MEANINGFUL REFUGEE PARTICIPATION AS TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP: GUIDELINES FOR CONCRETE ACTION

GLOBAL REFUGEE-LED NETWORK

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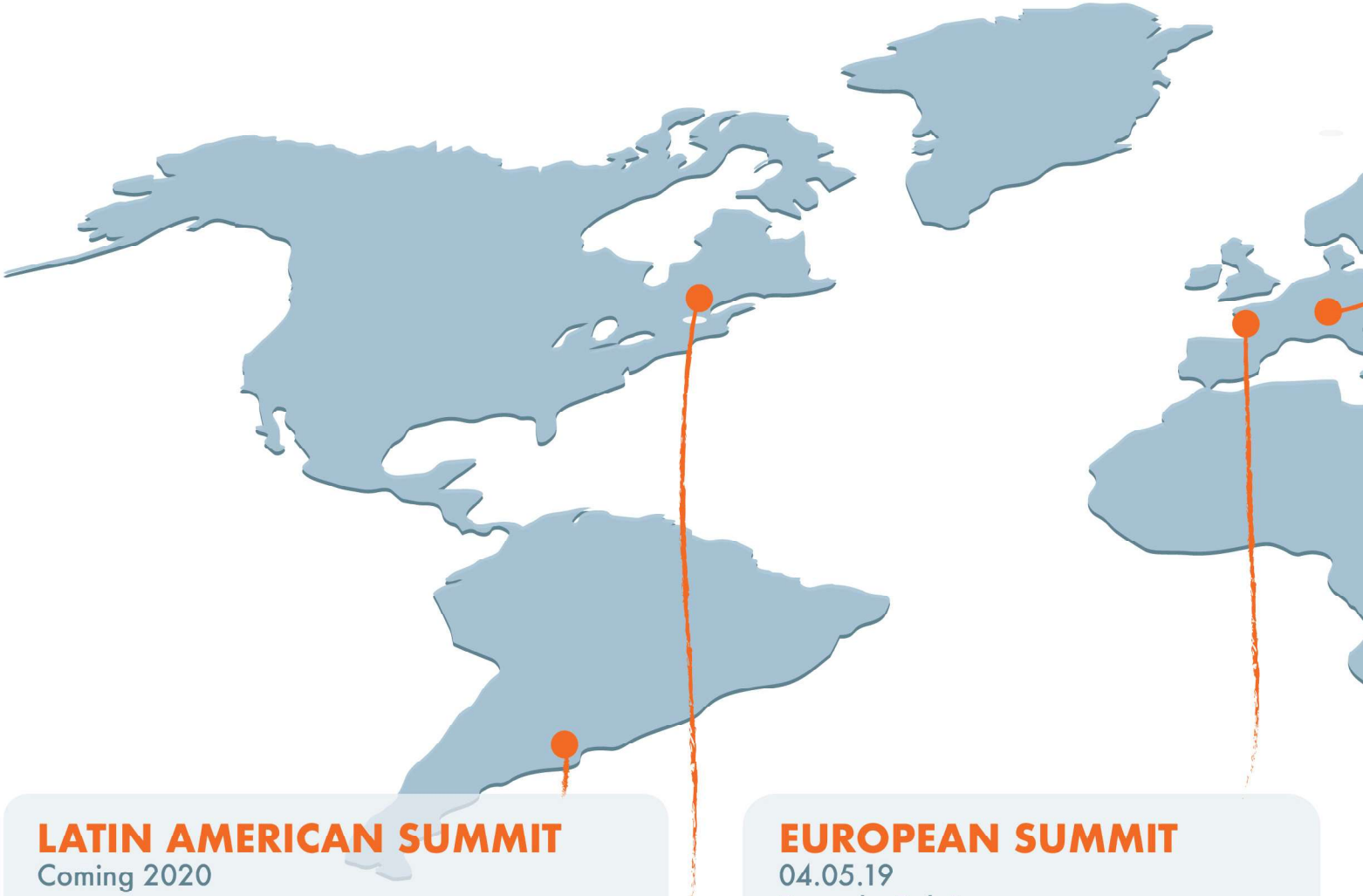
ABOUT THE GLOBAL REFUGEE-LED NETWORK

The Global Refugee-Led Network is a coalition of refugees and refugee-led constituencies in six regions of the world (North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and the Asia Pacific). Through our efforts, we collaborate with and amplify refugee voices and initiatives nationally, regionally, and globally.

The pursuit of meaningful refugee participation is the foundational pillar and principle of our work. As a network led by refugees, we work with our fellow refugees, relevant global initiatives, and other stakeholders to advocate for our right to self-representation, to promote positive changes to the global refugee architecture (including within development and humanitarian systems), and to enhance refugee inclusion on local, national and international levels.



