Refugee 'Self-Reliance' and Livelihoods as Collective Practices: Experiences from Lebanon, India and Greece

Abstract

Over the last two decades, international humanitarian agencies have increasingly promoted a policy of self-reliance, understood as making individual refugees financially independent from aid assistance through livelihood programmes. However, individual economic autonomy offers an incomplete picture of refugee wellbeing. Based on fieldwork conducted over 2017 in Halba (Lebanon), Delhi (India) and Thessaloniki (Greece), this multi-site study shows that non-camp refugees build on collective strategies at household, social network and community levels in the effort to develop mechanisms of survival and enfranchisement. As such, we argue that leisure and social life are fundamental dimensions of refugee self-reliance and should therefore be included in livelihood programming.

It is on a living tree that the vine grows

(Ghanaian proverb teaching support,

growth and interdependence

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1. Introduction

As refugees become part of the city fabric, different groups of actors with competing mandates, motivations, and expertise become involved in providing assistance and protection. In the wake of

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crises, governments – particularly local authorities – and humanitarian organisations often expand their services or create new ones to address the needs of the new population. The nature of these services shifts depending on location and the prevailing ideologies around care and responsibility at the time. Since the late 1990s, the global refugee regime, created to assist crisis-affected populations, has shifted from a "maintenance and care" approach to refugee support - exemplified by refugee camp settings – towards building self-reliance capacity and resilient livelihoods in humanitarian programming.[1] These latter approaches are particularly favoured by organisations working in urban environments, where refugees are expected to provide for themselves as autonomous individuals in host societies – something which, paradoxically, even local people struggle to achieve.[2] Moreover, in these dominant development and humanitarian frameworks, while host communities are normally understood to survive and thrive on the basis of multiple dependencies at a household and community level, refugees and the urban poor are often expected to develop adaptive, individual self-reliance within the confines of basic needs[3] – and, for many refugee groups, without legal status.[4] For instance, UNHCR views refugee integration into the host country labour market as the primary means for urban refugees to work towards self-reliance, even when there is no legal right for refugees to work.[5]

This approach is often individualised, as organisations seek to enhance individual refugees' skill sets to make them more "employable" in host markets,[7] and reduce their dependency on aid.[8] Even though long-term UNHCR programmes do, in certain circumstances, provide large families with a special allowance,[11] the individual-centered logic still prevails. As a result, collective ways that refugees might seek to cope with everyday hardships remains unheeded.

In this article, we explore the implications of this policy-practice disconnect by tracing the trajectories of the dominant self-reliance policy discourse, and its (dis)connections with ground

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Deleted: Such a policy shift in expectations of refugee autonomy has gone hand-in-hand with an increasing focus in academia on non-camp "solutions" to the refugee "problem" of humanitarian assistance dependency.[6] Against this backdrop, the self-reliance programme approachstrategy championed by aid actors focuses on developing and strengthening the livelihoods of refugees and on reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on assistance other than their own.
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realities in three very different contexts: Halba (Lebanon), Delhi (India) and Thessaloniki (Greece). Using empirical data from these three urban areas, we show that the core tenet of the dominant self-reliance discourse – individual economic autonomy – not only misses key ways that refugees survive and seek to make meaningful lives for themselves in urban environments, but it can also actively undermine refugee survival practices. Indeed, we will show how most of the survival mechanisms that refugees have been enacting prior to the arrival of international and national humanitarian agencies are actually developed on the basis of collective efforts and large networks which extend beyond family units – and with layers of social, cultural, and political activity, as well as economic actions.

As a growing body of research highlights, market-based initiatives focusing on refugee adults are increasingly believed to mitigate (or even solve) humanitarian crises.[15] Building on these debates and using a case study approach, this article intends to question the effectiveness of market-based formulas, proposing that economic self-reliance becomes an unachievable goal for humanitarian organisations when political and legal barriers restrict access to the formal labour market, and when the host country's political economy cannot structurally absorb new workforce. Moreover, in an effort to go beyond the acknowledgment of the diverse legal and material constraints that hamper self-sufficiency and self-recovery mechanisms in conditions of displacement in Lebanon, Greece and India, we seek to trace the disconnects between the enduring self-reliance policy discourse, and the ways in which self-reliance interventions by humanitarian actors or refugees themselves occur on the ground. In particular, we focus on the potential of leisure and social mingling in the everyday lives of refugees[16] to contribute to rehabilitation, recovery and self-

