



Earning Money/Staying Safe: The Links Between Making a Living and Sexual Violence for Refugee Women in Cairo

Women's Refugee Commission
Field Mission to Cairo, Egypt

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Executive Summary

It is widely believed that economic opportunities provide women with life options, greater participation in decision-making and more equity within the household. As a result, they are assumed to protect women against gender-based violence, including sexual assault and exploitation and domestic violence.

The Women's Refugee Commission* (the Commission) traveled to Cairo, Egypt to learn if and how this assumption held for refugees from Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, who live and work in Cairo. Although recognized refugees and asylum seekers are eligible for a work permit, in reality they are hard to obtain. Most women the Commission met with reported great difficulty in finding employment and meeting their basic needs. Often they are forced to work in unregulated sectors, such as housekeeping and child care, which exposes them to exploitation, abuse and harassment. There are very limited services for women who have been raped or abused, or women who have experienced domestic violence.

The Women's Refugee Commission did see examples of promising livelihood interventions, including programs that include vocational training and job placement components. Such programs should be emulated.

Key Findings

- ▶ **Refugee women in Cairo report great difficulty in meeting their basic needs, immense obstacles to obtaining employment, and many report incidences of racism and xenophobia.** Lack of legal access to the labor market forces refugee women to work in the unregulated, informal sector, thereby increasing their risk to gender-based violence).
- ▶ **Existing skills training and job placement programs serving refugee women do not include sessions on gender-based violence,** nor referral linkages to gender-based violence programs.
- ▶ **Very few refugees will be resettled** despite the expectation of many that resettlement in a third country is a viable durable solution.

Key Recommendations:

- ▶ Livelihood interventions must be brought to scale and more funding should be provided for livelihood programming for vulnerable refugee women.
- ▶ UNHCR and partnering agencies must include considerations for gender-based violence in all programming.
- ▶ Efforts to identify durable solutions (voluntary return to country of origin, integration into host country or resettlement in a third country) must be intensified.
- ▶ The Government of Egypt should reduce impediments to securing work permits for refugees and asylum seekers, enabling broader access to the labor market.

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Why We Went

The Women's Refugee Commission is conducting a three-year study on the livelihood strategies of displaced women in 10 countries worldwide. The study looks specifically at women's economic coping mechanisms during displacement and the protection issues related to those strategies. We are reviewing programs and activities implemented by the humanitarian community to support displaced women, and analyzing whether they lead to improved economic opportunities and/or address identified protection issues linked to economic need.

The goal of the research is to enhance the well-being of displaced women by promoting comprehensive, sustainable livelihoods that meet real market demands and lead to increased self-reliance.

In three refugee settings, the Commission has focused specifically on the nexus between women's livelihood strategies and their vulnerability to gender-based violence. Teams have visited Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Cairo, Egypt; and the Somali and Tigray regions of Ethiopia—the former two are urban settings and the latter a more traditional camp setting. It is particularly important to understand the complexities of protecting and serving urban refugees as their numbers now far exceed the number of camp-based refugees.

This report details our findings in Cairo. The Malaysia and Ethiopia reports on livelihoods and gender-based violence can be found at www.womenscommission.org/resources.

The Commission traveled to Cairo from July 19-26, 2008. The Commission conducted focus groups with 54 refugees and asylum seekers (the majority women),¹ met with 10 service-providing organizations² and conducted several site visits. Our goal was to collect information that would help shape a set of recommendations for practitioners, policymakers and donors on how to improve livelihood opportunities for refugee women in Cairo, in ways that could also mitigate their vulnerability to gender-based violence.

What We Found

Cairo hosts a highly diverse refugee population that is struggling to survive in a very difficult urban environment with limited assistance. Of the 43,542 registered refugees and asylum seekers, 54 percent are Sudanese, 25 percent are Iraqi and the rest are predominantly Somali, Ethiopian and Eritrean. Both recognized refugees and those seeking asylum who have registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Cairo are eligible for a residency permit, access to a small education grant and subsidized health care. Limited financial assistance is available for the most destitute through UNHCR's implementing partners. Persons of concern to UNHCR who meet the resettlement criteria could also be referred to third countries for resettlement.

