

# WOMEN LEADING FOR LIVELIHOODS



Worlds  
of Women  
Coming  
Together



# Advancing the economic independence of displaced women and girls

**P**EOPLE WHO FLEE conflict and persecution might be fortunate enough to find security and shelter in a refugee camp. But once they have refuge, what next? Displacement can last years, even decades. Protracted refugee situations are on the increase as conflicts become more complex and difficult to resolve. Despite this, returning home remains the goal for many. Ensuring that those wrapped up in these conflicts have the opportunity to develop the needed skills to be able to earn an income and support their families is crucial. Refugees need to be equipped to build a lasting future whether they return home to help rebuild

their communities, integrate their families locally or are resettled to a third country.

## Promoting lasting livelihoods is a challenge when short-term survival is paramount

How are people to live while waiting for a lasting solution? Those with an education, skills training, or community networks will do better. But women as a group are limited in their livelihoods opportunities. And women and girls generally

constitute 60 to 70% of the refugee population. Women often have less education and formal training. They may not be encouraged to work outside the home. When they do, it is generally in areas such as subsistence agriculture and informal employment. So women find themselves with even fewer livelihoods resources when they are forced to flee their communities. Realizing the potential of these refugee women to provide stability within their families as well as act as catalyst for change in their own country on return is crucial.

## Women's livelihoods are about subsistence - and empowerment

When they are impoverished and reliant on assistance from aid agencies for their daily needs, refugee women are unable to live in a dignified manner. Instead, they struggle every day to cover basic needs for themselves and their families. They sometimes have to resort to survival sex for food, for money, to clothe their children. Given the opportunity – education, skills training, access to credit schemes - these women will build businesses, support their families and provide the foundation for thriving communities.

By empowering women to address their economic needs, opportunities for sustainable life situations are enhanced — but it takes support and resources to accomplish this.



UNHCR/C. SATTLEBERG/AGO-1 1994

## Worlds of women coming together

**Women Leading for Livelihoods (WLL)** is an initiative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) aimed at promoting the economic independence and empowerment of refugee women and girls around the world. To WLL women are not victims or passive recipients of aid but – when given the proper resources – are capable of changing their lives and the lives of their children, families and communities.

Refugee women face a series of barriers to work; legal restrictions, physical and psychological trauma, lack of financial resources, child care issues, the wrong skills set for the environment and much more. WLL aims to try and break

down these barriers through the funding of a full range of programs aimed at empowering refugee women.

Livelihoods offer both short term protection and longer term prospects and both are built into WLL.

Projects cover a range of activities such as computer literacy, language and vocational training, innovative farming and market access, micro-credit, small business centres and child care.



*"Unless they have hope, people can only fall back on extremism. Women are the backbone of families in the Middle East. If their lives can be improved, their families and children will gain more stability and hope in the process."*

Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein of Jordan  
Funder of three WLL projects in Georgia, Morocco and Serbia

POOL PHOTO BY IAN JONES



UNHCR/L. CHALASANI/CS/LKA-2002

# HOW WE WORK

## SERBIA



UNHCR/V. VALJAREVIC/SRB-2008

**1** In Serbia, internally displaced Roma form a highly vulnerable minority group of approximately 200,000 people. To improve the livelihoods and social integration of Roma women and adolescents, UNHCR and MicroFins, a local NGO, opened a bakery in Belgrade. The bakery is both a business and a vocational training centre where Roma women acquire baking and business management skills.

## GEORGIA



UNHCR/NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL/GE0-2008

**2** The Omalo sewing workshop is entirely managed and staffed by refugee women. A joint initiative of UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council, it produces bed linen, mattresses, blankets, prayer carpets, prayer gowns and dresses, all of which are in high demand in the area.

## BRAZIL



UNHCR/ACNUR BRAZIL/BRA-2006

**5** Resettlement holds the promise of a new beginning for all refugees, but also acute risks particularly for women. In partnership with UNHCR, ArteSol, a Brazilian NGO, is providing employment opportunities to refugee women through vocational training and small grants for entrepreneurs, as well as incentives for local businesses.