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International humanitarian agencies problematically tend to capture self-reliance within "Livelihoods" programming, which is seen as a self-standing sector that should function according to predetermined goals - typically economic ones, such as a job and sustainable income. By doing so, the potential of socialisation leisure and social mingling in the everyday lives of refugees[12] to contribute to rehabilitation, recovery and self-reliance aspirations is underestimated in humanitarian policy. And when collective wellbeing and social practices are addressed, it is whenLeisure has rather become a back-route to social cohesion and local stability through INGOs deal with the separate programmes of social cohesion and local stability.[13] Sociological scholarship has long since emphasised the importance of learning new skills in relation to generating cohesion through the socialisation participation of the individual in social life, that is the turning from biological being into social being.[14]¶

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Drawing on field research in Halba (Lebanon), Delhi (India) and Thessaloniki (Greece), we will

reliance aspirations. Through this analysis, we aim to show how refugee self-reliance in the humanitarian framework is diversely understood and adopted in discourse and practice.

Lebanon, India and Greece are informed by field data collected during a yearlong networked research project exploring refugee self-reliance,[17] and were chosen for their diversity and the authors' networks on the ground. All three cities have different population numbers, significant histories of refugee hosting, but different legal regimes that recognise and protect (or not) refugees, as we shall explain shortly. While these three contexts diverge in the legal and political limits of refugee hosting, they also share similar tensions between humanitarian ambitions to enable refugee self-reliance and the limitations of those programmes. A comparison between them therefore provides useful insight into how these tensions replicate across diverse contexts.

In India, interviews were undertaken by XXX with 44 Rohingya refugees (who have arrived in India around 2012), 11 Afghan Christian refugees (who have arrived in the last decade), 4 Sikh Afghan refugees (who have been in India for several decades) and 12 NGO workers and UNHCR staff. Women participants make up just over a third of the Rohingya refugees interviewed, and none of the Afghan community, due to the reluctance of many women to engage with the researchers and also due to male community leader gatekeeping. In Lebanon interviews were undertaken by XXX in February and March 2017 with 19 key informants over a period of one month: 4 Lebanese residents (2 males and 2 females), 5 Syrian refugees (all females, from different age groups) who have arrived in Lebanon after 2011, 4 city authorities - namely the mayor, the deputy mayor, the governor of the district of Akkar (*mohafez*) and one *mukhtar* (a central state official) - and 6 local aid workers (4 females and 2 males) from 5 international NGOs

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implementing livelihoods programmes in Halba. The Thessaloniki study was conducted by XXX with 8 refugees, workers from 4 different local NGOs, 3 UN officials, and 2 local government employees. Although awareness of gender and age were key considerations in participant sampling, given the demographics of those engaging in the solidarity initiatives during the time of research, findings are more representative of male refugee experiences.

The paper will begin by analysing the concept of self-reliance as it has evolved in recent humanitarian policy and academic debate. We will then introduce in more detail the three case study areas, briefly framing the legal and political environments that inhibit the development of the refugee-as-economic-citizen. This will be followed by the analysis and discussion, where we will comparatively examine the social dimension of livelihoods and occupation, with leisure emerging as important, but often unintended, consequences of humanitarian "self-reliance" programming. As will be evident, our refugee interviewees in Lebanon, India and Greece understand "self-reliance" collectively at the levels of household and wider networks of shared interests. This should encourage contemporary scholars to carefully consider the choice of the unit of study, either the individual, the family, or the household.

2. Opening the Pandora's Box of Refugee 'Self-Reliance'

The idea of 'human security' - an approach introduced in the 1994 global Human Development report[19] - shifts the focus from the state to the individual,[20] and from geopolitics to biopolitics. Consequently, the mission to save lives and alleviate suffering during protracted crises has increasingly entailed the goal of making individuals self-reliant. In this framework, the currently

Deleted: using semi-structured and unstructured interviews across a range of actors in the context: refugees and migrants – both those receiving support from humanitarian NGOs and UNHCR, and those without support; locals, including from a variety of civil society and solidarity actors; actors across a variety of functions at UNHCR, INGOs and Greek NGOs; as well as at the Municipality of Thessaloniki. More specifically, interviews have been conducted with 8 refugees, workers from 4 different local NGOs, 3 UN officials, and 2 local government employees.

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popular vision of resilient livelihoods fits neoliberal models of governance, which offer space for the development of individual capacities and resources, while decreasing welfare provision and assistance.[21] In the same vein, the scholarly trend, which seeks to re-consign agency to refugees in the wake of a longstanding humanitarian process of de-humanisation, de-subjectivisation and de-historicisation,[22] corroborates the dominance of the neoliberal frame of individual responsibility and self-empowerment.