Both refugees and asylum seekers report great difficulty in meeting their basic needs and immense obstacles to obtaining employment. Due to high national unemployment rates in Egypt, the government places restrictions on the right to work "in order to protect its domestic labor force."³ Many Egyptians struggle to secure employment and "even those with higher education often have to work in the informal sector."⁴ Furthermore, "some 500,000 - 700,000 new entrants are said to enter the job market each year."⁵

Refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt must secure a work permit in order to work legally in the country. However, obtaining a work permit is virtually impossible. The highly expensive and complicated process requires an employer sponsor and no competition from a similarly qualified Egyptian candidate.⁶ Lack of Arabic language skills also compounds the barriers, particularly for Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali refugees. Refugees, especially Sub-Saharan Africans, also cite racism and xenophobia, as other major barriers to finding decent work. As a result, refugees must work in the informal economy. For women, this often means working in unregulated sectors, such as housekeeping

and child care, increasing their exposure to exploitation and abuse. One woman told the Commission: “Racism is really bad here. The (Egyptians) throw trash at us, beat our children, throw us out of stores. They treat us very badly. They insult women and even throw stones at pregnant women. One threw a wooden plank with nails at a girl!”⁷

Sudanese refugees face the same racism and hindrances to legal employment despite their unique status in Egypt. They constitute the largest population of Egypt’s refugees and share a “strong historical link dating from the 19th century British rule when Sudan was considered part of Egypt and was ruled by a British governor supported by Egyptian troops.”⁸ The Four Freedoms Agreement, an agreement reflecting this historical relationship, was ratified in September 2004. The pact grants Sudanese residing in Egypt the freedom of movement, residence, work and property.⁹ Implementation of the Four Freedoms Agreement, however, is “clouded in ambiguity.”¹⁰ It is a bilateral affidavit that does not specifically apply to refugees or asylum seekers,¹¹ and neither employers nor government offices have received guidelines on how to implement it.¹² This has left Sudanese refugees in the same boat as any other refugee or asylum seeker—unable for all practical purposes to work legally in Egypt.¹³

At the time of the Women’s Refugee Commission’s visit, the situation had recently become more precarious for refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt, with the refoulement (forced return to their country of origin) of more than 1,000 Eritreans and 49 Sudanese.¹⁴ The government does not currently conduct workplace raids to identify and arrest illegal workers, but the upsurge in refoulement has created fear and anxiety in refugee communities. As one NGO practitioner stated, “it appears we are moving away from a governmental attitude of benign neglect toward refugees, toward a policy of malice.”¹⁵

Fears of refoulement, difficulties in obtaining employment, limited international assistance, an atmosphere of discrimination and xenophobia, as well as a lack of durable solutions, make Cairo an increasingly difficult place for refugees to live.

Livelihood Strategies of Refugee Women

The diverse refugee community in Cairo has differing needs and skill levels. The primary livelihood currently available to refugee women is domestic work and many Sudanese, Somali, Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee women are employed in that sector. As this sector is not regulated under Egyptian labor law, a work permit is not required. However, the lack of regulation creates an environment ripe with protection issues. Many women report being abused, sexually harassed and exploited while working in domestic service. They told the Commission: “We feel as though we have to accept the insults delivered to us at work. Even the children insult us.”¹⁶

Wages tend to be low and reports of exploitation and the withholding of wages numerous. Women reported earning anywhere from less than \$100 to \$300 per month as domestic workers.¹⁷ However, domestic work is one of the few areas accessible to refugee women and there is consistent market demand for labor. While this translates into work opportunities for refugee women, the salaries they earn are generally not sufficient to meet household economic needs, particularly when some refugees report being charged three times the amount an Egyptian would pay for rent.¹⁸ One woman described her experience, which is representative of many of the refugees’ stories: “I work as a house cleaner. I pay 400 Egyptian pounds (EGP) (about \$72 USD) for a one-room flat. I pay 100 EGP (about \$17 USD) per month for kindergarten for my daughter. After I pay rent and kindergarten fees I am left with 150-200 EGP (about \$27-36 USD) for food. That’s why we share flats with each other. But then the others [those sharing the apartment] have relatives come to stay, we face sexual harassment.”¹⁹

