

White paper - Global Compact

The importance of Refugee Led Organisations to effective refugee responses

The refugee landscape has changed dramatically over the past decade. Today, over 60% of all refugees live in urban areas and the numbers of those forcibly displaced continues to grow - currently 65.3 million inclusive of 21 million refugees. What hasn't changed is the fact that the vast majority, over 80% of refugees, continue to reside in less developed countries - countries that struggle to care for their own citizens. And whilst humanitarian funding has increased over the years, it still falls far short of meeting even the most basic needs of those displaced. As such, the scale and scope of the crises requires new modalities of working to increase both program effectiveness and cost efficiencies. Engaging and supporting refugee-led organizations (RLOs), is one way to do both.

Refugees bring a wealth of skills and experience with them when they flee to new countries and communities. These skills need to be identified and tapped to better engage refugees in their own solutions. Refugee communities, for example, often set up their own self-help groups in their countries of asylum. These groups know their communities best and are often those who respond first to their communities' needs and priorities. These RLOs, however, are seldom part of the formal humanitarian response and are almost never capacitated, engaged and financially supported for what they do or what they could do.

Through an RLO Incubation Project piloted during 12 months in Malaysia, a country that has not signed the 1951 Convention, URBAN REFUGEES has learned that building the capacity of refugee-led organizations can have immediate near-term and longer-term benefits for refugee communities. Through a mentorship model, URBAN REFUGEES has demonstrated that RLOs can extend their reach, expand their services, increase their transparency, be the provider of first resort, and be the connective tissue that brings refugees together. Participating RLOs have added new services based on their communities' expressed needs, improved gender parity within their organizations, solidified their missions and strategic plans, and enhanced their sustainability through funded donor proposals. These RLOs have demonstrated that they have much to offer and value to add to the humanitarian response.¹ The Global Compact for Refugees needs to build on their experiences and engage them in improving the response.

¹ For more information, please contact Urban Refugees directly: sonia.benali@urban-refugees.org

Recommendations for inclusion in the Compact:

- Identify, engage, support and build the capacity of refugee-led organizations in refugee response - from registration exercises to direct service delivery.
- Donors and international and local NGOs should partner with RLOs as frontline providers for refugee response
- When necessary, donors should support intermediary organizations that mentor, strengthen and build the capacity of RLOs.
- All actors should recognize that refugees know best what they need, the solutions for fulfilling these needs, and are best placed to work toward those solutions. Refugee-led organizations are the natural conduit for this to happen.
- The humanitarian architecture, including working groups and clusters, should engage RLOs within their structures and mechanisms. Their voices, concerns and ideas need to be part of planning and coordination processes.

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