



Combating Forced and Child Labor of Refugees in Global Supply Chains

The Role of Responsible Sourcing



About Verité

As an independent, non-profit, civil society organization, Verité is recognized for its unique credibility. Since 1995, we have partnered with hundreds of corporations, governments, and NGOs to illuminate labor rights violations in supply chains and remedy them to the benefit of workers and companies alike.

We undertake independent, high-quality, original research on key issues and challenges in responsible supply chain sourcing. Leveraging our grassroots access, we provide a unique, bottom-up, objective view of labor conditions at the commodity, product, sector, and country level, mapping patterns of human trafficking and forced labor, child labor, and other egregious issues.

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TENT

About the Tent Partnership for Refugees

With more and more refugees displaced for longer periods of time, businesses have a critical role to play in helping refugees integrate economically in their new host communities. The Tent Partnership for Refugees mobilizes the global business community to improve the lives and livelihoods of over 30 million refugees who have been forcibly displaced from their home countries.

Founded by Chobani's founder and CEO Hamdi Ulukaya in 2016, we are a network of over 170 major companies committed to including refugees. Tent believes that companies can most sustainably support refugees by leveraging their core business operations -by engaging refugees as potential employees, entrepreneurs and consumers. The full list of Tent members can be found [here](#).

Find out more at www.tent.org

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Foreword

Today, over 30 million people in the world have fled their country because their lives, safety, or freedom have been threatened. Low- and middle-income countries - like Colombia, Turkey, and Bangladesh - host 85% of all refugees in the world. These are countries where many multinational companies have suppliers - and yet most companies don't think about the implication of their supply chain including refugees. With the global refugee crisis showing no signs of abating, multinational companies will become even more exposed to refugee populations via their suppliers.

Refugees are vulnerable to forced labor and child labor when they take on work in a host country. Even in countries where they have full formal access to the labor market, refugees can be at risk of exploitation, such as earning lower wages, and working in unsafe conditions. And while refugees are already working in multinational company supply chains, companies are often unsure how to address this potential risk and meet compliance standards. Companies should not try to eliminate risk categorically by dissuading suppliers from hiring refugees - in fact, this usually pushes refugees that are seeking work deeper into the supply chain, where oversight of labor issues is likely to be weak, making refugees even more vulnerable to forced labor, and companies at even greater risk of non-compliance with forced labor policies and laws.

Instead, companies should actively encourage their suppliers to hire refugees. This makes good business sense for both brands and their suppliers. Brands will create supply chains that are sustainable, diverse, and compliant with laws and policies that prohibit forced labor. As a result, they will attract consumers that reward businesses that go above and beyond to eliminate forced labor in their supply chains.

According to Nielsen's Global Sustainability Report, 72% of consumers aged 34 and under say they would pay more for goods produced responsibly. By hiring refugees, suppliers will fill labor shortages existing in their factories. What's more, the economies of host countries also receive a boost when companies integrate refugees into their supply chains; when refugees earn a decent living and can share their talents with the local community, they become productive members of society.

This report unpacks why and how companies can hire and incorporate refugees into their supply chains as a proactive strategy to combat forced labor. At the Tent Partnership for Refugees, our mission is to mobilize the global business community in support of refugees; we focus on facilitating refugees' economic integration and, as part of that work, we support major global companies in their efforts to include refugees in their supply chains. We believe this report will help companies tackle the problem of forced labor by rethinking how refugees can be safely integrated into their supply chains, and in doing so, help refugees gain access to fair, decent work.

We would like to thank the Verité team and all of the individuals at organizations and companies around the world that contributed to this project. We appreciate your support.

Sincerely,



Scarlet Cronin
Acting Executive Director
The Tent Partnership for Refugees



Introduction



In 2020, the Tent Partnership for Refugees (Tent) commissioned Verité to develop a report providing guidance for responsible sourcing teams at multinational companies interested in leveraging their supply chains to reduce the vulnerability of refugee populations to forced labor.

In line with Tent's mission to encourage businesses to recognize refugees as economically productive workers, suppliers, entrepreneurs, and customers, the following report explains ways that companies can hire and incorporate refugees in their supply chains and advocate for their rights as a proactive strategy towards combating forced labor. This report can be divided into two parts; Part 1 describes the labor vulnerabilities refugees face with regards to company supply chains and makes the case for why multinational companies should include refugees in their strategies to combat forced labor. Part 2 lays out an agenda for the actions multinational companies and their responsible sourcing teams can take to address the vulnerabilities of refugees in their supply chains. The agenda outlines two ways through which companies can take action in their supply chains: hiring refugees to create employment opportunities within the supply chain; and advocating for refugees' expanded right to work. Each pathway is illustrated with actual examples of how specific businesses have supported refugees through company-led initiatives that contributed to reducing labor vulnerability. This section also includes recommendations and resources for companies and their responsible

sourcing teams. Additional modes of engagement to promote job creation for refugees through targeted procurement and purchasing practices are also discussed, in an annex to the report.

While providing companies with a resource for integrating refugees into their responsible sourcing strategies, the report also notes the ways in which a supportive policy agenda can enhance forced labor interventions. It outlines recent policy shifts and milestones, as well as emerging guidelines on inclusive business engagement concerning refugees.

A central finding of the research indicates that refugees live and work in almost all countries of the world and in varying situations of vulnerability to forced labor. The report proposes that, in the face of the global phenomenon of long-term displacement, companies must seek to define an effective and proactive response to this challenge across their operational footprint.

METHODOLOGY

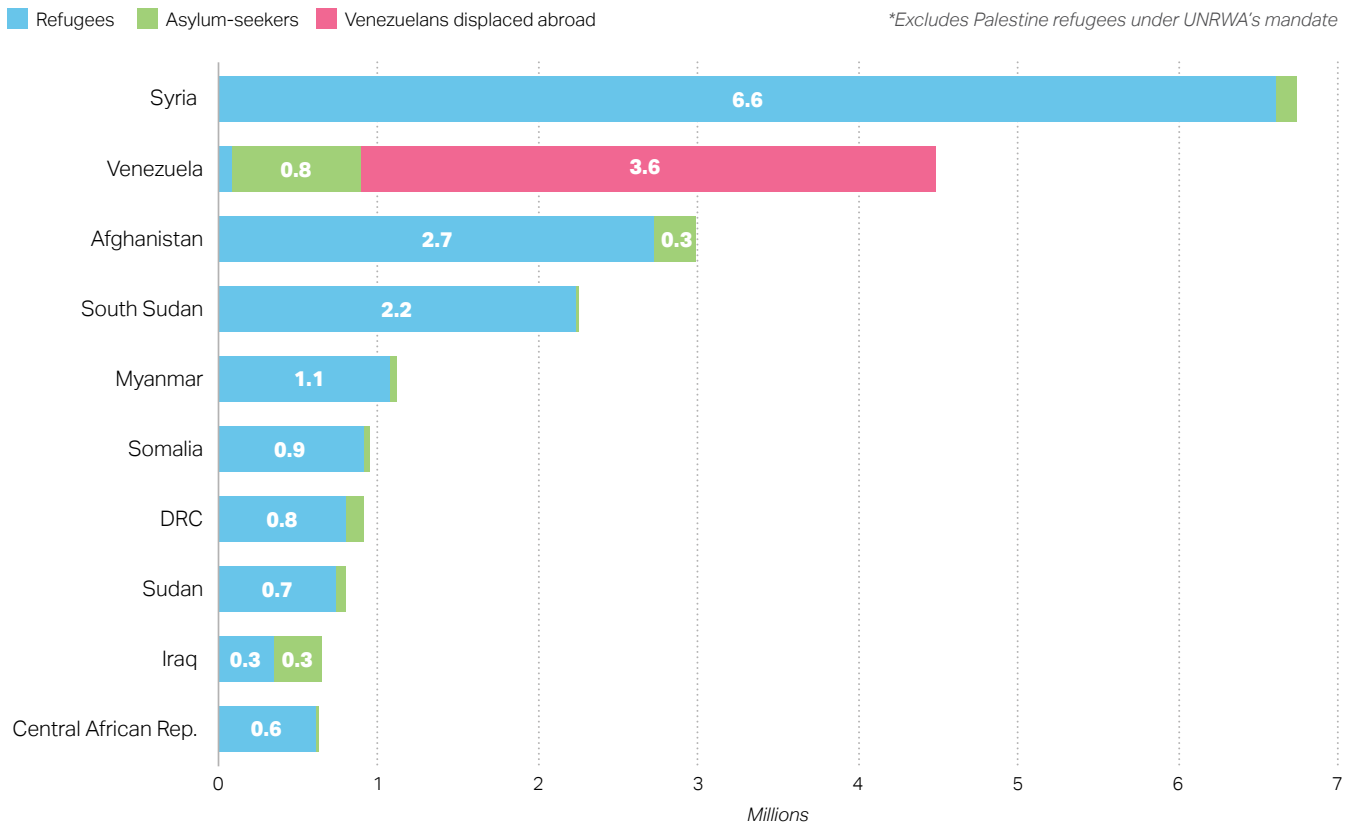
This report has been developed through a combination of desk research and key informant interviews with a set of stakeholders, including companies from a range of sectors, academics, human rights and ethical practice promoters, civil society organizations working with migrants and refugees, UN and other development agencies, and Verité's own global partner network. A total of 20 interviews involving 25 stakeholders were completed. (See Annex 1 for further detail regarding the key informants.) The research was undertaken at a critical stage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photo: Andres Navia Paz / Shutterstock.com

Part 1.