Iraqi refugee women reportedly have a great deal of difficulty embracing the option of domestic labor as well. Many come from middle class, professional backgrounds and are unaccustomed to accepting this type of work. Often, Iraqi families rely solely on savings and remittances from family members abroad to survive. Due to their now protracted stay in Cairo, savings levels are quickly dwindling and remittance monies are unlikely to be sustainable for the long term. A displaced Iraqi told the Commission: “All of us don’t have the skills to survive as a refugee. Our savings are running out.”²⁰

The Commission also met with a group of highly skilled Eritrean women who could not use their professional skills in any meaningful way because they did not have work permits. Former nurses, technology officers and humanitarian advocates expressed great frustration at having to accept jobs as domestic workers.

For those refugee women who can find work, child care is a major impediment, particularly in households headed by single women. The problem is compounded by the fact that it is very difficult for refugee children to attend Egyptian schools. While refugee children are legally allowed to attend school, a number of parents the Commission met with reported a great unwillingness to send their children to school as they face harassment and discrimination. One mother told us: "I have two children. I was a professional midwife in Ethiopia. Now there is no work for me in my profession. An Egyptian doctor offered me a job for only 300 EGP per month. I cannot be a housecleaner because I can't stay in. What would I do with my two children?"²¹

One single mother of seven reported locking her children in the apartment while she went to work.²² This practice was reiterated by several other women. Although Sudanese refugee leaders have been very active in establishing refugee schools for their community, this does not solve all of the problems and is not an option for every community. Iraqi refugee children, for example, are not allowed to attend Egyptian schools due to their temporary asylum-seeker status.

Refugee women who cannot find domestic work find it extremely difficult to find alternative sources of income. Medical care providers report that some refugee women turn to commercial sex work for their economic survival.²³ This is associated with a higher incidence of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. Young women are particularly likely to turn to this type of work.

Given the difficulties of protecting and providing for themselves and their families, a number of the refugees the Commission met with expressed a great desire to be resettled and few, if any, expressed a desire to stay in Cairo and integrate into the local community. Many indicated they would rather be anywhere else.

"Life in IDP camps would be preferable to staying in Cairo," one Darfuri man told the Commission.²⁴ Some even expressed a willingness to risk the dangerous border crossing into Israel in order to pursue a better life. Resettlement remains the hope of virtually every refugee and asylum seeker the Commission met with. However, in 2008, only 800 refugees were expected to be resettled, considerably fewer than the "over 3,000 in the year 2000."²⁵ The focus on resettlement presents a number of challenges when considering effective near-term livelihood strategies. For example, many refugees and asylum seekers are intent on learning English instead of Arabic so they are better prepared for resettlement.²⁶ Some are turning down work or training opportunities when they believe the job or skill would hamper their efforts to resettle because they do not want to be tied to a vocation in Egypt that will not serve them in their country of resettlement. Many of the refugees and asylum seekers the Commission met with appeared very poorly informed about resettlement—both the process and the numbers—which fuels hopes or expectations that are currently unrealistic.

Another factor that influences livelihood strategies is repatriation. This is a potential option for some South Sudanese. UNHCR "expects to assist up to 2,500 Sudanese refugees wishing to return home voluntarily in 2008 and 2009"²⁷ and has indicated an interest in training voluntary returnees for job opportunities in their home country. This makes good sense for those who can safely return, although some refugees interested in doing so believe the



A refugee woman running a small canteen at a community center for Sudanese refugees.

assistance is inadequate to cover the costs of return and for early reintegration, despite the fact that UNHCR has recently increased its repatriation assistance package and confirmed that a reintegration package is available in Sudan.²⁸ For every refugee or asylum seeker who may be interested in voluntary return, there are many others who have lingering concerns over remaining land mines, lack of infrastructure, lack of services and, above all, lack of economic opportunities in their home country. For them, a durable solution remains elusive.

Gender-based Violence and Refugee Women

Most women report either being a single head of household or the primary breadwinner, given their opportunities for domestic work. Women said that men “find it insulting when women make more than they do.”²⁹ The authority men traditionally maintained has been eroded as a result of displacement. Several women told us that there have been increases in incidents of domestic violence over disputes related to household decision-making and money management.

