

# Shifting Sands: Risk and Resilience among Refugee Youth in Cairo

## REPORT FOR COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTORS

### Who Are We?

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) is a research and advocacy organization based in New York, United States. Our goal is to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and young people. We advocate for changes in laws, policies and programs that affect people affected by conflict or crisis.

### Why Did We Come to Cairo?

The WRC did research on urban livelihoods and refugees in 2011. One of the big gaps we identified in that research was youth needs and how to address this. We received funding to look specifically at refugee youth in urban settings. We came to Cairo to assess needs for youth related to their education and livelihood opportunities. We used the research to write a report about the situation in Cairo. The research will also help us write global guidance on how to design and implement effective refugee youth livelihood programming in urban settings.

### What Did We Do during Our Visit?



Dale Buscher of the Women's Refugee Commission with refugee psychosocial workers for PSTIC who worked as research assistants and translators for the assessment. The young men are Iraqi refugees.

We met with refugees from the Sudanese, South Sudanese, Iraqi, Somali, Eritrean and Oromo communities. We spoke mostly with the youth to hear about their experiences and their ideas for solutions. We met with 22 people in one-on-one interviews (14 female, 9 male). We conducted nine focus group discussions of 6-8 persons each. We had separate groups for youth, parents, community-based organization (CBO) leaders and psychosocial workers (23 females, 30 males). The total number of refugees we spoke to was 88 (38 females and 50 male). We also conducted interviews with representatives of 19 organizations that provide livelihood or social services for displaced youth or that advocate on their behalf.

### The Context

Egypt has signed the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. It has also signed the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention. Because Egypt has signed these conventions, forced migrants fleeing persecution who enter Egypt are entitled to asylum and protection on a temporary basis.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) carries out refugee status determination (RSD), registers refugees and provides documentation.

Egypt has signed some exceptions to the international laws that protect and give rights to refugees. Legally, it looks like refugees do not have the right to work or to education. However, according to domestic Egyptians laws, refugees are considered to be foreigners, which means, they actually have the right to work and to education. But, there are other reasons why it is very difficult for refugee youth to find employment and go to school. Two important reasons for this are:

- There is high unemployment in the country. Egyptian youth are also having a problem finding jobs.
- Some refugees cannot speak Arabic. You have to speak Arabic to attend school and get vocational training.

### **What Did We Learn?**

Some of the refugee youth are working. However, the jobs are often for long hours, are far from home and offer little pay. Sometimes, if people are doing domestic work, there is the danger of mental and sexual abuse by their employers. Work is available, but it is not safe or does not pay enough for people to meet their basic household expenses.

Youth have no programs that are just for them. All the programs serve mostly families or very vulnerable individuals. Youth would like programs that address their needs and help them connect to each other for support.

Youth want to be able to work and go to school/vocational training at the same time. They cannot do that right now since there are no evening classes. This is especially true for language classes, because if you don't learn Arabic, it's impossible to go to school and training.

Youth want vocational training, but the quality is very low and the trainings are not long enough.

UNHCR and the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) only give support to the most vulnerable refugees. Even if youth can manage some work, or seek ways to find solutions to their problems, no one is giving support and rewarding the youth for their initiatives.

Information sharing is confusing. Most of the time it is not transparent. This is an issue because different refugee groups have different rights. For example, it is very difficult for refugees to know who is allowed free education or who is eligible for vocational training. When information is not clear, it causes mistrust between the refugees, UNHCR and the NGOs. There must be better communication between the people providing the services and the refugee communities.

### **What Do We Recommend?**

#### **UNHCR should:**

- Combine longer-term solutions that involve advocacy with the Egyptian government with short-term solutions on supporting youth with education support and livelihood-specific programming.
- Re-evaluate implementing partners for the services they are able to provide. Partnership agreements should be expanded to organizations that serve Egyptian youth.

#### **Service providers should:**

- Start an Internet radio/YouTube channel for refugees. Even though efforts have been made for better information sharing, more needs to be done to decrease mistrust and misinformation. Technology like this can also motivate youth to engage in community affairs. Instructional videos



A refugee youth learns welding, a popular training option for work in the informal economy, at Don Bosco's Vocational Training Center. Photo courtesy of Don Bosco.

on learning a new language or even classes on the radio in the evening can reach those that are working or those who cannot travel long distances.

- Connect and partner with local Egyptian NGOs. Resources are limited and the youth problems are shared between the host and refugee populations. Programs such as awareness-raising workshops, youth groups and sports groups will help to decrease the discrimination faced by refugee youth.

### **Refugee CBOs should:**

- Hold language classes, job-readiness classes, financial literacy classes and computer classes in the evenings.
- Have peer-to-peer networks and groups activities for youth. Youth desperately want recreational activities that can help them build social networks.
- Teach about work readiness in workshops or at meetings. This can be taught by people in the community who have jobs.
- Have meetings with other refugee CBOs to exchange information, learn from each other, identify common needs and opportunities, and support each other.

You can read our full report and our recommendations in *Shifting Sands: Risk and Resilience among Refugee Youth in Cairo* (in English), at <http://wrc.ms/PymzJ0>.

Please let us know if this report was helpful to you at [info@wrcommission.org](mailto:info@wrcommission.org).

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