How Global Supply Chains Intersect with Refugee Populations

▲ **Figure 1 | Top international displacement situations by country of origin end-2019**



A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

The global refugee^{1,2} population is large, growing, and present in every region of the world; and many global supply chains – of both goods and services – are likely to intersect with refugees in many ways depending on the specific country and sector contexts. The UNHCR has referred to 2010-2019 as the “decade of displacement,” as the number of refugees has doubled worldwide.³

At the end of 2019, there were a reported 26 million people registered as refugees worldwide,⁴ roughly half of whom were children.⁵ Additionally, a total of 16.2 million asylum applications were registered during this time, and 15 million people were newly recognized as refugees outside the asylum process.⁶ While more than two-thirds of the world’s refugees come from five “hotspot” countries (Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia, and South Sudan; plus millions of Venezuelans displaced abroad⁷), the number of refugees increased in every region of the world in the last decade.⁸

While the number of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons around the world is already at a historical high, these numbers are expected to increase further alongside global insecurity and conflict, economic disruption, climate crises, and, most recently, the COVID-19 global health pandemic.⁹ In a growing number of contexts, displacement is protracted,¹⁰ with refugees unable to return home due to wars, conflicts, and crises that have lasted for extended periods of time. Between 2009 and 2019 only 3.9 million refugees returned to their home countries of origin, compared to 10 million in the previous decade.¹¹

Refugees are engaged in formal and informal work in a variety of sectors, with most initially gaining employment on a casual basis. Evidence indicates that refugees work in agriculture,¹² textile/garment production,¹³ construction,¹⁴ restaurant work,¹⁵ fishing,¹⁶ palm oil production,¹⁷ and mining,¹⁸ among many others. Refugees are often hired for work that nationals would consider unattractive or dangerous,¹⁹ compounding their likelihood to accept jobs in sub-tier supply chain work such as fishing, textiles, mining, and forestry.²⁰ While refugees live and work in almost all countries of the world, 85 percent are hosted in developing countries.²¹

Wherever they find themselves geographically, the conditions refugee workers experience can vary widely depending on a number of factors, including whether they are legally permitted to work, the degree to which the host country offers economic opportunity beyond the least desirable forms of work, and the strength of legal frameworks protecting the rights of all workers - particularly migrants and refugees.

There are many ways for the business community to support the integration of refugees into their new host communities. For example, Tent mobilizes the business community to hire refugees in their own workforce; support refugee entrepreneurs; tailor products to better meet refugees' needs; and leverage their supply chains to provide employment opportunities for refugees.²² Companies can implement responsible sourcing efforts in their supply chains to improve refugee livelihoods by encouraging suppliers in sourcing countries to responsibly hire refugees, and engaging in right to work advocacy to reduce their legal barriers to work.

Creating safe, fair, and legal employment opportunities in supply chains can improve livelihoods *and* contribute to reducing some of the factors that contribute to the risks of human trafficking, forced labor, and child labor. As the global refugee population reaches historical highs—including in some key countries for global supply chain sourcing—companies' strategies to mitigate the risks of forced labor and child labor should include special considerations for refugee populations.



ACTION ITEM FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING:

Assess Geographic Sourcing Footprint.

The geographic location of refugees can shift in relation to the presence of conflict, crises, and host country policies on admitting refugees. Therefore, all companies should assess the geographic footprint of their sourcing operations to identify where refugees may be present. Assessing a company's sourcing footprint and improving supply chain knowledge allows companies to identify opportunities for engaging refugees directly in their supply chains in safe, fair, and legal employment; determine where refugees may already be intersecting with their supply chains; and develop appropriate management systems to monitor for human and labor rights violations.

Supply chain mapping traces a company's sourcing footprint and points of accountability — at all levels of production, from the procurement of raw materials, through to processing, manufacturing, and packaging, and final sale. Identifying the geographic location of first tier or “direct” suppliers can be a straightforward process. It can be more challenging to identify the country of operation of indirect suppliers (and their suppliers) that comprise the second, third, and lower tiers of the supply chain. In the context of food and beverage supply chains, for example, this means being able to identify the countries where crops were grown or animals were raised as well as countries hosting facilities where food additives and flavorings were manufactured. In sectors, like garments and apparel, supply chain mapping means not only identifying the geographic location of top-tier facilities that provide retailers with finished goods, but

the location of subcontracted facilities that contribute to garment production (potentially including home-based workshops), as well as the geographic location of the production of upstream inputs such as cotton, wool, yarn and textiles.



ACTION ITEM FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING:

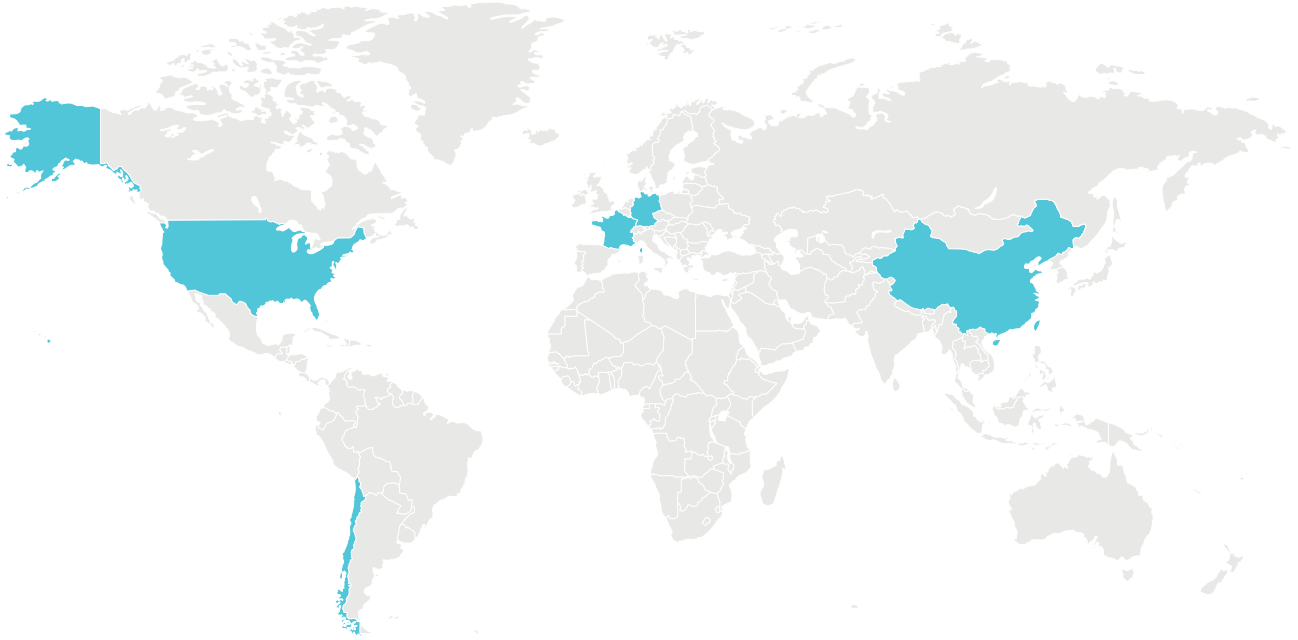
Assess the Presence and Scale of Refugee Populations in Source Countries.

Once companies understand the geographic footprint of their sourcing and procurement practices, they can conduct research to identify whether countries of production within their supply chain are likely to host refugee populations. The United Nations provides access to data and is an authoritative source for information on refugee presence in countries around the world.

There are multiple current “hotspot” countries and regions with high concentrations of both refugee populations and global supply chain operations. For example, the maps below illustrate the overlap between some of the top countries exporting agricultural and apparel goods in 2019 and the top refugee-hosting countries in the same year.

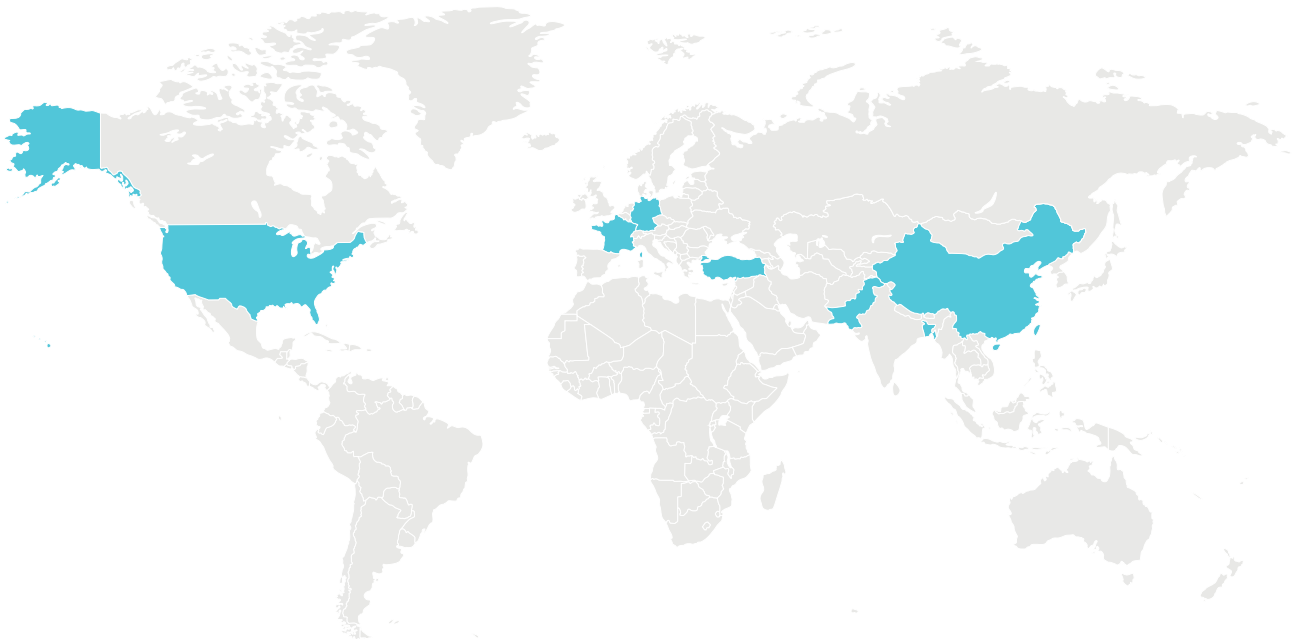
▲ **Figure 2** | Overlap of Top Refugee Hosting Countries and Agricultural Commodity Exporting Countries²³