LATIN AMERICAN SUMMIT
Coming 2020

NORTH AMERICAN SUMMIT
Coming 2020

EUROPEAN SUMMIT
04.05.19
Brussels, Belgium
30 Refugee-led Initiatives
48 Refugee Advocates
28 Countries Represented

To this end, we have been facilitating refugee participation through Refugee Summits within each of our regions, and at the global level. Thus far, we have learned from the knowledge and expertise of over 130 refugee-led initiatives from over 60 countries, and counting -- reach made possible through careful planning and innovative virtual participation practices. From Asia to Latin America and everywhere in-between, the summits have given us and our fellow refugee participants a sense of belonging to a new global community, and the opportunity to share experiences and exchange ideas for addressing displacement. This learning is unprecedented and the depth of human connection has been extraordinary.

Across summits, demands were similar. Namely, refugee-led initiatives want to be included in discussions where decisions are being made about their lives. All participants offered valuable input on various aspects of refugee policy, which is now consolidated and enshrined in GRN's new Trans-Border Manifesto, which can be found on the GRN website at www.globalrefugeelednetwork.org.

GLOBAL SUMMIT
06.25.18
Geneva, Switzerland
20 Refugee-led Initiatives
80 Refugee Advocates
72 Countries represented

ASIA PACIFIC SUMMIT
10.22.18
Bangkok, Thailand
20 Refugee-led initiatives
102 Refugee Advocates
10 Countries Represented

MENA SUMMIT
11.08 - 11.09.19
Istanbul, Turkey
18 Refugee-led Initiatives
30 Refugee Advocates
7 Countries Represented

AFRICAN SUMMIT
11.30 - 12.02.19
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
65 Refugee-led initiatives
72 Refugee Advocates
11 Countries Represented

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global refugee response space has been talking about the importance of including refugees[1] in responding to refugee situations for more than a decade. Most recently, both the 2016 New York Declaration and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) have called for meaningful participation of refugees in refugee response. Specifically, the GCR says, "states and relevant stakeholders will facilitate meaningful participation of refugees, including women, persons with disabilities and youth, in Global Refugee Forums, ensuring the inclusion of their perspectives on progress." Other international policies go even further, such as the UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity, which calls for the participation of specific refugee groups such as women, youth and LGBTIQ+ persons.

This conversation has instigated some progress. More than ever, we have seen refugees participating on panels, invited to fora and voicing their interests. And importantly, there is a growing appreciation for the fact that including refugees in substantive ways is not only the right thing to do, but that it results in policies and programs that are more effective and legitimate.

Despite this progress, the refugee response sector is struggling to enable meaningful participation. Refugee-led initiatives globally are therefore calling for an urgent focus on moving from rhetoric to reality. Among them, we, the Global Refugee-led Network, a global network of refugee-led initiatives, have loudly and repeatedly called for the systemic transformation of global refugee response to act on the opinions, perspectives and guidance of refugees, regardless of their legal status, travel capabilities or gender. Like many of our fellow refugee-led initiatives and allies, we believe the refugee response sector at large needs to listen, reflect, and ultimately change, so that refugees like ourselves can meaningfully participate in strategizing, funding and implementing programs, policies and other responses that influence our lives.

1 For the purposes of this document, a refugee is understood as a person who has been forcibly displaced from their home country, regardless of obtaining any legal status. Refugee-led organizations/initiatives are organizations which are founded and/or led by those with lived refugee experience, and may include both formal, registered organizations and informal initiatives.

Institutions must facilitate ongoing access to spaces where decisions are being made.

In an effort to move these limited examples to sector-wide practice, the Global Refugee-led Network and some key ally organizations have constructed the following document, which contains a definition of 'meaningful participation,' and constructing Guidelines that would enable it specifically within the refugee response sector. This document is the first step of a broader GRN process to construct and share Guidelines for enabling meaningful participation within society at large.

We define meaningful participation as:

> When refugees — regardless of location, legal recognition, gender, identity and demographics **— are prepared for and participating in fora and processes where strategies are being developed and/or decisions are being made** (including at local, national, regional, and global levels, and especially when they facilitate interactions with *host states, donors, or other influential bodies*), in a manner that is **ethical, sustained, safe, and supported financially.**

The following Guidelines for enabling this definition of meaningful participation are aimed at concretizing the sector's commitment. The Guidelines include:

Facilitate ongoing and sustained access to strategizing and decision-making processes at every level.

Refugee participation is often limited to moments of ad hoc consultation that do not enable refugees to influence or deeply inform the direction of the responses that impact their lives. Instead, institutions must facilitate ongoing access to spaces where decisions are being made. This can happen both by increasing refugee representation within teams, especially within leadership and governance structures, and by building mechanisms for external engagement that transfer power and ownership. Special attention must be paid to safety and logistics when enabling meaningful participation.

Facilitate refugee preparedness to engage in strategizing and decision-making moments.

In order for refugees to meaningfully participate, they must be positioned and prepared as equal partners. All actors within the refugee response sector should create opportunities for facilitating preparedness including through trainings, mentorship programs, employment opportunities, and funding for professional development.

Initiate institutional self-reflection and enact changes that dismantle power dynamics.