## KENYA



UNHCR/L. PEDERSEN/KE-N-2007

**4** Most of the young people in the Dadaab refugee camps have never left the camps due to restrictions on freedom of movement and the continuing conflict in their home country of Somalia. UNHCR and Care International work together to provide these youths, especially young girls, with the skills to become self-reliant and better integrated.

## MOROCCO



UNHCR/FONDATION ORIENT OCCIDENT/MAR-2008

**3** Many of the refugees in Morocco are unaccompanied minors and single mothers who have been victims of sexual violence. UNHCR and the Fondation Orient-Occident's Community Centre has a library and internet café and offers services tailor-made for refugee women and children.

WLL draws its resources from individuals and organizations committed to improving the livelihoods of women and girls. It puts the funds it receives to work in projects wherever UNHCR has a mandate to protect refugees and the internally displaced. We implement our activities in partnership with trusted local and international non-governmental organizations. To ensure that donations go straight to the implementation of projects, UNHCR covers staff costs for WLL. Advocacy and reporting on WLL projects receive 10% of donations.

WLL's project criteria ensure that refugee women are involved in identifying their competencies and needs, and that they are involved throughout the planning and implementation of all projects. Drawing also on the experience and advice of Diaspora women, WLL invites participation from these communities in strategic planning and field visits. Cultural sensitivity and sustainability of projects are key to our approach.

## Being a partner

Our partners are individuals and organizations who share our goal of reaching out to women refugees, ensuring the respect of their human rights, and helping them realize their potential. An updated list of projects for which funding is sought is available at the WLL website. Project costs range from about US\$20,000 to US\$500,000.

Our approach is based on involving our partners as closely as possible in the development of WLL projects, and on

providing them with a comprehensive understanding of our impact on the ground. We do this by implementing a rigorous monitoring, evaluation and reporting process in line with UNHCR's high quality standards. We invite donors to visit refugee camps in different regions.

Such visits are an opportunity for partners to meet the women and girls who will benefit from their philanthropy, and to learn more about their situation and how we can work together to improve it. In addition, WLL seeks partnerships with highly connected individuals who commit to leveraging their expertise and peer contacts. Partners meet under the leadership of Erika Feller, who is Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and one of the two highest-ranking women at UNHCR.

If you are interested in learning more about how you or your organization can become involved in the WLL initiative we would be honored to speak with you.



UNHCR / G. T. TINDE • 2008

*"Women and girl refugees have survived the worst, they want to move on with their lives and education and creating businesses are ways to do that."*

Liv Arnesen  
*First woman solo and unsupported to the South Pole*  
*Goodwill Ambassador for the Norwegian Refugee Council*

Supporter of WLL



UNHCR / T. BOLLSTAD / CS / CIS • 1996

Training can lead to jobs when women return home — work in a bakery in Chechnya.

A displaced Colombian woman.



UNHCR / B. HEGGER / COL • 2003



PUBLISHED BY:

UNHCR  
 Division of Operational Services  
 Division of International Protection Services  
 Division of External Relations  
 P.O. Box 2500  
 1211 Geneva 2  
 Switzerland

[www.unhcr.org/wll](http://www.unhcr.org/wll)

For information and inquiries, please contact:

Gry Tina Tinde  
*Special Advisor*  
 Women Leading for Livelihoods  
 Division of External Relations  
[tinde@unhcr.org](mailto:tinde@unhcr.org)  
 Tel: +41 22 739 8024

Justine Brun  
*Project Officer*  
 Women Leading for Livelihoods  
 Division of Operational Services  
[brun@unhcr.org](mailto:brun@unhcr.org)  
 Tel: +41 22 739 8831

Back cover:

**A Somali refugee in Dadaab.**  
 UNHCR / B. PRESS / CS / KEN • 2002

UNHCR / DER • WLL / ENG 1  
 OCTOBER 2008

