INSIGHTS SUMMARY
OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND THE JOURNEY AHEAD FOR REFUGEE WOMEN

GLOBAL GOALS / HYBRID WORKSHOP / 19 SEPT 2023

We would like to thank the following opening speakers:

Graham Macmillan, President, Visa Foundation; Shirin Pakfar, Chief of Section, Private Partnerships and Philanthropy, UNHCR; Ghadah Alnasser, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Hibiscus Initiatives; Veronica Rossini, Vice-President for Europe, Tent Partnership for Refugees; Sheyda O’Rang, Freelance Artist and Facilitator, Pan Intercultural Arts

There are now around 110 million forcibly displaced people in the world, at least half of whom are women and girls. At a workshop co-hosted by Business Fights Poverty and Visa, five inspirational panellists shed light on how business can help ensure a better future for refugee women.

INSIGHT 1: SHIFT THE NARRATIVE TO RECOGNISE REFUGEE WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

The conventional narrative often paints refugee women as simply recipients of aid, with an emphasis on their vulnerabilities. This narrow viewpoint can inadvertently overshadow the strength, resilience and capabilities of women refugees. To bring about a transformative change, it’s crucial to shift the narrative by recognising refugee women as resilient changemakers. By moving away from a discourse of dependency to one of empowerment, we can restore a sense of agency and centre the many positive contributions that refugee women can make to their families and communities, as well as to business and wider society. This is the aim of the Visa Everywhere Pioneer 20 initiative, which over the next five years will shine a light on 100 inspirational refugee women who have made extraordinary contributions to their communities.

We work to identify the best match between employment and skills, but also look at, ‘what are the big gaps in the labour market, and what should we start looking at in the future of work, and how can we enable that next generation of refugee women to be empowered and resilient?’

Shirin Pakfar, Chief of Section, Private Partnerships and Philanthropy, UNHCR

This sometimes does mean a bit of upfront investment and thoughtfulness to make sure that some barriers that don’t need to be aren’t there.

Veronica Rossini, Vice-President for Europe, Tent Partnership for Refugees
**INSIGHT 2: ADAPT BUSINESS STRATEGIES TO REFLECT REFUGEE WOMEN’S REALITIES**

Businesses, with their expansive reach and influence, have an integral role in reshaping the landscape for refugee women. To better support women refugees, it’s imperative for businesses to tailor their strategies so that they address the specific challenges and realities of refugee women’s lives. For instance, many refugee women are single parents living in precarious and inadequate housing, even facing homelessness, whilst navigating complex and hostile asylum systems. At the same time, they and their families may be living with the effects of significant trauma without adequate mental health support. Despite these challenges, refugee women want to grow and develop their skills and secure a better future for themselves and their families. By gaining insight into their lives and adapting services and employment opportunities to their specific needs, businesses can not only provide direct support but also foster a more inclusive and diverse business environment.

**INSIGHT 3: CHAMPION POLICIES FOR ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES**

Unfortunately, many refugee women face hostile regulatory environments that separate them from wider society and create barriers to integration and economic independence. Business can leverage its advocacy networks to call for robust and compassionate policies that move beyond mere symbolic gestures to create tangible opportunities. Comprehensive economic integration is about more than just employment—it’s about recognising and leveraging the vast potential of refugee women, allowing them to become significant contributors to the socio-economic fabric of their host countries. Such integration policies, when implemented thoughtfully, can lead to a ripple effect, benefiting not just the refugees but also the broader economy and society of the host nation.

**IN SUMMARY**

The journey for refugee women is marked by both challenges and potential. To truly champion their cause, it’s essential to reframe narratives, adapt business strategies with empathy, and advocate for inclusive regulatory systems. By recognising and harnessing the resilience and potential of refugee women, we can pave the way for a more inclusive, prosperous and equitable global community.
RESOURCES

- hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk
- pan-arts.net
- practicalaction.org/knowledge-centre/resources/improving-energy-access-for-refugees-in-rwanda
- practicalaction.org/our-work/projects/re4r
- tent.org
- unhcr.org
- womensrefugeecommission.org/blog/profiles-of-refugee-self-reliance