A combination of protracted humanitarian crises, funding limitations, and attempts at preventing beneficiary dependency have led NGOs and UN agencies to adopt refugee self-reliance as a key programming objective. Self-reliance is framed by UNHCR[23] on its website as "The social and economic ability of an individual, household, or community, to meet basic needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health, and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity". Considering the way this concept has been operationalised, the UNHCR self-reliance strategy (SRS) implied the need to empower refugees and hosts to support themselves; and, secondly, to establish mechanisms that would ensure integration of services for the refugees with those for the nationals.[24] However, the SRS has historically proved the limitations of the UNHCR definition, implementation, and expectation.[25] In this framework, the unprecedented emphasis on "solutions" to refugee care in a host environment is posited as market-based: refugees must be given work opportunities, or, otherwise, they need to be trained to access local markets. Higher purchasing power leads, it is assumed, to meeting basic needs and, over the longer term, to socio-economic security and stability, which is a key interest of host governments.

In our study, it is particularly relevant that the shift from assistance to self-reliance[26] has become of increasing importance in the case of urban refugees. Indeed, with assistance being provided in city spaces, the self-reliance programming approach affects the local economy by providing new

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human capital and transnational connections, as much as more competition with local labour. The structural constraints posed by host environments are increasingly evident, ranging from legal frameworks which do not provide refugee status recognition and work permits in some employment sectors, to the lack of work opportunities.[27] These limitations are the main impediments to successful market-orientated livelihoods programming[28]. For example, although moving away from care and maintenance towards a more self-reliance-oriented model had been discussed at UNHCR since the late 1990s, the model of local settlement aiming to help refugees increase their livelihood through micro-credit, employment, and vocational training was only implemented in 2004 in Egypt.[29]

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This disconnect between refugees' experiences of livelihoods programming and the official discourse of the UNHCR-started SRS has been diversely documented by experts and scholars.[30] However, self-reliance has survived as a key rhetoric of humanitarian actors and host governments due to macro-political reasons which complexly intertwine with the more intimate ones:

> "Self-reliance brings benefits to all stakeholders. For host states, self-reliant refugees contribute to the sustainable social and economic development of the country and have the potential to attract additional resources which also benefit host communities.
>
> For the international and donor community, the achievement of self-reliance reduces the need for open-ended relief assistance… For refugees, it helps them re-gain better control of their lives, provides greater stability and dignity, and may help them become 'agents of development' ".[31]

As it is evident in the statement above, self-reliance has been exclusively discussed in positive terms. Conversely, in the SRS implemented by UNHCR in Uganda, for refugees, self-reliance meant food reductions, therefore perceived negatively[32] also due to the fear of losing access to assistance regimes. Likewise, our case studies conducted in Lebanon, India and Greece will show how livelihood programmes are often unable to build refugee access to resources and socio-economic capacities, being unable to build on previous coping mechanisms. In these case studies we examine the ways in which the self-reliance formula shifted the responsibility from governments and NGO agencies to individual refugees and households, preparing the ground for a progressive withdrawal of assistance. This indeed happens in the wake of the constraints facing UN agencies and INGOs (Eg. Unpredictable budget shortfalls and chronic underfunding by Western donors to refugee crises). In this framework, in addition, legal and political conditions often remain unaddressed and unchallenged by humanitarian agencies.

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3. Historical and legal backgrounds to the case studies

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3.1 Halba

During the Syrian refugee flow into Lebanon from 2011 onward, Halba, the capital of the Akkar governorate (northern Lebanon), became one of the main destinations. While Akkar numbers 350,000 Lebanese inhabitants, 250,000 Syrian refugees have registered with UNHCR from 2011. Halba has a population of 27,000 local residents and 17,000 refugees, and Syrian nationals mostly reside in informal tented settlements (ITS) built on empty pieces of land on the side of public roads, rent out apartments, or occupy empty depots.

Since Lebanon is a "transit country", not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, displacement from Syria in Lebanon has not been regulated until October 2014, when the Lebanese government and the United Nations drafted a new decree for refugees. Whilst prior to the war and the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon local people used to better accept Syrian temporary menial labour,[33] their current permanent presence is instead rejected due to local infrastructures and labour markets increasingly put under pressure.

