted to building skills where there exist known gaps.



### **Coherence in asylum policies**

The panelists reiterated the need for protection messaging to be incorporated into this discussion around onward pathways and for more coherence between actual needs and policies. There is a great recognition by several major destination countries of the need for skilled labor – for example, Germany has indicated it is an urgent need for skilled workers – at the same time we are seeing efforts in the EU to restrict access to asylum and to make it much easier to return individuals without having access to an asylum procedure. With those two things in mind, we have to make sure that we are not promoting labor mobility programs at the same time dwindling the right to access to asylum. It was also highlighted, that the cost of not doing anything for people on the move is much higher seen from a protection lens – not doing anything would result most likely in more of these people being faced with human trafficking, forced labor practices and exploitation. Such investments will have a return on investment, from a solution, a protection and an entrepreneurial point of view.

### **Creating an enabling environment**

It is a fact that the winds are shifting, and the world is opening for refugees and acknowledging their skills. Slowly with time, the mindsets are changing on how we approach programming and policies. It is important that structures and systems move along with this narrative change and that we create environments that are conducive to creating durable solutions for refugees. Refugees are progressively gaining more agency and it is critical to move away from ‘working for them’ to ‘working with them’. Institutional barriers to refugees being included in existing programs still exist such as deficiencies in policy emergency measures, the lack of transparency, and structural barriers that prevent refugees from accessing resources.

### **Conclusion**

A key message coming from this discussion is about the narrative change from ‘burden-sharing’ to ‘responsibility-sharing’, and progressively to ‘opportunity sharing’ as stakeholders increasingly recognize and acknowledge the human capital and agency of refugees. There is a cost of not investing in durable solutions and associated risks of human trafficking, forced labor, and exploitation. Starting this conversation about creating more explicit links between protection interventions, and self-reliance programmes for durable solutions in third countries, strongly calls for calls increased coordination and innovation in programming - from countries of origin to countries of destination - as well as for States to consider these pathways as a promising for successful economic inclusion of refugees, and as opportunities for their own country and economy to benefit from skilled workforce.