

NRC's Youth Skills and Jobs for Self-Reliance Approach in Fragility, Conflict and Violence Settings

Drawing on its operational presence in Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) contexts, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has 25 years of experience in youth education programming, combining education and legal expertise to support youth to progress between learning, earning and engagement pathways. Our programme approach aims to support refugee youth to transition from dependency to self-reliance, while contributing to local economies, human capital development and national development objectives. NRC's experience shows that the hardest-to-reach youth, displaced and refugee youth with the lowest education levels, including young women with limited previous schooling, can be engaged and achieve strong education, and economic inclusion outcomes when operational, and regulatory barriers to skills development and labour market participation are systematically removed.

Across fragile, conflict and violence contexts, young people face a range of interlocking barriers to accessing the labour market and job opportunities. Young people make up much of the population in many crisis-affected contexts. Conflict and displacement disrupt their learning, livelihoods and social connections at a critical stage in their transition to adulthood.

Many face interrupted education pathways – only 37% of refugees are enrolled in secondary education¹ – and limited opportunities to acquire market-relevant skills. Reduced prospects for productive employment and economic participation, undermine their wellbeing. In Ukraine, NRC's Youth Needs Assessment found that youth living in frontline areas or those who had been displaced reported persistent feelings of emptiness, anxiety, and hopelessness.² Adolescent girls and young women often face additional protection risks, including gender-based violence, early marriage and pregnancy, while young men face risks around forced recruitment by armed groups and exploitation by organised crime groups and human traffickers. Yet humanitarian education responses continue to prioritise younger children and basic education, leaving many adolescents and youth without access to flexible accredited learning opportunities and pathways to employment. Youth in FCV settings also face significant constraints to accessing income-generating opportunities, including weak labour demand and limited private sector opportunities in remote refugee-hosting areas. In Cox's Bazaar where the right to work is restricted for refugees, NRC's assessment found that more than 90 percent of refugee youth participating in focus groups were

¹ UNHCR (2025). *The Unbreakable Promise: Resilience and Resolve in Refugee Education*

² Norwegian Refugee Council (2025). [Youth Needs Assessment in Ukraine](#).

not engaged in any regular income generation but were ready and eager to engage in learning and work.³ Insufficient language skills and non-recognition of qualifications from countries of origin further limits labour market participation.⁴ Legal and administrative barriers further restrict economic participation, including exclusionary regulatory frameworks, and practical obstacles related to civil and identity documentation, recognition of refugee status, and complex procedures for business registration, taxation, and work permits. Many displaced youths also lose productive assets during displacement, including land and property needed for agriculture and employment, and face limited access to financial services and financial literacy support. Young women often face additional legal, social, and economic barriers.

Despite these challenges young people are one of the greatest development assets in FCV settings, demonstrating extraordinary resilience, innovation and leadership while supporting their families and communities.

NRC's youth programming is designed to flexibly and comprehensively support youth access to skills and jobs in FCV, catalysing agency, self-reliance and durable solutions.

Drawing on its Youth Education and Skills (YES!) and legal aid (Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance, ICLA) expertise, NRC provides integrated programmes that address the multiple barriers to education, skills and jobs for youth in FCV contexts. NRC's YES! programme design is informed by conflict-sensitive assessments, labour market analysis, and participatory design. YES! programmes integrate four main pathways of support, customised to different contexts and participants' goals and preferred options.

NRC recognizes psychosocial support as foundation for conflict and displacement affected youth, provided through NRC's flagship [Better Learning Programme](#) and associated [Together for Wellbeing 2030 initiative](#).



Camila in Colombia proudly selling the T-shirts, hats and other crafts she created and painted [with support from NRC to strengthen her business which promotes community integration between refugee, migrant and local populations](#). Photo: Milena Ayala/NRC

³ Norwegian Refugee Council (2023). [Ready to learn, eager to learn: a youth-led market and wellbeing assessment in Rohingya camps](#)

⁴ <https://www.nrc.no/what-we-do/activities-in-the-field/education>

Four Youth Education and Skills Pathways to Improved Self-reliance & Durable Solutions			
Social Engagement & Wellbeing	Education and Skills	Access to Jobs	Youth-led Response
▪ Youth-led spaces and action ▪ Information and referrals ▪ Recreation & sport ▪ Mentoring	▪ Life skills and PSS ▪ Foundational skills (i.e. literacy, numeracy, digital, language) ▪ TVET and apprenticeships	▪ Career guidance and job placement ▪ Legal services for work access ▪ Entrepreneurship, business support ▪ Cash grants	▪ Local youth actors and leadership ▪ Outreach to vulnerable youth ▪ Community engagement

Recognizing that investments in skills development alone are insufficient where legal and administrative barriers constrain labour market participation, NRC complements education and skills programming with legal empowerment and policy engagement to strengthen the regulatory environment for economic inclusion.