Since 2014, Syrian nationals have no longer been allowed to enter Lebanon out of humanitarian reasons, but only for reasons connected to business and trade, or when they hold 1,000 USD and a hotel reservation for a tourist visa, when they own assets in Lebanon themselves,[34] or when sponsored by a Lebanese employer (*kafala* system). Moreover, since 2015, UNHCR stopped registering refugees from Syria and even de-registered a relatively large number, in order to comply with the Lebanese government's decree. In more detail, UNHCR deregistered over 1,400 Syrian refugees who had arrived in Lebanon after 5 January 2015.[35] Since then, refugees from Syria can only be "recorded", which implies protection, service provision, and even resettlement in a third country for the displaced but not the provision of documents proving one's own refugee status to the international community.

In June 2014, only Syrians from conflict-ridden areas bordering Lebanon would be allowed to enter the country.[36] The legal constraints that Syrian refugees are faced with in today's Lebanon are not limited to entry regulations. Indeed, the General Security regulations now require the refugee's residency renewal every six months for a USD 200 fee, also for those who registered with UNHCR.[37] This new regulation has led large numbers of Syrian nationals to lose their legal

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status in Lebanon, as unable to pay the fee. Their illegal status also prevents them from opening a bank account, enrol in public schools, and own properties.

While until the summer 2016[38] refugees had to pledge that they would have not worked while in Lebanon to uphold their UNHCR-granted refugee status, they are currently not allowed to work in sectors other than environment, gardening, agriculture and construction. Nonetheless, they are unlikely to find a permanent source of income due to the limited local economy, and the unwillingness of Lebanese citizens to formalise refugee work, as the recruitment of foreigners is now capped, and, moreover, local employers do not desire to be under observation by the Lebanese General Security for hiring Syrian nationals. As a result, most refugees are doomed to exploitation, informal and temporary jobs.

3.2 Delhi

There are currently 208,571 refugees registered with UNHCR in India.[39] The majority of those registered are refugees from Tibet (108,005) and Sri Lanka (61,812) - these groups are officially recognised by the Government of India as refugees, and have historically been provided Registration/Refugee Certificates, which enable them to live and work in the country and avail certain services. The remainder fall within UNHCR's mandate and are a mix of refugees from Asia and further afield, including: Myanmar (21,442, primarily Rohingya and Chin refugees), Afghanistan (14,129 mixed Sikh, Hindu, Christian and Muslim refugees), and Somalia (964).[40] The majority of those under UNHCR's mandate live and work within Delhi, or the National Capital Region (NCR). This concentration in/near the capital is partly due to UNHCR's location in Delhi, with status determination processes and humanitarian support requiring regular visits and

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assessments. At present India has no domestic laws that recognise refugees, and it is not signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or any regional frameworks. Thus, all are technically considered within the Foreigners Act of 1946 and Citizenship Act of 1955, just like any other category of foreigner.

For refugees to work legally in India and access academic institutions, they must have a Long-Term Visa (LTV), for which all mandated refugees are technically able to apply.[41] However, refugees continue to face significant barriers to employment. Firstly, Refugee Certificates are not recognised documentation for employment in the formal economy, thus refugees are restricted to working within the informal economy, which is often low skill, insecure, and exploitation is rampant.[42] Refugees face irregular opportunities, labouring without pay, unsafe working conditions and/or arbitrary dismissal. Secondly, many employers in the informal sector are now requesting Aadhaar Cards as mandatory for hiring. Aadhaar Cards are government-issued, biometric identification cards, which are currently voluntary but the Indian government are attempting to roll out as mandatory, to strengthen linkages between public sector and financial services - although refugees are not explicitly forbidden from registering for an Aadhaar card, and some have managed to procure them (legally and illegally), government guidelines are currently unclear as to whether Refugee Certificates are sufficient documents for registration. As such, officials are erring on the side of caution and refusing more often than not. Relatedly, refugees find it extremely difficult to open bank accounts without Aadhaar and with the majority of banks not viewing Refugee Certificates as sufficient documentation.

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UNHCR and its NGO implementing partners have, for several years, been running livelihoods programmes focused on augmenting refugee access to "the market".[43] In recent years, these programmes have undertaken skills assessments and training of UNHCR-referred refugees, identified market gaps and sought to place refugees within apprenticeships, with employers in full-time jobs, or offered start-up enterprise grants for a small number of entrepreneurial individuals. These have met with limited success. In interviews, we spoke with some refugees who were unable to convert their trainings into meaningful employment, and others that had been trained in a skill - the assembly of lightbulbs, for instance - that turned out to be less-than-competitive in a saturated market. Of the 323 refugees that were offered job placement services by an NGO over 2015 and early 2016, only 50 were continuing in jobs by March 2016, and their average monthly salary was 10,000 Indian Rupees (approx. USD 150.00).[44]

