

# IN THE SHADOW OF HUNGER

The Power of Self-Reliance to Protect Children and Restore Hope

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Background

In 2026, World Vision in partnership with the World Food Programme conducted a study to better understand the challenges forcibly displaced children and households face as well as their access to opportunities for building self-reliance.

This report examines the intersecting effects of reductions in humanitarian assistance and food insecurity on refugees, forcibly displaced households, host communities, and other vulnerable groups with a particular focus on children's wellbeing. The research explores links between food insecurity and a range of outcomes, including education and school attendance, child labour, child marriage, poor mental health, and family separation. It adopts a self-reliance lens to assess how far households can meet their basic needs independently and sustainably, and how this shapes children's exposure to protection risks.

The study draws on evidence from eight hunger hotspots globally—Bangladesh, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, DRC, Myanmar, South Sudan, and

### SELF-RELIANCE:

The social and economic ability of an individual, a household, or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity.<sup>1</sup>

1. UNHCR. (2005). Handbook for Self-Reliance. UNHCR.

Uganda, covering both forcibly displaced populations and host communities to provide a broader picture of vulnerability and resilience.

The report investigates three core questions: how aid cuts influence food security and child wellbeing; to what extent households are self-reliant and how that shapes outcomes for children; and which policy, community, and household factors either enable or hinder self-reliance in hunger-affected settings.

The findings show that food insecurity and aid cuts significantly increase the risk of harmful outcomes for children, including leaving school, begging, child labour, child marriage, poor mental health, and other forms of vulnerability. At the same time, greater self-reliance is consistently associated with better outcomes across nearly all indicators: children in more self-reliant households are markedly less likely to beg, leave school to work, experience child marriage, be separated from their families, take on excessive domestic responsibilities, or miss school altogether. Overall, the report concludes that while humanitarian assistance remains essential for immediate survival, it should be complemented by stronger investments in self-reliance and systemic policy reforms that remove barriers, expand opportunity, and better protect displaced children and their communities over the long term.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations, drawn from the study findings and study participants' direct requests, outline specific actions that key stakeholders can take to enhance self-reliance, while addressing the most acute needs related to food insecurity and ultimately improving child wellbeing outcomes.

## Host Governments

**Prioritise the establishment of an inclusive policy environment and strong implementation measures to enable self-reliance among refugees, IDPs, host communities, and other vulnerable households.**

- Promote inclusive policy environments that enable refugees to meaningfully participate in host countries, including enabling decent work and legal documentation, freedom of movement, and the right to education.
- Identify and address systemic, administrative, and practical barriers that diminish the impact of inclusive policies and limit participation of forcibly displaced people in the social and economic life of the host community. This includes access to credit and financial services, language-related challenges, documentation barriers, indirect costs to access education, mobility-related infrastructure and services, recognition of credentials, access to social protection schemes, inclusion in national statistics, training for civil servants and law enforcement actors, and awareness raising initiatives, among others.



Halima preparing beans for Sudanese refugee children in World Vision's school feeding program in Chad.

## QUOTE

“For me, a self-reliant household is one that doesn't depend on others or on support to live . . . It is difficult to talk about completely self-reliant households. The majority rely on food aid. Some households are partially self-reliant if they have small livestock, a vegetable garden, or a member with an income generating activity . . . I believe the primary resource needed is work that liberates people, meaning access to sustainable income generative activities.”

- Health Centre Manager, Chad

- Strengthen partnerships with organisations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people and relevant actors, including national statistical authorities, the private sector, development actors, local stakeholders, and faith communities, to expand economic opportunities for refugees, IDPs, host communities, and other vulnerable groups, foster participation, promote inclusivity, and strengthen social cohesion.
- Continue pledging and advancing the implementation of child-centred policy commitments through the GCR in preparation for the 2027 Global Refugee Forum.