Meaningful participation will not happen as a matter of common practice unless predominant institutions (including but not limited to UNHCR, national and international civil society, the donor community and host governments) reflect on the ways their systems exclude refugees. These entities must identify and change internal practices that make engagement unsafe, unproductive or impossible for refugees. A standard approach to instigating this kind of internal change includes contracting an expert in equity, diversity and inclusion to diagnose and train.

Finance refugee participation and refugee-led initiatives.

Financial support is a gateway to participation, and most refugee-led initiatives and refugee advocates lack it. All actors have a role to play in financing refugee participation: specifically, actors should offer grant opportunities that fund core costs, compensate refugees for their time and expertise and cover travel fees. Ultimately, the refugee response sector at large needs to reexamine funding flows so that refugee participation is fully financed.

Address and prevent tokenizing refugees.

Tokenizing practices in refugee participation continue to permeate the refugee response space. In order to overcome these practices, the sector must hold one another accountable to a meaningful version of participation. Participation should not be limited to low numbers or specific initiatives, to consultation or presentation, or to insensitively prompted storytelling. Such practices can re-victimize and re-traumatize, create damaging competition between refugee-led groups, and fundamentally limit the positive impact refugees can have on future responses to refugee situations.

As the response sector engages and follows-up on the first ever Global Refugee Forum, where the intention is to dramatically improve the situations of refugees globally, *all institutions and individuals working to assist refugees* must acknowledge that these changes — the systemic changes that enable refugees to influence decision making — are among the most powerful and transformative changes they can make.

Change in any form is not easy; but, change of this kind is highly complex. Research shows[2] that change of this magnitude is only possible when leaders commit to systemic transformation, and accordingly allocate the time and financial resources necessary to instigate change. Ultimately we must make this transition; **until refugees themselves are leading refugee responses at local, national and global levels, status quo and ineffective responses are unlikely to be fully examined and reformed.**

2 For example: Anand, R. "Leadership Commitment: Gaining and Keeping it Country by Country." Global Diversity Primer. Available at: https://www.diversitybestpractices.com/sites/diversitybestpractices.com/files/import/embedded/anchors/files/07_gdp_leadership.pdf.

...systemic changes that enable refugees to influence decision-making are among the most powerful and transformative changes [the sector] can make.

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DEFINING AND ENABLING MEANINGFUL REFUGEE PARTICIPATION

Many working in refugee response would intuitively understand that a women's rights conference led by men is destined to be ineffective. Responders would likely question the validity of a straight, cisgender person as the spokesperson for a LGBTIQ+ rights organization, and critique a panel on indigenous rights with no indigenous panel members. However, within the refugee response sector, refugees are rarely present at sites of decision-making or even discussion. At large refugee rights conferences, one could count the number of refugee representatives on fingers, and at the smaller tables where big decisions happen, refugees are wholly excluded. They are also largely absent from the ranks of refugee response institutions.

This is an sector-wide systemic failure. It must change, as history shows that successful social movements are always led by those affected. In considering successful movements, including those for women's rights, civil rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, against apartheid, or for independence, there is a clear pattern: the leaders are representatives from their communities -- those with firsthand experience of what needs to change, and a sustainable commitment to enacting that change.

In many instances, that leadership and ownership of the movement has been diligently fought for; the disability rights movement, for example, coined the phrase "nothing about us without us," demanding influence over the responses that impact their lives. This phrase has been taken up by some refugee-led initiatives too, including us at GRN, who are likewise fighting for access and ownership of the refugee rights movement. Within our space, these calls have led to some progress within ally institutions.

For example, academic and civil society partners in Canada have been working closely to develop a deeper understanding of meaningful refugee participation and the concrete steps needed to address barriers to participation. These steps include a mentorship program for refugee advocates to enhance their impact on policy discussions, resources to support refugee participation in national and global processes, and the inclusion of refugee leadership in the governance of initiatives such as LERRN: the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network. Building from these commitments, partners are now discussing the ways in which refugees can engage with key policy actors to further this process of institutional transformation. Likewise, refugee-led organizations, especially Jumpstart Refugee Talent, are actively engaged in shaping policy and program innovation, such as the Canadian government-funded Economic Mobility Pathways Project (EMPP).

To provide another example, in 2015, Saint Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) in Cairo, Egypt, committed itself to becoming an organization run by and for refugees. Today, over 85 percent of StARS employees are from displaced populations, and over 80 percent of StARS teams are run by members of displaced populations. StARS staff note that making this transformation was entirely possible once they dedicated themselves to it: the problem was not that there were no qualified refugee staff, but only that the organization was not actively looking for them.