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3.3 Thessaloniki

In recent times, Thessaloniki has attracted people escaping conflict, poverty and repression in a number of countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, occupied Palestinian territories, Nigeria, Algeria, and Congo. Following the arrival in Greece of approximately 124,000 refugees and migrants between January and July 2015, UNHCR declared a 'humanitarian emergency' in Europe, requiring 'an urgent Greek and European response'.[45] Many of these arrivals saw Greece as a country of transit; predominantly, they aimed to reach countries in Northern Europe. However, by May 2016, an estimated 28,726 refugees and migrants were stranded in formal and informal camps in Northern Greece following the closure the border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the construction of fences/border control

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measures along other countries' borders. It took the harsh winter weather of late 2016 to force a rapid change in strategy, with residents in uninhabitable camps being moved into urban accommodation – hotels and apartments – of which a significant proportion was in the greater area of Thessaloniki. In the context of increasingly tightened borders within the European Union and in surrounding countries, Thessaloniki's location also means it is currently one of a handful of urban hubs for refugees and migrants on the periphery of Europe.

Thessaloniki went from being predominantly a site of administration for the international response, with only local and national organisations predating the 'refugee crisis' supporting refugees in the city, to being itself a focus of programming by the international humanitarian response.

Most formal support by UNHCR and other international humanitarian NGOs is only available to people registered for resettlement under the EU Relocation Programme or considered 'vulnerable'.[47] The key factor for the provision of accommodation and other support by UNHCR is whether, based on their nationality, refugees fall under the EU Relocation Programme's criteria. Eligible nationalities are determined on the basis of EUROSTAT data for the previous quarter, whereby a nationality must receive an average recognition rate in recipient countries of 75% or greater, which, in the context of Thessaloniki essentially applies only to Syrians. Since refugees in the city do not have the right to work formally until they receive refugee status, and even then, very few opportunities exist, both informal-market and non-monetary forms of self-support – like food recycling and squatting – play a key role for a significant number of refugees and migrants supporting themselves in the city. A number of complementary autonomous collective activities of local residents and refugees have provided a number of services as well as opportunities for leisure, learning, building of social networks, and participation in decision-making.

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4 Analysis and discussion

4.1 The disconnect between policy and practice

Our field research indicates that vocational trainings in Halba, Delhi and Thessaloniki have little impact on refugee economic self-reliance due to legal and political barriers but also lack of demand in these local markets. For example, Rohingya refugees trained in light bulb assembly in Delhi by an NGO partner of UNHCR found themselves with a new skill but few job opportunities, partly due to the fact that the market has become oversaturated with a cheap supply of LED light bulbs in the last few years. The type of scenario is exacerbated by two factors. The first is the tendency of aid organisations to try to fit refugee labour into market gaps - i.e. to "train" refugees in skills the market "demands" in a given moment.[48] This leaves refugees, particularly those trained for low-skill jobs, open to market fluctuations and the negative impacts of demand and supply economics. In a market such as in India, with a huge over-supply of low-skilled labour, local and migrant hands are very easily turned towards the demands of the moment and the increased competition decreases opportunities and depresses wages. While the Rohingya refugees were willing to work for less and found limited opportunities, Afghan refugees - accustomed to Afghanistan market prices - were frustrated with what they felt were unlivable wages. As one NGO manager explained: 'In the [Indian] job market you will find a lot of highly qualified pool of labour very cheap. The Afghans cannot match. Afghanis expect, if someone is a graduate, they will expect more, 30% more than Indians willing to do the same job'.

The second factor comes as a result of the way aid organisations approach training in the first place - focusing on "skills" rather than meaningful employment opportunities – and having a deliberately limited impact. In this framework, humanitarian organisations actively curb income activities in contexts where local employment is historically low and increasingly put under strain after the arrival of refugees. For instance, in Halba livelihood programmes do not involve sales activities in the local market; rather, most of them are limited to providing refugees with new skills. Refugee women from Syria - interviewed in Halba in winter 2017 - affirmed they simply attended trainings to be able to produce home-made food and chocolates, or work as hairdressers and beauticians, but they were not given the opportunity to sell such products or have properties rented to be able to start their commercial activities. By the same token, a refugee woman contended: "What should I do with this learning? I lack the capital to start my own activity, and microcredit programmes generally address a very small number of beneficiaries. This is the reason why many friends of mine did not join the training in the first instance".