Many women also report being verbally attacked on the streets, particularly those who do not cover themselves and those who wear more Western style clothes.³⁰ Almost all the women the Commission spoke with reported being either physically or verbally abused while working as domestic workers. Sexual harassment, intimidation and rape are experienced regularly.³¹

Despite the frequent reports of gender-based violence, the Commission found that there appears to be no established support system for victims of gender-based violence. Survivors of rape can receive medical care at Refuge Egypt’s medical clinic, including post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment to prevent infection when potentially exposed to HIV infection.³² For extreme cases of psychiatric distress, practitioners can refer women to hospitals for psychiatric treatment.³³ Otherwise, women can be referred to one of the small psychological counseling programs run by Refuge Egypt or Caritas, but these programs do not specialize in gender-based violence and have limited capacity.³⁴ However, referral systems for victims of gender-based violence were extremely weak and were functioning only when followed through by one of the relevant actors.³⁵

In order to even report an incident of gender-based violence, a refugee women must travel to the UNHCR office located quite a distance from the city center in the 6th of October neighborhood. While many Iraqi refugees live in this area, most other refugee populations do not. Transportation to the UNHCR office from downtown Cairo is time consuming by bus and costly by taxi. The remote location of the UNHCR office presents an additional burden to an already difficult reporting process. What’s more, once an incident is reported, a refugee woman has to return to the city center to receive medical treatment or other services from the aforementioned agencies. There is no established “safe house” available for refugee women to seek shelter after an experience of violence. Not surprisingly, this was a very difficult issue for many refugee women to talk about.

As noted above, the Commission heard anecdotal evidence of domestic violence, which is not uncommon in such highly stressed living environments. However, the Commission found only one practitioner who offered any services to women who reported incidents of domestic violence, namely through informal counseling and home visits. This appeared to be voluntary effort on the part of the practitioner and not a formal part of any program visited.

What Works

The Commission considers livelihood programs successful if they link refugee women directly to employment and alleviate some of the protection issues they face. The Commission saw several examples of promising livelihood interventions that could be expanded upon to better serve the refugee community in Cairo. Several initiatives link women to employment, but a more holistic approach should be taken to integrate protection strategies into those initiatives. Humanitarian practitioners should also study some of the successful development programs currently

-serving the Egyptian population, particularly women’s micro-credit programs, to better understand how various economic programs can succeed within Cairo. Avenues for including refugees into existing economic development programs should be explored.

Market-Based Vocational Training

UNHCR funds the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), to run an economic development program for refugees. This program consists of a vocational training and job placement components. From 2007 to 2008, the program trained 300 refugees (43 percent female) and placed 94 participants in jobs upon graduation.³⁶ Market assessments were conducted by specialized consultants to identify areas for which there was an identified labor demand. The sectors selected, including medical care/nursing, embroidery, Internet-based enterprise, computer maintenance and others, either do not require work permits or can be done from home. CEOSS develops relationships with Egyptian employers in order to create a “job bank” for referring graduates of the program. Before sending trainees to interview at selected companies, they provide interview training. Before entering a position, many undergo an apprenticeship period where they receive further, more specialized, training.³⁷

For refugee women, working from home decreases their risk of on-site gender-based violence and need for child care. However, the CEOSS program does not incorporate training on gender-based violence, nor does it have an established referral system for participants who fall victim to gender-based violence while on the job or while in training.

Overall, the CEOSS program is a strong example of an innovative refugee livelihood program that is based on market needs, includes creative outreach to employers and has training and job placement components. But it is not without its challenges. Some of the obstacles this program faces include the fact that many refugees prefer to work in industries that were relevant in their home country or are in demand in resettlement countries. Practitioners report that some refugee participants are less interested in the dynamics of the Egyptian labor market.³⁸ Practitioners also report that refugees who do not speak Arabic are much harder to place.

Another obstacle is that some refugees reportedly fear that participation in the program will negatively affect their ability to receive minimal cash assistance or other forms of aid.³⁹ The Women’s Refugee Commission’s understanding is that assistance will not be denied and this perception is another example of the lack of information available on the policies and procedures affecting refugees.