These initiatives are exciting steps forward, but they are far from the status quo. By providing a definition of "meaningful refugee participation" and specific Guidelines for enabling it, we hope the sector can collectively take steps to help the refugee rights movement be its most successful. Regardless of which of these specific Guidelines are taken up, it is critical that there is a firm commitment to systemic transformation; the shift towards a refugee response sector led for *and by* refugees will require a deep, fundamental change in every aspect of the sector's programs, advocacy and ways of working. Research shows that attempts at promoting increased diversity in decision-making and leadership repeatedly fail.[3] Experts in the promotion of equity, diversity and inclusion often note:

Change is a process. It will require a period of transition where institutions -- funders, civil society, host governments and UNHCR -- decide what practices must end, and what new practices should begin.

Change will require additional time and resources. It will require that institutions allocate the human and financial resources necessary to facilitate new ways of working.

Change requires leadership buy-in. Enabling any of the following tenets successfully will require that the leaders of institutions understand and agree with the imperative of this transition.

With an awareness that this transition will take time, human and financial resources, and leadership buy-in, meaningful refugee participation is possible, and can lead to improved long-term solutions for refugees all over the world. These ideas should be broadly applied when facilitating the Guidelines described below.

3 See, for example: Dobbin, F. and Kalev, A. (2016). "Why Diversity Initiatives Fail." Harvard Business Review. Available at: https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail.

THE WHO AND HOW OF MEANINGFUL REFUGEE PARTICIPATION

As the sector begins this period of transition, it is important to create a shared understanding of what it means for refugees to be "meaningfully participating": *Who* should be participating? *How* should they be participating?

Who should be participating meaningfully

The international refugee community is anything but homogeneous. Meaningful participation of refugees requires attention to the multitude of experiences and identities of refugees. *All refugees,* resettled or in their first countries of refuge; with or without legal status; with all levels of formal education; and inclusive of all genders, sexual identities, religions, ethnic groups, those with disabilities, youth and elders, among other identities, should be included in important discussions that impact their lives.

Current systems are actively discouraging meaningful inclusion. In global and regional fora, travel and visa issues mean only refugees resettled in the Global North are participating. At local levels, safety issues prevent many refugees, especially for girls and women and LGBTIQ+ persons, from participating. In order to promote inclusion across demographics, actors must:

For Global/Regional Fora and Processes:

- Provide support for visas to accommodate refugees' differing abilities to travel;
- Provide technological support to ensure remote participation when refugees cannot attend (while recognizing that all steps should be taken to attempt in-person participation);
- When scheduling meetings, consider the variety of time zones that refugees might find themselves in, and provide ample notice between invitation and event, as travel times and visa processing requires at least two to three months of leeway;
- Provide interpretation services for meetings, events, conferences, and fora;
- Ensure accessibility of travel, accommodation and venue for those with disabilities.

Facilitating this kind of inclusion means that the sector must increase its collective comfort with less linearity and control in discussions, shorter agendas, technological disturbances and limitations, and more.

For Local Fora and Processes:

- Actively work with women and men refugee advocates to understand the safety risks of refugee participation and how best to mitigate them;
- Create "informed consent" models that help communicate the risks of participation with refugee women and men leaders and advocates;
- Stand in solidarity with refugee advocates if they are excluded from key discussions with officials by abstaining from participation; and
- Provide interpretation services for meetings, events, conferences, and fora.

How participation is meaningful

Even if many refugees are participating, it is not "meaningful" if their participation does not confer power and influence over the decisions that impact their lives. Meaningful refugee participation is:

> When refugees — regardless of location, legal recognition, gender, identity and demographics **— are prepared for and participating in fora and processes where strategies are being developed and/or decisions are being made** (including at local, national, regional, and global levels, and especially when they facilitate interactions with *host states, donors, or other influential bodies*), in a manner that is **ethical, sustained, safe, and supported financially.**

Enabling this definition with the diversity of refugee experiences, genders and other identities in mind requires that all institutions take proactive, concrete and actionable steps toward, and dismantle barriers to meaningful participation.The following sections outline such steps through Guidelines, and offer high-priority action steps that various actors can take to contribute to sector-wide transformation.

HIGH PRIORITY TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS

All of the following high priority actions should be taken in collaboration with refugee advocates. While we've focused on the refugee response sector (especially the donor community, host governments, national and international civil society, and UNHCR), many of the recommendations are broadly applicable to broader society. Future efforts will explore Guidelines more specifically for private sector, academia and beyond.

Actors	High Priority Transformative Actions
Donors Community (Foundations, Governments, UNHCR and beyond)	• Increase refugee representation on staff and leadership within relevant funding departments or projects; • Issue Calls for Proposals for refugee-led initiatives; loosen requirements and create fiscal sponsorship options so refugee-led initiatives in early stages can access funds, including in locations where access to banking and registration may be limited for refugee-led initiatives; • Realign existing resources to support initiatives promoting meaningful participation; and • Conduct regular and transparent briefings on funding opportunities, and advertise within refugee communities.
Host Governments	• Increase refugee representation among staff who work within relevant government departments and on refugee response projects; • Implement safeguards and offer assurances to refugee-led initiatives and advocates that representatives and their families will be safe from detention or deportation; and • Build and/or strengthen pathways toward legal status that confer work rights and free movement as this allows refugees to safely work as community representatives.
National and International Civil Society	• Increase refugee representation on staff and in leadership, including on Boards of Directors or Governors; ensure that refugees receive equal pay for equal work and avoid "gig" employment; • Serve as intermediary with the government to ensure refugees can participate and self-advocate safely in dialogues; and • Build and implement partnership models that ensure equal access and co-ownership with refugee-led organizations and refugee advocates.