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4.2 The social dimension of occupation

Even though such livelihood programmes neither produce actual labour nor significantly enhance economic activities and daily income, they turn out to have an important social implication. As a refugee woman in Halba pointed out, "If I hadn't joined this chocolate-making training course, I'd have stayed in the house all day, getting bored. This experience definitely enlarged my social networks". In other words, livelihood programmes were increasingly approached by the refugee interviewees as leisure activities, able to make people build a social life and have a space where to mingle with each other. Nonetheless, the aid workers interviewed in Halba were reluctant to

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classify such livelihood programmes in terms of "success" despite their positive social outcome, as they were initially planned to make refugees self-reliant in a politically and economically constrained environment.

Echoing XXX's observations in Halba regarding the importance of leisure and social activities in refugee lives, some of the more praised activities for promoting wellbeing in the view of these local community and faith organization members in Delhi have been ones focused on the arts or sports, albeit these were organised from within the community rather than by aid organisations. One Christian Afghan refugee explained that "it [playing music] has been good because Taliban did not even let us imagine playing music, but it's so calming and good for people who are in distress so I am happy that so many young people have taken it up and even made it big!". For many of the male Rohingya refugees in Delhi, football is an important past-time and, despite space limitations in their slum-like settlements, they constructed a football pitch for regular games. Several Rohingya interviewees spoke effusively about sport and its role in their lives. One young female Rohingya refugee aspires to be a professional runner and competes in (mostly informal) races in Delhi whenever she can. A male refugee from the Rohingya community noted: '[I] play [football] every day… My aspiration is to be in a football team and people recognize me as a Burmese footballer. And I am able to inspire more kids… I sometimes do daily manual labour work, but I don't need it. Whenever I call home, they send me money. Yesterday, I worked almost for 4 hours to earn 250 [Indian] rupees [approx. US $3.60] but didn't get paid. I don't like to fight but sometimes you have to. This is why I am not leaving my football. Work can make me stop it'. For this young male refugee football is both a career aspiration, a daily recreational activity, and preferable to daily-wage labour, for which he gets paid minimal, or not at all.

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Moreover, these games have opened out the Rohingya's social network. The same respondent noted that his team are getting support and training from 'foreigners' – 'They are helping us a lot. One German guy and two Polish girls'. An Indian student cultural organisation has set up matches with their football teams and the Delhi-based Rohingya "Shining Stars" team, explained their further significance: "[t]hrough football we can communicate our internal problems, and we can communicate our ability". Thus, just as refugees in Halba were utilising livelihoods programming as leisure time and for the foundation of a social network, refugees in Delhi have forged their own leisure activities and social networks in the gaps left by limited livelihood programmes and work opportunities.

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In Greece, refugees awaiting the recognition of their status cannot work, and even then, very few opportunities exist. In the absence of opportunities, both informal-market and non-monetary forms of self-support become important and a number of refugees and migrants interviewed were volunteering their time and skills, including in supporting others to develop skills (like learning languages), cooking for collective solidarity initiatives, or involving themselves in other ways in the day-to-day running of the initiatives.[49] Through such practices, solidarity initiatives (and the social networks they provide a platform for) support participants to use what agency they have in the context to shape their own time spent in the city. The solidarity initiatives also provide a physical place for the development of networks of support. One interviewee described how those he met through a solidarity initiative had supported his application for asylum, and then once he had received asylum in Greece, in finding a job (as a translator for a Greek NGO) and an apartment.

These solidarity initiatives also provided greater space for a more participatory and open response evolving with the needs. These included activities of material solidarity such as food distribution, the serving of hot food, clothing distribution, legal support and referrals, a women's support group, but also classes such as Greek, Maths and Arabic. Moreover, these initiatives provide access to computers and library and a space for socialising, discussions, assemblies, concerts, parties, film screenings and arts activities, including dance, music and theatre.

While we acknowledge that there are INGOs providing social life opportunities and leisure activities, these are always seen as a separate category of action to livelihoods programming, and are often organised in compartmental silos with limited complementarity and exchanges between different programmes. The social dimension of livelihoods therefore goes unheeded, while most of the refugees interviewed in the three contexts highlighted it as the most successful impact of such programmes on their lives. Also, leisure activities are mostly targeted at children and youth, while neglecting other age groups.[50]

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4.3 The individual and collective dimension of refugee practices

While refugee livelihood systems are, in practical terms, based on inter-dependency at household, network and community level, humanitarian programmes have been found primarily individual-focused, aimed at developing individual employability. Therein, not only Lebanon, Greece and India present challenging structural and legal constraints to be able to facilitate or encourage refugee self-reliance, but the livelihood programmes mis-configure local patterns of everyday sustainability. The goal is training individuals in (often menial) labour or skilled activities through

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workshops, or delivering foreign language and IT classes. In this way, networks of mutual support and household-based or community-based survival mechanisms that pre-exist crisis go unheeded in humanitarian programming, which, rather than capitalising on and reinforcing previous coping mechanisms, attempts to introduce new (potentially temporary) ones.