Private Sector Initiatives Serving Both Refugee and Host Communities

The Malaika Linen Factory is a private company that hires both Egyptian and refugee women to do highly skilled embroidery. It offers a 40-day training and pay transportation and meal costs for women participants.⁴⁰ Standards of quality are very high and those successful are well compensated. The best embroiderers can earn up to \$365 USD per month doing piece work. 55 percent of embroiderers are Egyptian; the other 45 percent are refugee women from Sudan, Palestine, Ethiopia or Eritrea. Retention is based solely upon quality of work and all tools and threads are provided for embroiderers. A “Training-of-Trainers” model is used so that master embroiderers can teach techniques to



A refugee woman embroidering at the Malaika Linen Factory with an Egyptian fellow worker.

newcomers. This model has been very successful in integrating refugee women with Egyptian women, providing sustainable income and training in transferable skills.

Incorporating Basic Protection Mechanisms

The Egyptian Sudanese Development Center⁴¹ in Arba wy Nuss also runs a domestic service training and placement program. The director of the program promotes the protection and fair treatment of refugee women on a grassroots level by accompanying graduates to their placement homes, recording the names and contact information of employers, as well as the agreed upon salary. This small step serves to hold families accountable and illustrates the advocacy role the community center is willing to play on behalf of refugee women.

Job Placement

Refugee Egypt implements a domestic service training program that places graduating participants into jobs as domestic workers. Participants receive two weeks of training and then are placed into homes identified by program staff.⁴² Gender-based violence training is not a component of this program. While this program successfully links women to work, much more could be done to provide for their protection. Families who accept domestic workers from this training are not extensively vetted by Refugee Egypt, although they are often informally referred by affiliated families.⁴³ Families are also not required to sign a contract or code of conduct when hiring domestic help.

Recommendations

- ▶ **Livelihood interventions must be brought to scale and more funding should be provided for livelihood programming for vulnerable refugee women.**
 - ◆ Interventions that allow women to work from home should be supported and promoted.
 - ◆ Programs should use tested market assessment tools and either replicate successful models of economic development programs already operating in the area or integrate refugees into existing economic programs serving economically disadvantaged Egyptians.
 - ◆ UNHCR and its implementing partners should be provided with sufficient resources to ensure that refugees who find work are not disadvantaged in terms of access to critical services they may still need, but cannot afford.
 - ◆ Reassurances to this effect should be communicated more effectively to refugee communities.
 - ◆ To the extent possible, UNHCR should increase support for day care services so that working refugee women have a safe place for their children.

- ▶ **UNHCR and partnering agencies must include considerations for gender-based violence in all programming.**
 - ◆ UNHCR does consider gender-based violence in its registration, refugee status determination and resettlement procedures. However, psychological counseling and community outreach on issues related to gender-based violence must be provided and fully funded.
 - ◆ Referral networks for gender-based violence services must also be established. All livelihood interventions must include gender-based violence training components.
 - ◆ A safe house for victims of gender-based violence should be established.
 - ◆ The protection of women entering into domestic labor must be considered.
 - ◆ Codes of conduct⁴⁴ should be signed by families receiving refugee domestic workers.
 - ◆ Accountability and follow-up should be an integral part of any domestic service placement program.

- ◆ Child care should be part of livelihoods training and placement programs.
- ▶ **Programs that serve both the economically disadvantaged Egyptians as well as refugees should be promoted as they help to ease tensions between the host and refugee communities.**
- ▶ **Efforts to identify durable solutions must be intensified.**
 - ◆ In view of the growing protection challenges and the protracted displacement of many refugees in Egypt, the international community should work with UNHCR to increase resettlement from Cairo.
 - ◆ Increased resettlement should be part of a dialogue on a comprehensive durable solutions strategy that also includes local integration where possible, and more effective repatriation options for those south Sudanese who can safely return.
 - ◆ Priority in resettlement should continue to be given to the most vulnerable, including female-headed households, single women, the disabled and victims of gender-based violence. Recognizing, however, that even a significant increase in resettlement is not a solution for many refugees, information about resettlement should be much more readily available to refugee communities to promote more realistic expectations of future livelihood options.
- ▶ **The Government of Egypt should reduce impediments to securing work permits for refugees and asylum seekers, enabling broader access to the labor market and reducing the need to accept high-risk employment.**

Notes

¹ The Women's Refugee Commission conducted focus groups with seven Darfuri women on July 20, 2008; 25 refugee women of both Ethiopian and Eritrean nationality on July 23, 2008; and 22 Iraqis (9 men, 13 women) on July 25, 2008.