■ Top Agriculture Exporting + Top Refugee Hosting



▲ **Figure 3** | Overlap of Top Garment and Apparel Exporting Countries and Top Refugee Hosting Countries²⁴

■ Top Garment & Apparel Exporting + Top Refugee Hosting



▲ **Table 1** | Top 25 Refugee-hosting Countries²⁵

| Country | Total Refugees Under UNHCR Mandate and Venezuelans Abroad (2019 Data) |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 Turkey | 3,579,531 |
| 2 Colombia | 1,771,871 |
| 3 Pakistan | 1,419,596 |
| 4 Uganda | 1,359,458 |
| 5 Germany | 1,146,682 |
| 6 Sudan | 1,055,489 |
| 7 Iran (Islamic Rep. of) | 979,435 |
| 8 Lebanon | 916,141 |
| 9 Bangladesh | 854,779 |
| 10 Ethiopia | 733,123 |
| 11 Jordan | 693,668 |
| 12 Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 523,733 |
| 13 Ecuador | 478,605 |
| 14 Chile | 454,758 |
| 15 Chad | 442,670 |
| 16 Kenya | 438,899 |
| 17 France | 407,915 |
| 18 Cameroon | 406,259 |
| 19 Peru | 380,714 |
| 20 United States of America | 341,715 |
| 21 China | 303,379 |
| 22 South Sudan | 298,309 |
| 23 Iraq | 273,986 |
| 24 Yemen | 268,503 |
| 25 Egypt | 258,391 |

Refugee populations in key exporting countries are likely to contribute—either formally or informally—to the production of export goods. As noted above, since the global refugee population is both growing and in flux, companies should map supply chains and assess production countries for refugee presence as a general good practice. In addition to noting the presence of refugee populations in countries where finished goods are produced and exported, companies should also keep in mind their larger supply chains and assess for refugee presence in countries from which inputs and raw commodity materials may be sourced.

For refugees, obtaining work that allows them to meet their basic needs is critical for survival, as humanitarian assistance alone seldom meets their full needs. As refugees seek an income, they are likely to interact with international supply chains in either formal or informal capacities. This points to the need for long-term solutions beyond short-term humanitarian assistance, including the right to work and ample opportunities for safe, fair, and legal employment. This need becomes even more important considering the heightened labor vulnerabilities refugee populations often face. The following section discusses this vulnerability in greater detail.

REFUGEES AND LABOR VULNERABILITY **Definitional Frameworks on Forced Labor, Human Trafficking, and Related Labor Vulnerabilities**

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines forced labor as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily.”²⁶ The presence of a threat of penalty and involuntary work are often the result of a combination of labor and rights violations, sometimes referred to as indicators of forced labor. According to the International Conference of Labor Statisticians, these indicators can include, among others:

- Abduction or other forms of forced recruitment;
- Being deceived into taking a job that is different from what was promised in terms of hours, hazardous work, wages, nature of work, or employer;
- Threats or violence against workers and their families;
- The withholding of wages or working for very low or no wages;
- Manipulation of debt that prevents the worker from leaving their job;
- Withholding of valuable documents (such as identity documents or residence permits);
- Abuse of workers’ vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation.²⁷

Children can also be victims of forced labor and tend to be more vulnerable as they have limited ability to provide informed consent. It is important to note that if children are working as a result of their parents being in forced labor, the children are also considered victims of forced labor.

Human trafficking, a phenomenon closely related to forced labor, is defined by the United Nations as:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”²⁸ The nature of “exploitation” can include a range of outcomes including “the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”²⁹

Factors Contributing to Labor Vulnerability of Refugee Populations

A review of literature and insight from experts³⁰ points to two categories of factors that can increase refugee vulnerability to forced labor. The first category is linked to the specific country and region in which refugees are living and working. The second category is closely linked to pre-existing vulnerabilities of refugees and their families. An assessment of the relevance of these risks can be conducted drawing on sources including audit reports or other sources of worker testimony, secondary literature, legal review, consultations with local experts such as workers organizations and civil society groups.



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ACTION ITEM FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING:

Understand Risks Source Countries May Present for Refugees.

Understanding the geographic footprint of their sourcing allows companies to understand the context in which refugees live and work. A 2019 report by the International Organization for Migration and Walk Free found that migrants are particularly vulnerable to forced labor and trafficking in persons in situations or places “where the authority of the State and society is unable to protect them, either through lack of capacity, absence of applicable laws or simple neglect.”³¹ This country-specific information allows companies to develop an appropriate engagement strategy for mitigating the risk of forced labor for refugees. The following questions can help guide assessment of refugee vulnerability to forced labor in different country contexts:

| Country-Based Risk Assessment Question | Explanation of Implications for Refugee Experience and Company Strategy |
|---|--|
| <p>Do refugees live alongside host populations?</p> | <p>Increasing numbers of refugees live and work alongside host populations in host countries. Since 2014, approximately 60 percent of refugees have lived outside refugee camps and in largely urban environments.³² Urban refugees typically have greater labor mobility and freedom of movement than those living in refugee camps or isolated areas.³³ Refugees living alongside host populations experience different degrees of right to work depending on the host country context.</p> |
| <p>Do refugees have a legally protected right to work?</p> <p><i>Additional questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are there limitations on the right to work?</i> • <i>Are refugees allowed to work in practice?</i> • <i>Do employers support employment of refugees in practice? What is the uptake of the refugee right to work?</i> | <p>The 1951 Refugee Convention ensures refugees' rights to decent work in wage-earning employment, self-employment, and employment.³⁴ According to a 2016 study, approximately 75 of the 145 signatory countries officially grant refugees the right to work.³⁵ Refugees who possess the right to work in their host country are able to work formally and legally, thereby providing them with greater protections than those with only partial or no right to work. In such contexts, refugees might be legally employed in supplier factories, in auxiliary services provided to supplier factories, or self-employed in an entrepreneurial endeavor. However, having the right to work may still carry significant restrictions or risks of vulnerability (e.g., in some cases refugees must be sponsored by a specific employer in order to gain the right to work; in other cases, the right to work may be limited to certain sectors).³⁶</p> <p>Many host countries do not grant refugees the right to work or severely limit their right to work; nearly half of the convention signatory countries and many of the 48 countries that are not signatories substantially limit the right to work of refugees.³⁷ These limitations often derive from a concern that refugees will take jobs from local workers and drive down wage rates and working conditions.³⁸</p> <p>Whatever the justification, when refugees are not afforded the right to work, they often end up employed in the informal sector which can increase their vulnerability.³⁹ Informal sector employment can include,</p> |

for example, day labor in the agricultural or fishing sectors - however there is no limit to which sectors can engage refugees in informal work. Even the operations of highly scrutinized and audited supply chains may involve informal outsourced manufacturing, which is seldom traceable and in which employers often act with impunity.

Do refugees in the target country live in refugee camps?

Approximately 2.6 million refugees live in refugee camps - temporary facilities that provide immediate humanitarian assistance, protection, and legal aid. One of the defining features of refugee camps, according to the UNHCR, is some degree of limitation on the ability to work or open a business.⁴⁰ Refugees living in camps may also experience limited freedom of movement and poor and dangerous living conditions.⁴¹ When work does take place, it usually occurs in informal and risky environments, unless there are specific training or enterprise-oriented initiatives. The UNHCR notes that camps are often associated with negative consequences for refugees and host countries, including: barriers to employment and self-reliance for refugees, increased gender-based violence, decrease in the well-being of children, and threats of trafficking in persons for commercial sexual exploitation or labor exploitation.⁴² In some cases, the numbers of refugees living alongside nationals is far greater than the global average; for example, in Jordan, over 80 percent of the country's 1.2 million Syrian refugees live outside camps. In Turkey, the country with the largest refugee population in the world, only 2.4 percent of its nearly 4 million Syrian refugees reside in camps,⁴³ and at least 50,000 Rohingya refugees live among locals in Chittagong (Bangladesh) working informally, as refugees have no right to work in the country and are considered stateless.⁴⁴

Does the country have a high degree of poverty, instability or conflict?

The economic conditions and degree of labor market formality in a specific host country is often another key determining factor in the decent work options available to refugees living and working alongside host populations.⁴⁵ Many host countries—including those from which companies may regularly source goods—lack sufficient decent work opportunities for their own citizens and refugee

populations due to high poverty levels. The level and extent of poverty in a country is known to be a “push” factor for human trafficking, including trafficking for forced labor. Household food insecurity and income shocks that push people deeper into poverty are strongly correlated with increased likelihood of being trafficked.⁴⁶ People suffering from extreme poverty may make choices that increase their risk of being caught in situations of forced labor. Refugees are also more susceptible to falling victim to labor exploitation by organized crime groups, including forced recruitment by illegal armed groups (including child recruitment) and criminal gangs engaged in illegal activities such as drug trafficking,⁴⁷ activities which can flourish in countries with weak rule of law.

Does the country have high or rising levels of xenophobia, racial, or religious discrimination?

Where there is xenophobia and discrimination towards refugees by the host community, its authorities and employers, abuse can easily follow. This can compound a refugee’s vulnerability to labor abuse (e.g., low pay and poor working conditions) and deepen levels of manipulation or forced labor to obtain the work needed to survive.



Photo: Oksana Perkins / Shutterstock.com



ACTION ITEM FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING:

Understand How Individual Refugee Demographic Characteristics Intersect with Country-Based Risk.