UNHCR Geneva and Regional Bureaus	• Increase refugee representation on staff and leadership; ensure that refugees receive equal pay for equal work and avoid "gig" employment; • Build budgetary line-items that promote refugee engagement including but not limited to airfares, compensation for time and work, visa processes, improved technological equipment for remote participation, off-hour work for employees to accommodate time zones; • Build and implement partnership models that ensure equal access and co-ownership with refugee-led initiatives and refugee advocates; and • UNHCR explores and proposes, in collaboration with refugee-led groups, ways to include refugees and refugee-led institutions within its formal structures of governance at global, regional and local levels.
UNHCR National Operations	• Increase refugee representation on staff and leadership; ensure that refugees receive equal pay for equal work and avoid "gig" employment; • Cover core costs for refugee-led initiatives, including unrestricted capacity-building grants; and • Build and implement partnership models that ensure equal access and co-ownership with refugee-led initiatives and refugee advocates.

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PROACTIVE STEPS TOWARD MEANINGFUL REFUGEE PARTICIPATION

Below, we outline a set of proactive steps that various actors (inclusive of national and international civil society, the donor community, host governments and UNHCR) can take to instigate sector-wide transformation.

Facilitate ongoing, sustained access

Meaningful refugee participation requires the inclusion of refugees beyond select moments; instead, refugees should be involved in all steps and aspects of decision-making processes. In particular, refugees need ongoing and sustained access to conversations about the allocation and management of funding within refugee response, and conversations surrounding national, regional or global policy or law.

Fill staff, leadership and governance roles with refugees. A vital aspect of facilitating ongoing access is ensuring that refugees are on staff, particularly leadership roles, including at multilaterals such as UNHCR, in government or private sector departments, and within initiatives associated with refugee communities. As such, hiring practices must be rebuilt to reveal increased numbers of refugee applicants. While refugees should be present at all levels of organizations and institutions, it is particularly important that refugees are present in those roles that provide access to decision-making tables. As with all inclusive hiring practices, attention must also be paid to ensuring equal treatment of refugees of different genders, religions, ethnicities, sexualities, ages and abilities.

When employing refugees, institutions should avoid relying on "gig" employment (contract employment common for interpreters and community workers that typically does not include benefits and workplace protections, nor provides job security). Institutions should furthermore plan to assume the costs associated with hiring non-nationals, for example, costs for employment lawyers or visas. Where refugees do not have adequate work rights, and no alternative is present, it is critical that institutions take up or deeply support advocacy that promotes legal status and work rights so that employment is safe for refugees and institutions alike.

Beyond hiring for staff positions, refugees should sit within governance structures, such as on Boards of Directors. UNHCR, specifically, should begin to design a new set of governance structures that include refugees and refugee-led groups in strategizing and decision-making within its local, regional and global constructs, including within UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom), which guides the whole of UNHCR's programs and activities. Currently, ExCom does not have a distinct member representing refugees. Advisory committees may also facilitate meaningful participation, as long as their structures transfer influence and decision-making power.

Establish partnership models that promote equal access as equal partners. Whereas increasing representation on staff and within governance structures takes time, building partnerships with refugee-led initiatives, groups and advocates can be an immediate way to secure ongoing input and access. Partnerships can take many forms, but include activities such as MOUs, secondments, joint campaigns, joint fundraising, direct giving or grantmaking, and beyond. Partnerships should be conceived of as between two or more equal parties, and as a step beyond and more formal than consultation alone, which does not provide those participating with control or influence over decision-making.

Critically, partnership models should be careful not to co-opt the messaging, leadership or agency of refugee-led initiatives. This can be achieved by jointly designing the nature of the partnership with refugee advocates, and always ensuring that refugee advocates and initiatives are given full credit for their work. Donors can help to instigate effective partnership models by establishing funding criteria that mandate the direct and meaningful involvement of refugee populations in strategizing and decision-making.

Partnership models that promote equal access as equal partners stand in stark contrast with the predominant use of focus groups; focus groups do not transfer any power or influence, and should not be upheld as exemplars of meaningful refugee participation in isolation.

Provide the logistical support needed to facilitate access. Refugees often have difficulty participating in important fora or meetings due to issues with travel documents or legal status. Institutions hosting such fora should provide support to procure travel documents *and* provide avenues for remote participation when travel is impossible. For example, UNHCR Geneva could provide such support for refugee advocates and refugee-led organizations for its Annual or Regional Consultations by arranging refugee dial/video-in to meetings and coordinating travel. This kind of support can broadly facilitate participation; the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR), for example, held a meeting in Fall of 2019 that facilitated the virtual participation of refugees from ten Asian countries, resulting in unprecedented refugee participation in a policy discussion.