² The Commission met with AMERA; American University of Cairo Refugee Studies Center; Refugee Egypt; COEES; Multi Cultural Refugee Association (Tadaman); Sudanese Community Center Albanos; CARITAS; UNHCR; CRS; Malaika Linen Factory.

³ Grabska, K, "Who Asked Them (refugees) Anyway? Rights, Policies and Wellbeing of Refugees in Egypt," The Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program, The American University in Cairo and The Development Research Center on Migration, Globalization, and Poverty, University of Sussex. 2006.

<<http://www.aucegypt.edu/ResearchatAUC/rc/cmrs/reports/Pages/default.aspx>>. Last accessed November 11, 2008.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Interview with AMERA July 22, 2008.

⁷ Focus group, July 20, 2008.

⁸ Katarzyna Grabska, "Living on the Margins: The Analysis of the Livelihood Strategies of Sudanese Refugees with Closed Files in Egypt," Working Paper No. 6, June 2005, American University in Cairo Forced Migration and Refugee Studies.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Interview with AMERA, July 22, 2008.

¹¹ Interview with NGO practitioner, July 22, 2008.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Sinai Perils," Human Rights Watch, 2008.

¹⁵ Interview with NGO practitioner, July 22, 2008.

¹⁶ Focus group, July 20, 2008.

¹⁷ "Irregular Workers in the Labour Market: the case of trafficked migrants and refugees working as domestic workers in Egypt." Paper presented at the "Migration and Development: Building Migration into Development Strategies" conference at the

Development Research Center at the University of Sussex, Royal Society, London, April 28-29, 2008 by Ray Jureidini, Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program, American University in Cairo.

¹⁸ Focus group, July 20, 2008.

¹⁹ Focus group, July 23, 2008.

²⁰ Focus group, July 25, 2008.

²¹ Focus group, July 23, 2008.

²² Focus group, July 20, 2008.

²³ Interview with Refugee Egypt medical staff, July 24, 2008.

²⁴ Focus group, July 20, 2008.

²⁵ Sperl, Stefan, "Evaluation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas: A case study review of Cairo." UNHCR Publications. 2001. www.unhcr.org/publ.html. Last accessed November 11, 2008. p. 29.

²⁶ Interview with Sudanese Community Center, Arba wy Nuss, July 23, 2008.

²⁷ UNHCR, "UNHCR Global Appeal 2008-2009 - Egypt." UNHCR Publications. 2007. www.unhcr.org/publ.html. Last accessed November 11, 2008. p. 205.

²⁸ UNHCR, December 2008.

²⁹ Focus group, July 20, 2008.

³⁰ Focus group, July 23, 2008.

³¹ "Irregular Workers in the Labour Market: the case of trafficked migrants and refugees working as domestic workers in Egypt." Paper presented at the "Migration and Development: Building Migration into Development Strategies" conference at the Development Research Center at the University of Sussex, Royal Society, London, April 28-29, 2008 by Ray Jureidini, Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program, American University in Cairo.

³² Interview with Refugee Egypt medical staff, July 24, 2008.

³³ Interview with CARITAS, July 25, 2008.

³⁴ Interviews with CARITAS, July 25, 2008, and Refugee Egypt medical staff, July 24, 2008.

³⁵ UNHCR, December 2008.

³⁶ Interview with CEOSS, July 24, 2008.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Interview, Malaika Linen factory, July 23, 2008.

⁴¹ Interview, Egyptian Sudanese Community Center, July 23, 2008.

⁴² Interview, Refugee Egypt, July 24, 2008.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Note: As has been done successfully in child labor protection interventions in East and West Africa as well as Southeast Asia. See Anti-Slavery International and ILO websites for further information.

Mission Statement

The Women's Refugee Commission works to improve the lives and defend the rights of refugee and internally displaced women and children. The Women's Refugee Commission is legally part of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. It receives no direct financial support from the IRC.

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