In addition to the above characteristics of host countries that can impact refugee vulnerability to forced labor, refugees with different demographic characteristics may experience higher levels of vulnerability. Key questions for assessing the vulnerability of individual refugees might include the following:

- Country of origin.
- Current living situation.
- Length of time the refugee has lived in the host country.
- Proficiency and literacy level in the host-country language.
- Prior education/training or work experience in a particular skill, trade, or occupation.
- Inclusion in demographic groups that tend to experience higher levels of vulnerability (i.e. refugees with disabilities, women, LGBTQ community, young adults, ethnic minorities). Note that female refugees who are not accustomed to working outside the home and/or are currently the head of their household are at particular risk of abuse.
- Whether a refugee/a refugee's family is indebted and whether they have safe and legal opportunities to repay any debt.
- Presence of any assets or possessions that could be leveraged to fill gaps in livelihoods.



ACTION ITEM:

Understanding Refugee Vulnerability Under Different Right to Work Contexts.

Refugees with limited or no right to work, or lacking in critical support networks, may be excluded from formal employment and have little choice but to work in the informal sector in order to survive. Refugees may be pushed into seeking work under-the-radar in informal sub-tier operations, mostly through outsourcing. These jobs are more likely to be performed in unsafe working conditions and for low pay, and the options for seeking help in the event of abuse are low. Numerous indicators of forced labor vulnerability have been detected in refugee populations around the world due to their socioeconomic vulnerability and reliance on others for job access. There can also be a greater risk of child labor when formal work for adult refugees is not possible. For example, refugees in Malaysia—a country that is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention but is an important sourcing country for many multinational companies—are restricted to the informal sector and have been found to be vulnerable to child labor, forced labor, and trafficking in persons.⁴⁸

At face value, refugees with the legal right to work are less vulnerable than those without the legal right to work. However, it is important to acknowledge that the right to work on paper alone seldom results in genuinely decent work and opportunities in practice. While the right to work is enshrined in international norms⁴⁹ and is a critical element of securing decent livelihood opportunities for refugees, right to work policies must be crafted carefully for successful uptake and implemented in an enabling environment.

Refugees with the legal right to work are often still limited in their job market access due to underlying factors such as xenophobia and discrimination, sometimes based on historic, ethnic, religious, or other political tensions between the host country population and the arriving refugees.⁵⁰ Refugees may be barred from certain professions, or they may lack the resources to pay for a permit and the language skills required to apply for it. Legally having the right to work may also create a new dependency on an employer due to the need for sponsorship. Conversely, when refugees are left to navigate their right to work status on their own, vulnerability to exploitative behaviors can also occur.⁵¹

Some studies have shown that refugees may prefer not to enter formal work or face barriers to formal work for a variety of reasons.⁵² They may lack the required skills, face language challenges, or may have never worked in a formal setting before (particularly if they are coming from rural settings in their home countries); or, they may find the option infeasible and unattractive due to their home life, cultural norms, and responsibilities. (This is especially the case among women refugees. In Turkey, for example, just 13.4 percent of Syrian women were estimated to be part of the labor force in 2017.⁵³) Adding to this complexity, the loss of benefits and humanitarian assistance that often follows legal employment may disincentivize refugees from taking formal work.

Although informal work may not occur in safe and decent conditions, the greater flexibility and alternative livelihood options it provides can sometimes be a deciding factor in choice of work for refugees. All of these factors should be kept in mind, understanding that refugees can experience substantial labor vulnerability even in contexts where they have the right to work; and that while the right

to work is a critical piece of the puzzle for providing livelihood for refugees, it should be accompanied by supporting mechanisms that respond to the needs and challenges of specific refugee populations.

In most host country contexts, welfare systems are insufficient to provide sustained support to large and vulnerable displaced populations. Despite the precarious situations that many refugees around the world experience, refugees are resilient and “highly innovative, coming up with creative ways to support themselves.”⁵⁴ Entrepreneurialism and the ability to start a business can be as important to the wellbeing of displaced people as the right to formal employment.



COVID-19 AND REFUGEE VULNERABILITY

Corporations worldwide are facing major disruption due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has left the world of formal work in flux. All international supply chains have been affected by the pandemic. Some sectors in which refugees often work – such as apparel or agriculture – have been particularly hard hit, with declining consumer demand and difficulties in work access. The pandemic has also proven to be a powerful threat multiplier for vulnerable populations, including refugees. It is both a health and an economic crisis that has hit refugees especially hard, particularly those living in low- and middle-income host countries.⁵⁵ The high population density, inadequate sanitation infrastructure, and weak healthcare systems in many of the world's largest refugee camps create particularly high risk for the camp's inhabitants, since it can be nearly impossible to maintain the recommended social distance crucial to preventing and slowing the spread of the airborne virus.⁵⁶

Pandemic-related curfews and lockdowns have reduced working hours and earnings, with a greater impact on refugee populations.⁵⁷ Refugees have also experienced loss of jobs and livelihoods due the sectors in which

they are commonly employed being heavily affected.⁵⁸ Analysis conducted by The Center for Global Development, Refugees International, and International Rescue Committee found that “before COVID-19, refugees were 60 percent more likely to be working in the sectors highly impacted by COVID-19 and the economic downturn.”⁵⁹ While existing empirical data is limited, emerging evidence suggests that refugee populations living in host countries are experiencing higher rates of job loss due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 than citizens of the host countries.⁶⁰ In Jordan, for example, a survey conducted in April 2020 found that nearly one third of refugee households surveyed had not had enough food to eat in the past week.⁶¹ The UNHCR announced in May 2020 that one-third of refugee daily workers in Jordan had lost their jobs. The agency also reported it had received 300,000 calls to its hotline in Jordan since COVID-19 hit in early March 2020, with most people seeking cash assistance.⁶² In the long term, it is anticipated that pandemic-related economic downturns and shocks will continue to result in economic vulnerability among refugee populations and will directly affect states' treatment of and aid offered to migrant and refugee populations.⁶³

There are several pathways within the business community for companies to help offer basic aid and support to refugee populations to access stable and sustainable livelihoods, as well as to offer mentorship and job training. Companies can also support a wide-range of initiatives that facilitate the procuring of goods and services from refugee-owned businesses or integrate refugees into core business operations. Providing refugees with safe, fair, and legal employment within the supply chain or supporting refugee entrepreneurs by including them as suppliers can reduce refugee vulnerability to forced labor. Regardless of the type of work they do or the legal context, refugees are likely to end up within or indirectly interacting with international supply chains—especially with actors at the bottom of supply chains. It is therefore critical that ethical sourcing and supply chain teams understand how forced labor risk may manifest among refugees.

Examples of Forced Labor Phenomena Among Refugee Populations

While refugees are often exploited alongside other types of migrants and vulnerable groups, they may face increased or unique risks related to their precarious situations. This can create situations in which refugees do not have leverage to protect their rights if they are exploited by an employer, recruiter, or other employment actor. This can sometimes manifest in forced labor or child labor. According to the U.S. Department of State’s 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report, trafficking in persons for commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking of children, forced labor, and debt bondage have all been documented among refugee populations.⁶⁴ These abuses and others have been documented among refugee populations in formal and informal work.⁶⁵

Forced labor involves the two key components of involuntary work and menace of penalty. The forced labor indicator approach lends itself to the identification of components of forced labor risk and root causes. The following examples of how some forced labor indicators have manifested among refugee populations help illustrate the nature of risk refugees face. They offer compelling evidence for why companies should take proactive measures to include refugees in their efforts to address forced and child labor in their supply chains.



ACTION ITEM FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING:

Assess for Presence of Forced Labor Indicators and Child Labor Risk in Supply Chains.

When assessing worksites within company supply chains – including indirect procurement - companies should specifically investigate the presence of the following indicators of forced labor. Where indicators are present, companies should seek to understand and document how the indicators play out in practice, as this can help guide effective intervention planning.⁶⁶

| Forced Labor Indicator | General Description | Relevance for Refugees |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Deceptive Recruitment</p> | <p>Deceptive recruitment occurs when workers are recruited under false pretenses e.g., the nature, conditions, location of work, and wages to be paid.⁶⁷ Deceptive recruitment can indicate that the work is being performed involuntarily.</p> | <p>The confluence of factors that can lead to the deceptive recruitment of refugees is not unique to refugee populations. In countries where refugees do not have the right to work, their options for income generation are limited to the informal sector, which is often unregulated by the government. This lack of oversight provides impunity to recruiters and employers who may recruit refugees under false pretenses. For example, it has been documented that Syrian refugees in Turkey are enticed to work in agricultural operations like hazelnut farming by unregulated recruiters who promise higher wages than the actual pay and who take more than the standard 10 percent cut of wages for connecting the worker to the farm. In one instance, a refugee worker was paid half the amount a recruiter initially promised for a 12-hour day's work.⁶⁸</p> |
| <p>Work with very low or no wages</p> | <p>While very low wages – including sub-minimum wages – do not conclusively demonstrate forced labor, they can indicate that work is being performed involuntarily.</p> | <p>Very low pay among refugees has been documented across sectors and countries including the agriculture⁶⁹ and garment sectors in Turkey,⁷⁰ multiple sectors in Jordan,⁷¹ in the garment, domestic and childcare, construction and manual labor, and fishing sectors in Bangladesh,⁷² and in the gold mining,⁷³ palm oil,⁷⁴ and restaurant sectors in Colombia.⁷⁵</p> |