Self-reliance as a socially situated practice acquires a collective rather than individual meaning. This is because, on the ground, the "self" contained in the "self-reliance" formula is often collective rather than individual. This recalls Wittgenstein's *Wir-Subjectivitat* - "We-Subjectivity"[53] - according to which the social meaning of practice and discourse can only be generated by the collectivity. While it is a common belief that social meanings are dictated by culture or religion, we rather argue that self-reliance in such mobility networks and transit settings acquires a peculiar configuration, which heavily relies on external ties and collective arrangements of survival.

The case of Halba shows that self-reliance is practically sought out by relying on the mutual support of household members - and, more importantly, they are not necessarily members of the same family. For instance, Mohammad, originally from Aleppo (northern Syria), has been in Halba for 4 years. He used to be a tiler, but he then started suffering from slipped disc and could not work at all. Mohammad's sister became a widow while relocating to Lebanon, and had to rear her four children by herself (whom they call "orphans" due to the father's death occurred in an incident at work one year before). Mohammad's family, his sister, and her three kids nowadays live together to support each other. His sister receives help from local charities to take care of the fatherless children. Resisting official humanitarian policies, both families sell the WFP food vouchers (27

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USD per month per household member) to be able to pay the rent (130 USD including electricity bills). Being eleven household members, they can sell their vouchers to Lebanese neighbours for 297 USD per month. Economically vulnerable Lebanese families in fact crave to receive financial support for everyday shopping expenses in the Akkar region; yet, most of them are ineligible to humanitarian assistance. In this context, purchasing vouchers for cheap prices allow them to access a wider range of food items. Mohammad also specified: "We're able to save up some money by purchasing cheap food, but the rent needs much more... With no work, there is no alternative than selling vouchers". Self-reliance, in this case, is household-oriented rather than being an individually started strategy of coping and producing self-sustainability.

In this framework, it is frequent to see mutual support and services between refugees and poor local residents. Zena is a Lebanese Halba resident, who has never benefited from livelihoods programmes despite her financial hardships. Her husband works in a Beirut factory for 450 USD per month, the half of which needs to be spent for daily commuting. She assists Syrian refugee children to do their homework in the afternoon hours. While she provides this service free of charge, the children's families chose to build their tents on her private land, and pay to her a cheap monthly rent. Another example of self-reliance being based on mutual support is provided by the everyday practice of car-sharing in Akkar's villages. Car sharing is a relatively common practice among Syrians and Lebanese residents who reside in Halba and surroundings. Both Syrian and Lebanese poor income families cannot afford owning and maintaining a private car. Fieldwork indicates that such collective practices provide evidence of longstanding self-sufficiency mechanisms, which humanitarian programming does not take into account, therefore failing in the official policy that aims to potentiate refugees' everyday tactics of survival.[54]

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In the context of Delhi, for Afghan Sikh and Christian refugees, mutual support often comes through the wider community network and faith-based organisations.[55] For instance, Afghan Sikh refugees that had fled after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and arrived in India in the early 1980s then contributed to the establishment of the Khalsa Diwan Welfare Society (KDWS) in the early 1990s, which received a second wave of Sikh and Hindu Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban. One Afghan Sikh refugee recalled of that period, "on reaching here, we realised that the government did not care about us but were only concerned about resettling Muslim refugees to third countries who they perceived to be a security threat". The longer-term Afghan refugees and local Indian community, particularly through the Sikh temples, offered initial emergency food and shelter relief and, through KDWS, developed a more extensive programme of activities, which included skills training, cultural activities and education support.

These shared services, leisure and cultural practices, and social networks exemplified in Halba and Delhi extend beyond the time of emergency crisis and are vital for refugees' own sense of well-being. Beyond that, they also contribute to the construction and maintenance of social capital and local inter-dependencies, which are essential for urban refugee self-sufficiency when state and humanitarian care (where they exist at all) fall short. Returning to a point made at the outset of this paper, while community interdependence and non-economic activities are understood as key facets of self-reliance – or, at least, autonomy and well-being – among citizens of a state,[56] the importance of these practices and networks for refugees are overlooked in humanitarian policy.