This support must be offered at least two to three months in advance of a convening, as visa processing can be time-consuming and complex. For LGBTIQ+ refugees, and in particular transgender refugees, it is often unsafe to travel through particular countries; thus, more support should be provided to ensure that their itineraries do not present additional risk.

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Similarly, institutions hosting such fora should always provide translation and interpretation for refugee advocates who need it. These considerations and costs should become assumed within strategic plans and budgets, as opposed to in an ad hoc manner. This combats the idea that participation is an 'extra' that can only be facilitated should ad hoc resources become available.

Create safe spaces for engagement, even when refugees aren't legally protected. Refugees, especially at the local and national levels, are likely to experience profound safety risks associated with their participation in any format. These risks include detention and deportation back to life-threatening conditions; for women and girls in particular, those safety risks also include sexual or gender-based violence. This is especially true in situations where refugees who wishes to participate do not have secure legal status issued by a host government.

Ultimately, the solution to this concern is for host governments to strengthen or introduce national governance frameworks that confer legal status, freedom of movement, work rights and access to justice. Even before host governments have built or enacted legal and policy solutions that protect refugee participation, they can offer refugee advocates ad hoc safeguards that promise indefinite safety before, during and after moments of engagement.

Civil society and UNHCR can support the facilitation and documentation of these safeguards by serving as an initial intermediary. Furthermore, where safeguards are viewed as inadequate, civil society and UNHCR can construct informed consent models, ensuring that potential participants understand the risks associated with their participation.

Facilitate refugee preparedness

Promoting and enabling meaningful refugee participation means acknowledging disparities in privilege that refugee advocates experience with respect to education, work experience and familiarity with the professional culture of refugee response. Institutions should facilitate training and capacity building opportunities, and provide professional development in order to ensure that refugee advocates have the tools needed to participate effectively within institutions, and to contribute to discussions at strategizing and decision-making tables.

Provide professional development funds. Institutions and organizations should provide professional development funds for refugee staff at all levels to promote their upward mobility within institutions. Due to their experiences of displacement, refugees may have had interrupted formal education and work experience. It is vital that institutions provide opportunities for refugees to fill any educational or professional gaps necessary for employee success and comfort on the job.

Provide training and capacity-building opportunities. Many refugee advocates have not been formally trained in areas that some refugee response sector leaders take for granted, from policy advocacy to communications to project management. Trying to participate within the current refugee response professional culture without these types of trainings can be frustrating and prevent advocates from effectively communicating their knowledge and experience.

Institutions from all parts of the refugee response sector can and should provide free training, mentorship opportunities, and ongoing support to ensure that refugee advocates have the tools they need to participate meaningfully and succeed. For example, donors can provide training and ongoing support on grants management, the private sector can provide pro bono consulting in strategic planning, and UNHCR and civil society can provide training/support on a variety of relevant programmatic and operational topics. One such example is the refugee mentorship program being developed by academic and civil society partners in Canada, which is building the capacity of refugee advocates to engage in policy dialogues through training opportunities, mentorship for individual refugee advocates engaging in policy processes, and research support.

Initiate institutional self-reflection

The shift to becoming a sector that is run for and by refugees requires internal reflection by all refugee response institutions and those that fund them. Internal practices must be evaluated and changed to create an effective, safe and productive environment for refugee participants.

When we say all refugee response institutions, we really mean all -- inclusive of national and international civil society, the donor community, host governments and UNHCR. The process of self-reflection can be an uncomfortable one, but is a necessary starting point for instigating change.[4]

Hire a consultant to provide guidance. It can be difficult to self-diagnose what practices might be harmful for refugee staff or representatives. Institutions that wish to promote refugee representation on their own staff, or increase refugee engagement with refugee-led groups and advocates, need to call upon the guidance of experts to advise on how to create a safe, welcoming and supportive collaboration space. An ideal consultant will have specific expertise in gender sensitivity, equity, diversity and inclusion.

4 Some good places to start for self-reflection:

Laine Halley, T. (2019). "White women doing white supremacy in nonprofit culture." Woke at Work. Available at: https://www.wokeatwork.org/post/white-women-doing-white-supremacy-in-nonprofit-culture.
Poblano, L. (2019). "Challenging white dominant culture: time to look in the mirror." CompassPoint. Available at: https://www.compasspoint.org/blog/challenging-white-dominant-culture-time-look-mirror.

Provide inclusion and diversity training. Following diagnosis, and with the support of experts, all staff, and particularly leadership, of institutions involved with refugee response should receive equity, inclusion and diversity training to promote safe environments for refugee participation. These trainings should not only be provided for NGOs or UNHCR, but also for government departments and foundations that will work with refugee representatives or refugee-led organizations.

Building such training needs to happen with the support of experts and as a part of a broader initiative to promote meaningful refugee participation. Research shows that poorly conducted trainings can further entrench bad practices, prejudice and animosity.