| Forced Labor Indicator | General Description | Relevance for Refugees |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| <p>Withholding of wages</p> | <p>Employers may delay payment of wages owed as a strategy for preventing workers from leaving a job they would otherwise leave.</p> | <p>Wage withholding from refugees can be found in many sectors, particularly when employers are able to act with impunity and refugees feel they have little to no chance of intervention should they report this to authorities. (In fact, refugees may fear such reports may result in their being punished, especially in situations in which a refugee does not have the right to work). Wage withholding among refugees has been documented in the garment sector in Turkey,⁷⁶ in multiple sectors in Jordan,⁷⁷ in the construction and manual labor and fishing sectors in Bangladesh,⁷⁸ and in the fishing sector in Thailand, where unpaid wages prevented trafficking victims from returning home.⁷⁹</p> |
| <p>Threats or violence</p> | <p>Threats or violence against workers, workers' families and relatives, or close associates are a means of coercing workers into performing work (including performing overtime work not previously agreed upon).</p> | <p>Threats or violence have been reported from refugees in several sectors around the world. As with other indicators, the combination of the need for livelihood and lack of alternatives, employer impunity, and xenophobia can converge in refugees being vulnerable to threats or violence from employers. For example, threats or violence have been reported by refugee and migrant workers in multiple sectors in Jordan, where they report being threatened with deportation and physical violence;⁸⁰ in the garment sector in Bangladesh, where there have been reports of physical violence;⁸¹ in the fishing sector in Thailand, where there have been reports of physical violence;⁸² and in the garment sector in Turkey, where Syrian refugees report threats of losing employment if they do not work extra hours.⁸³</p> |

| Forced Labor Indicator | General Description | Relevance for Refugees |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Debt bondage or manipulation of debt</p> | <p>Debt can be leveraged to coerce a worker to accept an undesirable job or as a means of binding a worker to a job they would otherwise leave. Debt can arise for costs related to recruitment (such as fees for securing a job or travel costs paid upfront by an employer or recruiter) or can be incurred while on the job (such as through cash advances with high interest rates or other fees charged to workers).</p> | <p>Debt bondage has been documented among refugees in association with debt to cover migration costs, recruitment-related debt, or debt to an employer for deductions to cover housing, food, or tools used for the job. In Turkey, some refugee workers were reported to have become indebted by paying recruitment fees to secure agricultural jobs;⁸⁴ in the fishing sector in Bangladesh, refugee children were documented as having to work to pay off loan-related debts incurred by their families;⁸⁵ in Thailand, refugees reportedly became indebted by paying labor recruitment fees to smugglers;⁸⁶ and in Malaysia, refugees were exploited in connection with debt related to border crossing.⁸⁷</p> |

Examples of Child Labor Phenomena Among Refugee Populations

Child labor usually occurs in refugee communities out of necessity, with children often working long hours to help support their families.⁸⁸ The U.S. Department of State’s 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report notes that refugee children are particularly vulnerable to forced labor and other forms of exploitation.⁸⁹ The children of refugees often work informally in diverse jobs — many of which are unsuited to the children’s age — to aid their families’ survival. In some contexts, families may believe that children working without a permit may face less risk of prosecution than adults working without permits.⁹⁰

The combination of labor vulnerabilities affecting refugee adults can create scenarios in which refugee

children have an easier time finding or keeping jobs than their adult family members. A multi-state study of countries hosting Syrian refugees found that the primary reason Syrian children had to work was because of the barriers limiting their adult family members’ job prospects.⁹¹ This was also found to be the case in Malaysia where, because adult refugees have restricted movement and are not legally authorized to work, children work in numerous sectors.⁹²

There have been accounts of refugee child labor around the world. For example, refugee children in Jordan are regularly employed informally. They have reported abuses including low pay or nonpayment of wages, working overtime hours, hazardous working conditions, and verbal and physical abuse.⁹³

In Ethiopia, 60 percent of refugees are children, thousands of who are unaccompanied.⁹⁴ Both the lack of adult supervision, as well as desperation, has resulted in numerous reports of children being trafficked.⁹⁵

HOW COMPANY SOURCING PRACTICES IMPACT REFUGEE VULNERABILITY

Because of the complex nature of many companies’ supply chains, and with the increasing numbers of refugees in many countries around the world, it is likely that all companies with business interests in countries with refugee populations will find that their supply chains intersect in some way with refugee labor. Company sourcing and procurement practices can either exacerbate or improve refugee vulnerability.



ACTION ITEM FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING:
 Assess the Degree to Which Sourcing Practices and Business Decisions May Obscure Risks to Refugees.

Industries with long, complex, or non-transparent supply chains are more likely to be at risk for labor vulnerability – for refugees as well as other workers – than ones with short, straightforward supply chains. Longer supply chains involve more environments in which labor takes place, and hence more possibilities for violations to occur. The length and complexity of supply chains can also make it difficult for the eventual purchasers of finished products or services to monitor for vulnerability and violations taking place at the secondary or tertiary levels.⁹⁶ In many contexts, risk assessments only reach first tier suppliers. Without strong policies and expectations cascaded from a company to its indirect suppliers, upstream suppliers are unlikely to invest resources in committing to ethical hiring. While this lack of

oversight can have negative consequences for all workers, refugees and other vulnerable populations are likely to suffer the worst abuses.

In addition to the opacity stemming from complex supply chains, downward price pressures and rapid production timelines imposed on suppliers by their clients can create conditions that drive labor abuse. More specifically, price pressures can create a perceived requirement for suppliers to source workers from the lowest-cost labor recruiters, regardless of ethical performance. Suppliers are also hesitant to speak openly with multinational buyers about the impact of price pressures, for fear of losing business.

To the degree that there is awareness of potential labor risk for refugees, some companies consider countering that risk by avoiding hiring refugees altogether, even in countries where refugees have the legal right to work. However, this purported risk mitigation strategy is counter-productive; it only pushes risk deeper into the supply chain — leading refugees to accept more precarious work arrangements and further obscuring visibility into their working conditions.

The good news is that, just as company practices can lead to increased risk and vulnerability for refugees, thoughtful company practices can reduce vulnerability. The following section will provide insight on potential company approaches and opportunities for developing strategies that contribute to safe, fair, legal, and freely chosen work for refugees.

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Part 2.

Company Approaches and Opportunities to Reduce Refugee Vulnerability to Forced Labor in Supply Chains



THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

The current policy environment around refugee rights prioritizes pathways that can provide refugees with restored dignity and self-reliance. The promotion of livelihoods through economic opportunity is a private sector action that fits squarely within this framework. Efforts by multinational companies to promote refugee livelihoods in their responsible sourcing can simultaneously reduce refugee vulnerability to forced labor.



ACTION ITEM FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING:

Understand Recent Global Frameworks on Refugee Rights and the Implications for Company Practice.

Following the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016⁹⁷ and the Global Compact on Refugees, the The OECD and the UNHCR launched a “10-point Action Plan for Employers in the Hiring of Refugees” in 2018.⁹⁸ The action plan supports the labor market integration of refugees and offers a useful high-level guide for companies on how to enhance employment opportunities for refugees in the countries in which they and their suppliers operate.

In December 2019, the first Global Refugee Forum convened by the UNHCR resulted in over 120 pledges

relating to jobs and livelihoods.⁹⁹ With the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the UNHCR rallied a call for support for refugees from those who made pledges at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.¹⁰⁰

The evolution of the global policy landscape clearly demonstrates an emerging consensus around the role of the private sector in responding to the global refugee crisis. In addition to a robust commitment to general refugee wellbeing and humanitarian support, companies should pursue holistic understanding of their supply chains so that they can advance refugee livelihoods via ethical employment and reduce vulnerability to forced labor and child labor.

LEVERAGING EXISTING DUE DILIGENCE SYSTEMS



ACTION ITEM FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING:

Adapt and Expand Existing Due Diligence Systems to Include Refugees.

Taking action to improve the lives and economic outcomes of refugees does not necessarily require companies to implement new due diligence standards or responsible sourcing practices. Instead, companies can modify existing tools and procedures.

For example, many leading companies already undertake workplace monitoring and assessment. However, even advanced monitoring systems may not proactively include refugees. Interviews and stakeholder consultations conducted for this report found that, currently, companies often neglect the presence of refugees in their supply chains. Companies should expand the scope of existing assessments by asking questions focused on refugees’ vulnerabilities in their host communities. Companies can also work to identify local civil

society organizations working directly with refugee populations that understand refugee realities and have active programming. In building relationships, companies can encourage suppliers to openly describe the informal or formal work relationships they have with local suppliers and refugee workers (with or without the right to work).

CONNECTING THE DOTS – PATHWAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Thus far, this report has covered a number of specific action items companies can take to build their understanding of the risks faced by refugees, as well as suggested entry points for developing refugee-inclusive due diligence systems. These action items set the stage for companies to take more direct action in their responsible sourcing to improve livelihoods for refugees and reduce forced and child labor risk, through two interconnected pathways: creating employment opportunities through direct engagement with hiring efforts, and advocating for refugees' right to work. These two pathways are described in more depth below.

Companies that promote refugees' right to work and the direct hiring of refugees in key sourcing locations can amplify those efforts through a targeted shift in procurement and purchasing practices. Companies can source goods and services from refugee-owned, refugee-run, or refugee employing businesses and can encourage their suppliers to do so as well. These efforts are part of a comprehensive strategy to address the risk of exploitation of refugees in supply chains, by addressing underlying poverty and associated labor vulnerability. Examples and recommendations for procurement and targeted purchasing are discussed in Annex 4 of this report.

Examples and Discussion of Responsible Sourcing Engagement

The following case studies show how companies have engaged in direct hiring and promoting the right to work to advance livelihood opportunities for refugees in supply chains and reduce forced labor risk. Direct hiring in safe, fair, and legal employment can bring opportunity for refugees and, by providing a safe workplace, contribute to reducing forced labor vulnerability. Where refugees do not have the right to work, companies can engage in advocacy through industry coalitions and partnerships to encourage governments to grant refugees this right. Right to work environments can further be enhanced through job- and skills training programs, job matching, and other types of support to help refugees enter the formal labor market.

Pathway 1: Creating Employment Opportunities Through Direct Engagement with Hiring Efforts

The circumstances that refugees often find themselves in can lead to situations of vulnerability. Lack of employment can exacerbate this vulnerability, and the need for generating livelihoods can sometimes result in people taking work that ends up being exploitative and/or is different from what was originally promised. When both a menace or threat of penalty and involuntariness are present, exploitive conditions may become instances of forced labor. Where adults are not able to work or to find work, children might work in the informal sector to support their families.