## Donors and the International Community

**Foster donor coordination and incentivise integrated programming that addresses urgent needs and enhances self-reliance.**

- Allocate sufficient quality funding for refugee responses and humanitarian action, enabling governments and humanitarian actors to maintain crucial life-saving support for vulnerable households and reduce risks of adverse impacts of funding cuts on children.
- Support the integration of food assistance programming with interventions aimed at enabling sustained and dignified work, including building capacities, knowledge and skills, financial inclusion, access to information, and addressing overarching barriers to meaningful work through context-sensitive approaches.
- Foster donor coordination to harmonise strategies, reduce gaps in service provision, and support meaningful investment in self-reliance, including through the GCR framework.
- Create financial and diplomatic incentives for host governments and partners to prioritize self-reliance, inclusive policies, and integration of refugees and stateless people in national systems.

## UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes

**Facilitate and provide technical leadership to sustainably integrate self-reliance at both the strategic and programmatic levels across the HDP nexus.**

- Engage diverse stakeholders across the HDP nexus to foster integrated programming that includes short-term emergency food and cash assistance while building self-reliance.
- Facilitate access to registration and documentation for refugees in coordination with host governments and relevant partners.
- Strengthen technical capacity for building self-reliance, including providing the necessary monitoring and implementation frameworks, tools, best practices, research, and technical guidance.
- Advocate with host governments for reforms to legal frameworks to ensure the rights of



A Venezuelan family crossing the border into Colombia.



A woman harvesting her olive grove in the West Bank.

forcibly displaced people are protected. In cases where refugees are currently not permitted to work by law, advocate for policy reforms in the short-term, such as the development of alternative permit types, to allow refugees to work and access other opportunities.

## NGOs and Civil Society

**Deliver integrated programming across the HDP nexus, advocate for policy change, and enable participation of forcibly displaced people.**

- Adopt an integrated approach to programming across the HDP nexus, which addresses both short-term and long-term needs. This involves maintaining food and cash assistance to meet urgent life-saving needs, while strengthening sustainable livelihoods (e.g. skill development, job placements, linkages to markets, access to tools and materials, start-up funds, etc.), financial inclusion, and social cohesion to reduce dependence on external assistance and support refugees, IDPs, host communities, and other vulnerable groups in achieving self-reliance.
- Advocate with host governments and donors to protect the rights of forcibly displaced people, particularly around access to work, documentation, and freedom of movement, and invest in partnering with the private sector and financial institutions to promote financial and digital inclusion.
- Act as enablers, facilitators, and conveners to support the participation of forcibly displaced people in civil society initiatives at the local, national, regional, and global levels.



Babodmas and his wife Esther tending to their backyard garden in Uganda.

## QUOTE

“In some cases, we get desperate because we don’t have food. Sometimes our parents worry that we might get sick from not eating, or sometimes we only eat once a day, and they have to look for work, and if they don’t find it, they get even more desperate. Sometimes the community helps us, but only when they can, and when they can’t in some cases we get even more desperate because they can’t help the other person since they themselves don’t have money.”

- Child, Colombia

## Private Sector

**Enable the economic inclusion of forcibly displaced workers and support the translation of self-reliance interventions into practice in labour markets.**

- Support the creation of decent employment opportunities for forcibly displaced and host communities and establish training and other programs in collaboration with UN agencies, governments, and civil society to support skills development and access to available opportunities.
- Ensure hiring processes include fair assessments of refugees’ qualifications given the challenges that displacement generates and develop alternative verification processes in cases where documentation is missing. This could include pre-set agreements with UN agencies and host governments regarding the validity of unfamiliar credentials and alternative forms of documentation for refugees.
- Invest in financial inclusion, including expanding access to financial services such as credit and banking and establishing alternative documentation requirements as needed.

# SELF-RELIANCE PROTECTS CHILDREN AND RESTORES HOPE

## Conclusion

Self-reliance offers a pathway to a dignified future, protects children from harm, and upholds fundamental rights to employment, education, freedom of movement, and access to services. In concrete terms, it means being able to pursue economic opportunities, independently secure basic needs, and contribute to the economic, social, and cultural landscape of the host community. The findings of this study affirm that strengthening households' resilience and

independence through self-reliance improves the wellbeing of children and households, especially among forcibly displaced people, while protecting against negative outcomes. Addressing urgent humanitarian needs, protecting the rights of forcibly displaced people and host communities, and promoting self-reliance will require diverse stakeholders to act in partnership to address challenges and enable the conditions for sustainable progress.



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