Finance refugee participation and refugee-led initiatives

The meaningful work of refugee-led initiatives is acutely underfunded. In creating a shift to a sector run for and by refugees, special attention should be paid to providing financing for refugee advocates and refugee-led initiatives to participate in discussions and carry out refugee response work generally.

Beyond that, funding models need to ensure refugees themselves have influence over the flows of money that dictate response. Currently, those flows are opaque to most.

Compensate refugees for their time, expertise, and work. When asking refugees to speak on panels, help with trainings, or other forms of participation, institutions must always provide compensation for time and work. This is in addition to travel and visa fees, if relevant. Refugee participation should be considered equivalent to expert contribution; compensation should be commensurate with that expertise.

Special attention must be paid to refugee participants who are not already employed within the refugee response sector. Many times, institutions have a policy of not offering honorariums; however, such a policy effectively excludes the participation of anyone who cannot afford the corresponding travel, child care, or time off work, if applicable. This will disproportionately be true for refugee participants.

Provide core funding for refugee-led initiatives. Donors have the power to promote refugee-led initiatives by providing funding for core operating costs. Without these costs covered, refugee-led initiatives' participation can remain dependent on one-off financing opportunities. Often, refugee advocates are financing their involvement in advocacy and organizing through other income generation, effectively reducing the amount of time and energy they can place on improving responses to refugee situations.

Core funding for refugee-led initiatives should be flexible. Many refugee-led initiatives struggle to register due to restrictive registration requirements. In such cases, donors should permit and help facilitate fiscal sponsorship opportunities through civil society organizations that will respect the autonomy of refugee-led initiatives. Furthermore, donors should issue unrestricted and/or capacity building grants wherever possible, so that refugee-led initiatives can build and solidify their foundations.

DISMANTLING BARRIERS TO REFUGEE PARTICIPATION

In addition to taking proactive steps to promote meaningful refugee participation, we must also acknowledge and end problematic practices that essentially bar refugees from genuine influence and decision-making. Actions that promote engagement but that do not also transfer power and influence are misaligned with the notion of "meaningful participation." It is critical that our next steps as a sector include intentional exercises in highlighting and dismantling the barriers that prevent refugee influence and leadership in responses.

Prevent Tokenization

One of the most profound barriers to meaningful participation is the ongoing practice of "tokenizing" refugees. Because there has been very little agreed-upon clarity of what makes participation "meaningful," some efforts have given the illusion of inclusion, but have left those that participate under-utilized and under-consulted; and, in practice, many who would like access to such discussions cannot. Common forms of refugee tokenization include:

- Inviting refugees only to moments of announcement or consultation, rather than to the processes and decision-making moments that surround those moments;
- Inviting refugees to only or primarily to share their individual stories of persecution without creating spaces that enable refugees to provide meaningful input on policy, programs, approaches or other key discussions in refugee response;
- Limiting the number of refugees who can participate by targeting specific seats for refugee involvement in order to "bring the refugee perspective," or neglecting to ensure perspectives across age and gender have equal access to opportunities. This often gives the impression there is only room for a single refugee to participate;
- Relying on cultural events, camp simulations, or other de-politicizing or trivializing methods to articulate the refugee experience.

Tokenization is unethical. As refugee-led groups all over the world clamour for more access, denying it, or offering it only symbolically, can be experienced as a form of silencing from the very entities that intend to support refugees. It is important that refugee response actors recognize tokenization as a form of silencing that can cause further pain and trauma, and create rifts between service providers and the communities they serve. Beyond tokenizing refugees for their experiences, refugees can also be tokenized for their specific identities such as due to gender, sexuality, religion, race, or ethnicity.

Tokenization minimizes the inevitable learning that comes from meaningful participation. Refugees are experts due to their lived experience. That lived experience begins with surviving persecution; it continues with seeking safety in environments that often criminalize entry, deny access to health care, education and work, and that sometimes never uncover solutions. That experience should be informing the responses the sector is creating, supporting, demanding or rejecting at every level and stage. When actors tokenize, they deny all refugees responses that have been built by experts who know first hand the needs and interests of their fellow communities.

Tokenization also creates unnecessary and harmful competition between refugee-led initiatives. When the response sector cherry picks single refugees to sit on panels without a sustainable engagement platform that is inclusive and independent, it can create the impression there is only room for a single (or extremely limited) voice(s) to be heard. That perception can generate competition between refugee-led initiatives, and impedes the ideal scenario of refugees across environments, backgrounds, and genders from together generating comprehensive program and policy recommendations.

Tokenization and cherry picking also invite questions of "legitimacy" posed to refugee-led groups that have managed to have a voice and participate; usually these questions focus on whether or not refugee-led groups are adequately representing all refugees everywhere. When refugee-led groups inevitably can't live up to that expectation, their contribution can be deemed inadequate or undemocratic. In the midst of such claims, refugee-led groups have been asked to step back, which is counter the spirit of refugee participation. Rather than ask some refugee-led initiatives to step back, institutions should make room for more to step-up, so that the diversity of refugee experiences can deeply inform and influence the direction of policies and programs.