Suppliers may hesitate to employ refugees, in part out of a concern to avoid potential risk of noncompliance with the due diligence requirements of their multinational buyers. But ignoring refugee vulnerabilities or simply blocking refugees from employment at top tiers will only push risk deeper into

the supply chain. Standards, protocols and processes for ethical hiring should be a part of any supplier due diligence program. Where such standards and systems are in place, refugees with the legal right to work can be hired safely and effectively alongside country nationals and other migrants.

Multinational companies can contribute to improving livelihoods among refugees through direct engagement and hiring efforts with their suppliers. For example, following the granting in 2016 of the legal right to work in Turkey for foreigners under temporary protection (see more below in Pathway 2: Advocating for Refugees' Right to Work), H&M directly engaged with its suppliers to encourage them to hire refugees. H&M also partnered with the UNHCR to offer training for suppliers on the work permit application process, since employers (rather than refugees) are responsible for submitting permit applications. By prioritizing the issue with its suppliers and offering additional training and capacity building, H&M was able to create incentives and a supporting environment for hiring refugees in a legal, safe, and ethical way.¹⁰¹ H&M began with 100 Syrian refugee employees in 2017 and now works with 30 suppliers employing roughly 400 Syrian refugees,¹⁰² primarily in tier 2 garment-producing facilities. By 2025, H&M has committed to working with 40 suppliers, to create jobs for at least 2,000 refugees in Turkey.¹⁰³

In settings where refugees can legally work, companies should consider promoting a refugee hiring program with key suppliers and industry bodies, including investment in recruitment and training for new workers, or apprenticeships and childcare support for suppliers who take part in this initiative. For more on Pathway 1, go to Recommendations and Resources for Hiring Efforts.

Pathway 2: Advocating for Refugees' Right to Work

In countries where refugees do not have the right to work or where the right to work is limited, responsible sourcing teams at multinational companies can and should advocate for refugees' right to work. As mentioned above, one of the most successful multi-stakeholder efforts to obtain the right to work of displaced people and refugees occurred in Turkey—the country with the highest number of refugees in the world and an important sourcing location for multinational companies. Approximately half of the refugee population is of working age.¹⁰⁴ Turkey is also one of the world's largest producers of garments and textiles, known for quality of production and benefiting from proximity to the European market. The sector accounts for about 10 percent of Turkey's GDP.¹⁰⁵

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and the Fair Labor Association (FLA) led advocacy efforts in Turkey for the right to work for Syrian refugees, which was granted in 2016. In 2014, the FLA began advocating for the right to work for Syrian refugees, engaging in dialogue with Turkey's Ministry of Labor and the offices of the Prime Minister and the President—an advocacy effort that ETI eventually joined.¹⁰⁶ The FLA was also advocating for changes to Turkey's Regulation on Temporary Protection, which limited Syrians' freedom of movement and employment in comparison with refugees.¹⁰⁷ In 2014, ETI also began working to better understand the situation facing refugees in garment sector supply chains and to develop best practices in collaboration with members, trade unions, and other Turkey-based stakeholders.¹⁰⁸ ETI's actions were motivated by their member brands' desire to respond to reported illegal employment and exploitation among refugees in supply chains in Turkey.¹⁰⁹

The ETI and the FLA’s advocacy efforts were successful when, in January 2016, the Turkish government passed the right to work under the Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection. This regulation granted Syrians with temporary protection status the right to apply for work permits.¹¹⁰ These efforts, and the resulting legislative change, created the context in which H&M was able to partner with the UNHCR to train suppliers on hiring Syrian refugees.

In collaboration with the FLA, the ETI convened a multi-stakeholder platform in Turkey and introduced the use of the UN Guiding Principles (UNGP) as a framework for considering responsible business action and helped facilitate multi-stakeholder efforts and government engagement to secure the right to work for Syrian refugees in Turkey. The Steering Committee of ETI’s Turkey platform included three Turkish employer associations representing Turkish suppliers, trade unions, local NGOs, and Turkish representatives of ETI-affiliated brands and retailers; together, this group represents almost 70 percent of the total export of the Turkish textile-apparel industry.¹¹¹ The platform also offers a space for stakeholders to engage in discussions around business and human rights issues facing Syrian refugees in Turkey and to explore action plans for addressing them.¹¹²

Despite this advancement, uptake of work permits has been slow. Between 2016 and 2019, only 132,497 work permits were issued to Syrian nationals.¹¹³ This has been attributed by stakeholders to the requirement that employers apply for the work permit on behalf of refugees. In some cases, right to work applications need to be made in the location where the refugee was first registered, which can be problematic in cases where a refugee has moved.

Other obstacles cited by stakeholders include a reluctance of some employers to hire Syrian refugees, and the preference of some refugees to work in the informal sector. To mitigate against these challenges, the FLA has produced materials to educate refugees about their rights,¹¹⁴ worked with brand affiliates to overcome specific obstacles to promote the hiring of Syrians, and continued to advocate for policy changes to improve the uptake of work permits in Turkey.

Companies’ efforts to work together and in partnership with other key stakeholders can create increased livelihood options for refugees. There are also many complexities involved in designing right to work programming that is fully responsive to refugees’ needs and reflective of refugee challenges and realities; these are discussed further in Recommendations and Resources for Advocating for the Right to Work.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR RESPONSIBLE SOURCING ENGAGEMENT

To ensure the relevance and success of any intervention, the responsible sourcing teams of multinational companies should work with credible local organizations in developing strategies and implementation plans. Additionally, the OECD and the UNHCR’s “10-point Action Plan for Employers in the Hiring of Refugees” referenced at the beginning of this section provides a useful high-level guide for direct action. This section outlines key recommendations and considerations for the two pathways described above and offers additional related resources companies can consult to take direct action. Recommendations for procurement and targeted purchasing to promote and support refugee job creation are discussed in Annex 4.



Photo: XXXX / UNHCR

Recommendations and Resources for Hiring Efforts

When undertaking efforts to promote the ethical employment of refugees in the supply chain, companies must send a clear signal to suppliers that there is demand from the buyer for these hiring practices. Responsible sourcing teams should communicate expectations around responsible hiring and safe, fair, and legal employment to their suppliers. Responsible sourcing teams should also be sure to understand any concerns or reluctance their suppliers might have around hiring refugees. Once those are addressed, companies can incentivize supplier engagement by their suppliers and support supplier hiring initiatives and the creation of an enabling environment for new workers (for example, through the provision of additional skills training or childcare facilities).

One of the most important things to consider when exploring hiring efforts is the legal status and context for refugees in the target sourcing country. Responsible sourcing teams must determine if refugees can legally work in the country and any other relevant parameters. Resources such as the International Labour Organization's NATLEX Database of National Labour, Social Security, and Related Human Rights Legislation can help companies in this essential step.

Once this is determined, responsible sourcing teams should assess what opportunities exist with their suppliers. For this step, collaboration with local organizations is key. Indeed, key informant interviews with private sector actors indicated that companies who wish to improve employment and

livelihood opportunities for refugees have been most successful when they work in partnership with local organizations. Working collaboratively with stakeholders and local partners can help companies:

- understand the role of national actors;
- understand how the local context may be shaping employment conditions, specifically for refugee populations;
- enhance an enabling environment for refugees to access formal employment, especially if there is a preference to not enter formal work in traditional sectors as is sometimes the case for a variety of reasons¹¹⁵ (for example by recognizing and acting on the need for job training, skill building or matchmaking).

Responsible sourcing teams can engage organizations that use a matchmaking approach to link employers with refugee jobseekers. [United Work](#), for example, promotes the employment of Syrian refugees in Turkey by acting as a broker between job-seeking Syrian refugees and prospective employers and providing complimentary support services such as interview coordination, work permit consultancy, and pre-employment trainings on social and work life adaptation. [Education for Employment \(EFE\)](#) is a youth education and employment network in the Middle East and North Africa that provides job training and matching for youth, including refugees. To date, EFE has connected over 100,000 youth to jobs across the region.

In addition to working with local stakeholders, when it comes to actually hiring refugees, companies should tap into existing responsible recruitment initiatives to ensure proper screening and management of labor agents that may be involved in facilitating

refugee hiring. There are many resources available to help companies ensure that all workers—including refugees—are recruited and hired responsibly, a key component of due diligence efforts to address forced labor vulnerability. A few examples include:

- [Help Wanted](#), an initiative developed by Verité and Humanity United which offers a primer on forced labor and debt bondage risk caused by labor recruitment in multinational company supply chains; and [The Fair Hiring Toolkit](#), which provides targeted tools for taking action for diverse stakeholders including brands and suppliers.
- [Tent's Guidebooks](#), which offer advice and best practices to help companies implement initiatives to integrate refugees, including guides for hiring refugees in different countries.
- [ResponsibleSourcingTool.org](#), a web-based resource sponsored by the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons and managed by Verité, which offers publicly available resources to support companies and other stakeholders in understanding and mapping geographic- and sector-specific risks of trafficking in persons in supply chains, and includes a suite of practical tools.
- [Toolbox to implement fair hiring in the agricultural sector](#), developed by AHIFORES and Verité under the Global Action to Improve the Hiring of Migrants (REFRAME) project implemented by the International Labour Organization and funded by the European union, offers documents to help companies ensure that labor contracts that protect workers' rights are in place in the agricultural sector. (In Spanish.)

Once hiring has taken place, companies must commit to auditing all levels of their supply chain and, as noted above, ensure that their tools include specific considerations for refugees. Any noncompliances identified in the supply chain must be addressed and directly remediated.

Preferential hiring programs for refugee employment can bring genuine opportunity. Evaluating how these initiatives sit within the social and political context of target sourcing countries—through engagement with local stakeholders—can ensure that they can be communicated and framed appropriately to host communities. Host populations often face their own economic challenges, such as limited employment

opportunities and challenges meeting their own basic needs. However, even in host countries where the economy is not at full employment, there are roles which refugee workers are more likely to take than native workers. It should be noted that failure to design initiatives that take these dynamics into account may aggravate tensions between refugees and locals, in turn contributing to the discrimination often experienced by refugees. Relatedly, companies should develop supplier management approaches that directly address any existing ethnic, religious, cultural, or economic tensions between refugees and host communities.