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Similarly, in Greece, refugees perceived their self-reliance as a collective process, dependent upon the social networks they were able to create both in their own national community and with local residents. Shared nationality with refugees and migrants already living in the city is a key factor of support for some new arrivals. At times, this can be the most significant factor in helping arrivals to find accommodation (including squats), develop networks and informal livelihood opportunities (which can also be heavily based on nationality), and understand and navigate the city. The participation in local autonomous solidarity initiatives which are organised by horizontal collectives also respond to a very important socio-political aspect. Refugees can participate in the governance of these initiatives which is particularly significant given a wider context that so often silences refugees and migrants, and in which humanitarian responses have offered little opportunity for input and influence. In such cases, solidarity initiatives have resulted in qualitatively different forms and experiences of support and self-support to those resulting from the humanitarian response to date. For example, a number of interviewees reflected that the city's local groups, especially its solidarity initiatives, are much more inclined to listen to refugees than humanitarian organisations, and to adapt their actions accordingly. Moreover, while the humanitarian response has contributed to the individualisation of responsibility through its emphasis on self-reliance and entrepreneurship, solidarity initiatives have promoted the 'active participation of citizens in political society'.[57]

At the level of socio-economic exclusion and poverty that refugees occupy in the urban contexts here taken into analysis, humanitarian market-based self-reliance programmes not only evidence a divide between policy and practice, but can also be counterproductive. Wage-labour in a low-skilled job in the informal economy pays incredibly poorly. One Afghan refugee respondent

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recalled that in his first UNHCR-placed job in Delhi he made only 3000 India rupees per month (approx. $45 USD) making paper plates, and of that '1000 rupees went in room rent and I had to survive on just 2000 [$30 USD] a month'. Consequently, longer hours need to be worked or multiple jobs balanced just to make ends meet, which takes refugees away from their local networks and partaking in shared social rituals and practices. While wage-labour is essential for daily hand-to-mouth survival, it is political advocacy, solidaristic support and social communities -- fostered among a wider social base -- that are essential for longer term change in discriminatory legal and political practices, and care practices that go beyond the economic. Through their individualised, neoliberal "job" and "income" priorities, humanitarian self-reliance programmes, as they currently stand, can inadvertently bypass opportunities for solidaristic local network formation, social communities, and political claim-making, or overlook those that already exist.[58] Moreover, findings show that official humanitarian policies can also create new challenges (Eg. The sale of the food vouchers) and end up being resisted by practices put in place by the refugees themselves in order to address their own needs.

While the Lebanon study mostly shows household-based and, although to a lesser extent, inter-community self-reliance practices, in India self-reliance involves out-group as much as in-group support practices. The case of Greece further shows how mutual assistance develops along community lines, but it also related to larger social networks and inter-community support.

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5. Conclusion

Humanitarian agencies promote a policy discourse of self-reliance, understood as making individual refugees financially independent from aid assistance. However, political and economic

constraints in the host countries make this type of self-reliance unachievable and livelihoods programmes based on this understanding of self-reliance are often considered a failure. A more nuanced and localised understanding of self-reliance demonstrates that refugees value the social and collective leisure aspects of livelihoods programmes even if they are not leading to economic self-reliance, or they develop alternative social activities which better respond to their needs. Leisure and social activities, which expand and strengthen social networks without an immediate impact on livelihoods are a fundamental dimension of self-reliance, which does not merely regard young age social groups. Moreover, refugee self-reliance practices, including income-generating activities, build on collective strategies at household and community levels. Questioning the "economic adult" postulate, aid agencies should recognise the importance of social and leisure dimensions and the way in which self-reliance is approached as a collective strategy by refugees.

In all three cases, the importance of social and collective forms of leisure activities unexpectedly emerged as a central theme from the data. In Lebanon, leisure was an unintended result of livelihood programming. In India, many refugees were not attending livelihoods programmes and were instead engaging in volunteering work and social activities in their communities (sometimes choosing unpaid sport over menial labour), while in Greece, refugees were engaging in socio-political life through autonomous initiatives with host communities which gave them agency and allowed them to participate in decision-making processes. Moreover, self-reliance practices involved more explicitly political aspects of being together exclusively in the case of Greece, where refugees are legally recognised as such and can aspire to citizenship.

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From these studies it is clear that leisure and social life are fundamental dimensions of "self-reliance", which is understood by refugees as a collective endeavour. The expansion or strengthening of social networks should therefore be recognised as a primary need. This is at odds with much humanitarian "self-reliance" programming, which does not account for social life and leisure as components of survival and wellbeing, and instead continues to reinforce neoliberal ideas that the economically autonomous adult refugee is the ultimate goal.

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