Finally, tokenized participation makes it harder to make a genuine call for meaningful participation. It lures the sector into believing it has done enough, when only symbolic representation has been achieved. In practice, "tokenized participation" can take the place of meaningful participation. This is not surprising; in an industry with few resources and great need, tokenized participation is a quick fix because it does not ask for the time, resources, and dedication that meaningful participation requires. However, without these elements, the response sector will not be successful in inclusion initiatives. That is why meaningful participation must be prioritized.

Tokenization can be prevented by:

Scrutinizing and amending efforts that are intended to promote participation: When asking a refugee to participate, ask yourself: Have I limited participation to a particular group, or chosen between refugee groups for speaking? Have I asked someone to share their personal story of persecution insensitively or exclusively? Have I asked a refugee to participate only in a moment of presentation? If the answer is yes, adjust actions until the participation contributes to meaningful participation as defined above.

Identify and denounce tokenization: Actors involved in planning processes of events, conferences, or other fora should call attention to tokenization when they see it. The sectors is in a process of learning; without one other's feedback and support, the sector will be unable to progress. Donors have particular power to stop tokenization in its tracks when enacting and funding programs, events, and fora.

Standing in solidarity when tokenization happens: When actors are unable to stop tokenization before it happens, they should take a stand against it. This might involve refusing to speak on a panel or attend a conference where refugee delegates are not present or meaningfully participating.

Above all, prioritizing "meaningful" refugee participation at all stages in the process: Many acts of tokenization result from treating refugee participation as a checkbox as opposed to a priority. For example, an already established panel or conference might just add a refugee speaker to signal participation instead of re-thinking their approach. Refugee participation should form the foundation of any initiative, program, or forum. This participation should be present during discussions on agendas and objectives of an event or process, and continue through all stages of the process.

Identify and Address Harmful Institutional Dynamics

The sector must also identify and address institutional cultural dynamics that reenforce power relations and create additional barriers to participation. Actors should review their own workplace culture, with the help of consultants and experts, end practices that are detrimental to achieving meaningful participation. Some examples of harmful cultural dynamics, and methods to combat them include:

Using industry- or institution- specific jargon: Refugee advocates often do not have the same educational and professional background as those currently leading refugee response, particularly youth advocates. This creates a barrier to meaningfully engaging and offering insights. Communications should be written in a way that is easily understandable by those outside our sector.

Top-down, disempowering structures and language: Refugee response institutions are often rooted in ideas of unequal power that pose refugees as victims as opposed to natural leaders of their own movement. Institutions must, using an outside consultant or advisor as well as in conversations with partners, examine the ways in which they use disempowering language (such as "beneficiaries") or structures that prevent refugees from participating as equals.

Assuming knowledge of ways of working of processes and fora: Those who have been working in refugee response as a longstanding career have a deep connection and understanding of the history, ways of working, shorthands, and decorum of processes and fora present in moments of engagement. Actors should provide contextual guidance for refugee advocates in advance of participation. Expecting input on strategy and decision-making without doing so runs the risk of promoting tokenization, as refugee advocates are not participating with the same level of knowledge.

Setting hiring qualifications that reward applicants of primarily one background: Actors should take care to review their hiring qualifications as they move to promote meaningful participation of refugees. It can be helpful to review job advertisements and scrutinize which traits have been prioritized, and why. Actors should explicitly recognize the unique qualifications that refugees might hold in order to create a more diverse hiring pipeline.

Decision-making behind closed doors: When institutions carry out decision-making processes behind closed doors, it is near impossible for outsiders to identify how to combat institutional practices that hinder meaningful refugee participation. It is critical that decision-making processes are transparent and accessible so that outsiders can propose realistic options for instigating refugee inclusion.

CONCLUSION

Refugees and refugee-led organizations have been advocating for decades for their rights to self-representation and meaningful participation in the shaping of policies that impact their own lives. These extensive global efforts have resulted in more actors in the refugee response field recognizing refugee participation as key to addressing displacement.

This recognition is important, but it is not nearly enough. Enabling refugee participation requires internal and external changes, some of which may seem overwhelming. Our hope is that these guidelines provide allies and colleagues with a roadmap for how to turn their commitments into successful partnerships, actions, projects and polices.

Whole-hearted commitment is needed in order to weather the complexities of making the transition to a fully representative sector run with and for refugees. It is not enough to add refugees as panelists or to hire a refugee staff member; rather, we challenge the response sector to enter into a period of self-reflection, to identify the concrete steps that will enable and break down barriers to meaningful participation, and to commit time and resources to enact plans.

Will the refugee response sector at large continue trying to assist refugees as beneficiaries and victims? Or, will global actors be bold and humble enough to *partner and work* with them instead? We invite you to take the challenge and begin transformation. This is our chance to uncover and enable dignifying, respectful solutions for refugees everywhere.

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