Photo: XXXX / UNHCR



Photo: F Armstrong Photography / Shutterstock.com

Recommendations and Resources for Advocating for the Right to Work

In addition to advocating for refugees' right to work, companies can also engage in public policy advocacy to encourage laws, regulations, and enforcement that effectively protect vulnerable workers, migrant workers, and that regulate labor recruiters at national and international levels. This work can be done independently, through representative business or employers' organizations, intergovernmental organizations like the agencies of the United Nations (UN), or multi-stakeholder initiatives and coalitions. The [Guide to Public Policy Advocacy](#) for brands, included in Verité and Humanity United's Fair Hiring Toolkit, presents tools to guide development of public policy advocacy in the human rights space.

When engaging in right to work advocacy, it is recommended that companies and their responsible sourcing teams engage with local organizations or industry associations with an on-the-ground presence that understand refugee needs and wants; this can help include refugee voices into the design of advocacy strategies. Through collaborating with local organizations, companies can better understand refugee's right to work context and determine if advocacy efforts are a relevant pathway to pursue. To learn about the field and context, companies can also consult [Tent's policy research reports](#).

In their advocacy work, companies can also reference the previously discussed policy landscape to encourage granting the right to work for refugees. In addition to these policy developments discussed above, in 2017, the ILO released a revised version of a 1944 recommendation: Recommendation No. 205 on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience. The recommendation is relevant in crisis and disaster situations (and is therefore often relevant

to, and even aimed at protection of refugees). It calls on governments to aid in the generation of employment and decent work opportunities for those affected. The Recommendation was released with a Resolution for countries to adopt and provides a framework for rolling out the program between 2018-2023.¹¹⁶

One of the key objectives of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework discussed above is to enhance refugee self-reliance.¹¹⁷ [The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative](#) (RSRI) was launched in 2018 by the [Women's Refugee Commission](#) (WRC) and [Refuge Point](#) to respond to refugees' desire to build independent lives in their new homes and in light of the lack of existing evidence as to what works in advancing this self-reliance.¹¹⁸ A multi-stakeholder initiative, RSRI focuses on promoting self-reliance and improved quality of life for refugees through programming, advocacy, and ongoing measurement to support the expansion of effective approaches. In addition to its work on the RSRI, WRC has made important research contributions and crafted policy recommendations and guidance for the field on expanding the scope of livelihoods work that recognizes refugee skills, experiences, and capacities.¹¹⁹

In addition to advocating for the right to work, companies should also engage in labor and human rights advocacy to ensure refugees have as many pathways to safe and fair livelihood opportunities as possible, and should be guided by an overall agenda of advancing self-reliance for refugees.

Engaging with and supporting initiatives that promote self-reliance among refugee populations can lead to more successful refugee enterprises (from which companies can procure goods and services) and have the longer-term effect of reducing forced and child labor vulnerability.



Conclusion



While refugees are often exploited alongside other types of migrants and vulnerable groups in global supply chains, they face increased or unique risks related to their precarious situations that result in vulnerability to forced labor, trafficking in persons, and child labor.

Refugee children may not be allowed to enroll in or access schooling and often engage in informal labor to support their families' survival. Forced labor, trafficking in persons, and child labor among refugees are not limited to particular sectors, though they may be more common in sectors with significant informal workstreams. These abuses have been documented in the supply chains of a range of sectors and in different geographies. Though refugee vulnerability is complex and multi-layered, improving livelihood opportunities can help reduce forced and child labor risk.

There are a wide range of approaches available to the business community to support refugee populations worldwide, and a number of ways in which the responsible sourcing teams at multinational companies can work towards these goals. Proactively and responsibly generating safe, fair, and legal employment opportunities for refugees in supply chains in source countries can help create livelihood opportunities and should be part of an overall strategy

to combat forced and child labor vulnerability. Where refugees do not have the right to work, engaging in advocacy to give refugees this vital right can also be integrated into strategies for combating forced and child labor. By including refugee-owned, -run, and -employing businesses in their procurement processes, companies can also contribute to thriving local economies and successful entrepreneurial endeavors, further bolstering refugee livelihoods. In all these actions, companies can be even more effective by coordinating and working through industry associations and other multi-stakeholder groups.

The pathways described in this report lay out why and how responsible sourcing teams at multinational companies can and should integrate refugee vulnerability into their overarching strategies to combat forced and child labor. Approaches must be highly tailored to local environments in order to avoid potential harm and to be responsible, responsive, and successful. Alongside direct interventions, companies should also explore indirect engagement to support refugees, outside their specific supply chains. Acting as businesses and socially responsible corporate citizens, there are many ways in which companies can support the programming of local organizations to directly address vulnerabilities and needs of refugees and to promote livelihoods and resilience. Such engagement brings with it opportunities to promote and collaborate with local businesses and civil society and to contribute toward healthier and more prosperous local economies in which basic human rights and dignity are respected.



Annexes

Photo: Joseph Sohm / Shutterstock.com

Annex 1:

Data Table Methodology

Verité utilized publicly available 2019 data from the International Trade Centre (ITC) UNCTAD/WTO's Trade Map and the United Nations Total International Migrant Stock 2019 dataset to populate the data tables presented in this report. ITC Trade Map provides export and import data on 5,300 products of the Harmonized System (a global product classification system) for 220 countries. Within the Harmonized System, there is not one single commodity code for the "agriculture" and "apparel" sectors. In order to present a rough estimate of the top agriculture and apparel exporting countries, Verité downloaded the export trade data for all countries for specific key commodities (including raw material commodities) that comprise those two sectors as follows:

For Agriculture:

- Product: 02 Meat and edible meat offal
- Product: 03 Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates
- Product: 07 Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers
- Product: 08 Edible fruit and nuts, peel of citrus fruit or melons
- Product: 09 Coffee, tea, maté and spices
- Product: 10 Cereals
- Product: 12 Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits, miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit, industrial or medicinal
- Product: 1701 Cane or beet sugar and chemically pure sucrose, in solid form
- Product: 1801 Cocoa beans, whole or broken, raw or roasted
- Product: 2401 Unmanufactured tobacco, tobacco refuse

For Garment and Apparel:

- Product: 50 Silk
- Product: 51 Wool, fine or coarse animal hair, horsehair yarn and woven fabric
- Product: 52 Cotton
- Product: 54 Man-made filaments, strip and the like of man-made textile materials
- Product: 60 Knitted or crocheted fabrics
- Product: 61 Articles of apparel and clothing accessories, knitted or crocheted
- Product: 62 Articles of apparel and clothing accessories, not knitted or crocheted
- Product: 64 Footwear, gaiters and the like, parts of such articles

For each sector, the export data for each commodity code was compiled into a single spreadsheet. Verité then made one comprehensive list of all the countries included on any of the commodity code-specific lists for each respective sector. The resulting comprehensive list of countries was pasted onto a tab with column headings corresponding to each Commodity Code. Verité wrote a formula for each column that read the country from the

comprehensive list and pulled the 2019 Export Total that corresponds to that country for the given Commodity Code in the column header. This compiled all 2019 export data across the various Commodity Codes into one table. Verité added together the totals from each column, providing one summary export figure per country. These were then sorted based on their cumulative total from highest to lowest to produce a list from which the 20 countries with the largest cumulative export total was drawn.

The list of countries with the 25 largest estimated refugee stock population totals in 2019 was determined using the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees “Refugee Data Finder.” Verité downloaded query data for the total population of refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad for all countries. The two different populations were added together to produce a sum for each country, and that list was then sorted from largest to smallest to produce a list from which the 25 countries with the largest estimated refugee populations was drawn.

Annex 2:

Key Informants

Note that some informants requested anonymity. Only those that agreed to be named are listed below.

- Olgun Aydin, Consultant on Refugee Integration
- Dale Buscher, Women's Refugee Commission
- Alpay Celikel, Fair Labor Association
- Heidi Christ, UNHCR/MADE51
- Christine Gent, World Fair Trade Organization/MADE51
- Mauro Gonzalez, PMI
- Hasret Güneş, United Work
- Jennifer P. Holt, Building Markets
- Ghadeer Khuffash, Enterprise for Employment-Jordan (EFE-Jordan)
- Anna Kletsidou, PMI
- Emre Eren Korkmaz, University of Oxford
- Kellie Leeson, Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative
- Ana Leite, PMI
- Peter McAllister, Ethical Trading Initiative
- Carolyn Makinson, Vitol Foundation Advisory Committee
- Ana Martiningui, Education for Employment-Europe (EFE-Europe)
- Vaishali Misra, IKEA
- Thuy Nguyen, Patagonia

Annex 3:

Refugees in the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report 2019

Verité conducted an in-depth review of the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (2019) and tracked all mentions of trafficking in persons and forced labor among refugees, crisis and other migrants, and asylum seekers in order to articulate a high level description of the intersection of refugees and trafficking-in-persons risk. According to Verité's review, refugees were mentioned in relation to trafficking in persons in 29 countries; crisis or other migrants were mentioned in relation to trafficking in persons in 18 countries; internally displaced persons were mentioned in relation to trafficking in persons in three countries; and asylum seekers were mentioned in relation to trafficking in persons in three countries.