Across 35 countries, NRC's legal aid programme provides legal support through a network of lawyers, paralegals, and national legal aid partners. Services support youth in obtaining required documentation including tax identification numbers, business licenses, civil and identity documents, and work permits—while strengthening their understanding of rights and responsibilities in both formal and informal labour markets. NRC also facilitates access to land and property for agricultural livelihood and small businesses. NRC's online [KOBLE](#) platform is revolutionising legal aid for displaced people making access to legal identity, education and employment services simpler, safer and scalable in contexts like Ukraine and [Colombia](#).

NRC contributes to scaling impact through systems strengthening, institutional capacity development and policy dialogue to address systemic barriers to youth economic inclusion, while enhancing national capacity to integrate displaced youth in labour markets. NRC works with the [Global Refugee Youth Network](#), as well as local youth organizations, national and local TVET institutions and authorities responsible for business registration, and labour market governance, with a focus on improving service delivery for displaced and marginalized youth.

NRC also recognises the importance of engagement with the private sector in securing employment pathways for youth. Developing training with private sector partners ensures skills match market demands and helps to secure work experience and jobs. In South Sudan for example, NRC collaborates with the private sector for competency-based curricula development, on the job training, apprenticeships and job transition support.

In restrictive policy contexts, NRC undertakes evidence-based policy engagement to help strengthen the conditions for the economic inclusion of displaced youth. This includes efforts to remove de jure and de facto barriers to education and employment, promote recognition of qualifications, and expand access to business registration and work authorization.



Jesus Osorio working in his welding shop [as part of NRC Colombia's work supporting youth skills and jobs with migrant populations.](#)
Photo: Diego Montero-Cerpa/NRC

NRC's Youth Education, Skills, and Self-Reliance Programme in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, NRC's Youth programme combines vocational skills training and transitional employment support delivered through its Education and ICLA programmes, along with local government stakeholders, livelihood partners, and community and youth-led structures.

The programme offers a package of interventions addressing both the supply side of youth employability and the systemic barriers preventing refugee and host community youth from participating in local economies. It provides nationally accredited and certified technical and vocational skills training, life skills training including psychosocial support, career guidance and mentoring, and business development and start-up support with a focus on agriculture, as well as on- and offline digital learning pathways with Arizona State University. Youth are also provided with a range of legal empowerment services to support their economic inclusion—including awareness of labour rights and obligations, assistance with identity documents, business registration and licensing, work and residency permits, negotiation of access to land, and support for financial inclusion.

Under the programme, NRC also addressed structural constraints to economic inclusion for young refugees, helping translate legal rights into improved access to jobs, entrepreneurship, and productive assets. By strengthening the enabling environment for economic participation, these interventions generated sustainable outcomes while laying the foundation for scaling up impact:

- **Removing barriers to labour market participation:** While Ethiopia's legal framework provides refugees with important economic rights, implementation has remained uneven. NRC's ICLA team collaborated with regional and local authorities, Refugees and Returnees Services, UNHCR, and community structures to improve awareness and practical implementation of refugees' right to work. This contributed to more than 1,400 refugees obtaining the documentation required to participate in labour markets and access economic opportunities.

- **Expanding financial inclusion:** Graduates receiving business start-up support were unable to access formal financial services because refugee identification documents did not meet banking requirements. NRC identified a government-supported microfinance institution that enabled refugee youth to access start-up capital, alongside mentoring and peer-support networks, helping establish pathways to enterprise growth financing and longer-term integration into the financial sector.

- **Facilitating access to land and agricultural skills:** ICLA and education teams facilitated negotiations that enabled refugees to access land through rental agreements, shared land use, and locally negotiated arrangements with host communities. Education teams then provided market-oriented agricultural skills development, enterprise support, and mentoring. Several refugee and host community youth groups accumulated approximately 500,000 Ethiopian Birr (USD 3,000) in savings through agricultural activities and continue to expand their production.

Contributing to durable solutions for refugees, NRC is a founding member of the Ethiopian government's *Technical Coordination Platform for the Inclusion of Refugees and IDPs in the TVET System and Labour Market* alongside the World Bank, ILO, and local authorities. The platform provides a forum for stakeholders to share lessons learned and best practices, identify and discuss implementation challenges, and promote coordinated solutions to strengthen the inclusion of refugees and IDPs in Ethiopia's TVET system and labour market.

NRC's youth skills approach in Ethiopia demonstrates how integrated investments in legal empowerment, productive assets, and skills development can generate sustainable economic opportunities for displaced youth while also delivering economic benefits to host communities through land rental, shared production, and increased local market supply.