While not authoritative, the [Trafficking in Persons Report \(2019\)](#) offers a comprehensive assessment of trafficking risk in 187 countries around the world and therefore provides a useful and thorough, although not definitive, picture of trafficking in persons risk among the world's refugee populations. The Trafficking in Persons Report (2019) notes refugees' vulnerability to trafficking in persons (especially forced labor and sex trafficking) in numerous countries around the world:

- Trafficking in persons (including trafficking-in-persons risk) was documented among refugees in the following countries: Angola, Aruba, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Pakistan, Rwanda, Serbia, Somalia, South Sudan, Spain, Sudan, Turkey, Uganda, The United States of America, and Zambia.
- Trafficking in persons (including trafficking-in-persons risk) among crisis and other migrants was documented in the following countries: Algeria, Angola, Aruba, Bangladesh, Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Iran, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Sudan, Thailand, The United States of America, and Yemen.
- Trafficking in persons (including trafficking-in-persons risk) among internally displaced persons was documented in Colombia, Ethiopia, and Sudan, and trafficking in persons (including trafficking-in-persons risk) among asylum seekers was documented in Kenya, Malaysia, and Sudan.

According to Verité's review of the Trafficking in Persons Report (2019), trafficking-in-persons risk among refugees was documented in at least 16 different sectors. Of these 16 sectors connected to trafficking-in-persons risk among refugees, seven were noted in 10 or more countries: agriculture (25/29 countries), construction (17/29 countries), domestic work (16/29 countries), the service industry (16/29 countries), trafficking for commercial

sexual exploitation (15/29 countries), begging (12/29 countries), and manufacturing (10/29 countries). Analysis of the data in the *Trafficking in Persons Report (2019)* therefore suggests that some of the most common, although certainly not only, sectors that refugees are trafficked into or experience forced labor in include agriculture, construction (including brickmaking and logging), domestic work, the service industry (including restaurants, salons, janitorial work, and entertainment), prostitution or trafficking in persons for commercial sexual exploitation, begging, and manufacturing (including textile and electronics production).

The *Trafficking in Persons Report (2019)* also suggests that while refugees are often exploited alongside other types of migrants and vulnerable groups, they may face increased or unique risks related to their particularly precarious situations and the process of seeking refuge itself. Whereas migrant workers may be recruited into situations that ultimately become labor trafficking or in which they experience forced labor, refugees' might encounter vulnerability upon arriving in a host country in which they are seeking refuge (as documented in Germany) or as they move through a country en route to a final destination (as documented in Serbia and Croatia). Trafficking in persons for commercial sexual exploitation, child trafficking, forced labor, and debt bondage have all been documented among refugee populations.¹²⁰

Individuals may be recruited from refugee camps into trafficking in persons for commercial sexual exploitation or labor exploitation (as documented, for example, among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and among Congolese refugees in Rwanda) or upon their arrival in a host country (as documented among North Korean refugees in China) and are particularly vulnerable due to economic precarity.¹²¹ In other instances, traffickers and employers may use a range of exploitative tactics to compel refugees to work, including debt bondage or debt related coercion, threats of deportation, and restrictions of movement.¹²² The *Trafficking in Persons Report (2019)* notes that refugee children are particularly vulnerable to forced labor and other forms of exploitation, as documented among Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.¹²³ As aforementioned, refugees may also become vulnerable to trafficking in persons and exploitation while transiting through countries or if they become stranded in countries (as documented among Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees in Serbia and Croatia).¹²⁴ In other instances, traffickers may use the promise of refugee status to entice vulnerable populations to emigrate, and upon arrival in a host country compel individuals to engage in sex work with threats of denunciation to authorities and physical abuse (as documented, for example among Rwandan women in Zambia).¹²⁵ Finally, those who traffic refugees may be part of criminal groups (as documented, for example, in Mexico and Iran), and/or may coerce refugees and migrants into criminal and illicit behavior (as documented, for example, in Germany and Lebanon).¹²⁶

Annex 4:

Procurement and Targeted Purchasing

In addition to direct hiring and right to work advocacy efforts, companies can use their procurement and purchasing practices to contribute to reducing forced and child labor vulnerability by sourcing goods and services from refugee-owned small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and other local business that employ refugees. Companies can also harness their own purchasing power by encouraging suppliers to source products made by refugees for use within their operations and expanding procurement to refugee-owned businesses. In this way, companies can use their supply chains to help refugee-owned businesses and businesses that employ refugees succeed. When these businesses succeed, livelihoods are bolstered, which can greatly contribute to a reduction in poverty and associated labor vulnerability.

Examples and Discussion of Responsible Sourcing Engagement

Many organizations and programs exist that can help companies and their global suppliers identify refugee-owned or -run enterprises that can bid for their procurement needs and projects. For example, the nonprofit organization Building Markets connects local SMEs, including those owned or employing refugees, with new buyers in local, regional, and international markets. Globally, Building Markets has assisted SMEs in winning 17,779 contracts worth USD 1.35 billion. Approximately 40% of contracts have been made to female-owned or -managed enterprises.¹²⁷ The organization has worked with a range of multinational corporations, including Heineken and The Coca-Cola Company.

The Building Markets model focuses on helping buyers diversify and expand their vendor pools by boosting the visibility and capacity of SMEs. The organization does this by verifying local businesses through in-depth surveys, providing training and mentorship, and increasing market and capital connections through targeted tender distribution, matchmaking, and events. Building Markets' research suggests that there are many opportunities for companies to engage refugee-owned SMEs in their supply chains. For example, in partnership with the Syrian Economic Forum, Building Markets carried out a market analysis and found that over 6,000 Syrian-owned businesses had been created in Turkey since 2011, and of those SMEs that were in their sample, they were creating an average of nine jobs.¹²⁸ Since 2018, Building Markets' Turkey team has assisted refugee-owned and employing SMEs in winning over USD 11 million in new contracts, which has created 2,650 full-time equivalent jobs.

In another example, the [IKEA Social Entrepreneurship Initiative](#) integrates social enterprises into its core business through building inclusive supply chains, with a focus on supporting women and other vulnerable groups across the world.¹²⁹ The initiative has been working in Jordan for the last four years, in partnership with the Jordan River Foundation (JRF), a local nonprofit focused on employment generation. Together, IKEA and JRF train and employ

Jordanian and Syrian refugee women to produce products for IKEA retail stores.¹³⁰ Similarly, the UNHCR's global brand and initiative [MADE51](#) promotes refugee inclusion in the global artisanal value chain. It partners with social enterprises operating in refugee host countries and combines their businesses' capabilities with the skills of local refugee artisans to develop and export artisanal crafts that are marketed under the MADE51 brand. This results in market-ready products that enable refugees to earn a fair wage and inspires support from consumers for refugees across the world. MADE51 uses a collaborative business model, incorporating pro-bono support from strategic partners on product design, technology, branding, and marketing. Strategic partners include Bain and Company, Herbert Smith Freehills, Brand Opus, and the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO).¹³¹

Recommendations and Resources for Procurement and Targeted Purchasing

Just as it is important to connect and collaborate with local organizations when pursuing direct engagement through hiring and advocacy work, it is important to work with local organizations when seeking to include refugee enterprises and refugee-owned SMEs in procurement of goods and services. Given the complexity of refugee situations, efforts by companies to collaborate with a range of relevant stakeholders, as well as interventions with a broad reach, are critical toward meeting the needs of the moment and can strengthen the "whole of society" approach recommended in the Global Compact on Refugees.

Responsible sourcing teams can review localized procurement practices and proactively include refugee businesses within tenders for products or services (examples of services could include cleaning, catering, or childcare). They can also include social or community impact criteria in their procurement tendering procedures or develop special purchasing schemes for specific products from refugee enterprises or local initiatives. Companies can engage organizations and programs that help identify refugee-owned or -run enterprises who can tender and bid for companies' and suppliers' procurement needs and projects. Building Markets, for example, offers [a searchable database of businesses](#) from a wide range of sectors including, among others, manufacturing, accommodation and food service, and information and communication. Once an enterprise has been identified and contracted with, it is important to clearly communicate expectations around the prohibition of human trafficking, forced labor, and child labor in all contracts and vendor agreements. Companies should have in place a Code of Conduct that explicitly prohibits human trafficking, sets out protections for workers, and establishes basic performance expectations for vendors, subcontractors, suppliers, and labor recruiters.

Such procurement efforts can serve to create more decent work opportunities for refugees and can also help overcome restrictions for refugees to practice higher-skilled professions held earlier in their home countries. Refugees often encounter challenges in credentialing

and verification of qualifications for higher-skilled professions in the host country. Building demand and opportunities for refugee enterprises can help address this, as an enterprise may be able to obtain necessary permits and licenses once demand is present.

Finally, engaging with and supporting initiatives that promote self-reliance among refugee populations can lead to more successful refugee enterprises (from which companies can procure goods and services) and have the longer-term effect of reducing forced and child labor vulnerability. The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) was launched in 2018 by the [Women's Refugee Commission](#) (WRC) and [Refuge Point](#) to respond to refugees' desire to build independent lives in their new homes and in light of the lack of existing evidence as to what works in advancing this self-reliance.¹³² A multi-stakeholder initiative, RSRI focuses on promoting self-reliance and improved quality of life for refugees through programming, advocacy, and ongoing measurement to support the expansion of effective approaches. In addition to its work on the RSRI, WRC has made important research contributions and crafted policy recommendations and guidance for the field on expanding the scope of livelihoods work that recognizes refugee skills, experiences, and capacities.¹³³

Endnotes

- 1 There are numerous terms that can be used to describe a person who is leaving or who has left their home or country of origin; this report focuses on refugees and asylum seekers. According to the UNHCR, “A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country due to persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal, and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.” See “What is a Refugee?” USA for UNHCR. www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/.
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- 24 This map presents the 20 countries with the highest total value of exports in 2019 of the following commodities: Articles of apparel and clothing accessories, knitted or crocheted; Articles of apparel and clothing accessories, not knitted or crocheted; Cotton; Footwear, gaiters and the like, parts of such articles; Knitted or crocheted fabrics; Man-made filaments, strip and the like of man-made textile materials; Silk; Wool, fine or coarse animal hair, horsehair yarn and woven fabric. The total values were calculated from the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO's Trade Map data: <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>. See Annex 1 for further notes on methodology.
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