

Module 1: Background reading on the structural challenges identified in implementing refugee led work.

Structural Barriers experienced by WRLOs

We first examine the potential of, and challenges to **women refugee led work, with a focus on the key structural issues**. These refer to problems that are a result of the biases embedded in the fabric of social institutions, such as education, family, religion, government, and economic institutions. This applies both in countries of origin host countries, and in resettlement. These biases create great advantages for some members of society and major disadvantages for others, who may be already marginalized. They are said to be designed to provide structure, guidance and order in any given society, and are shaped by ideologies and dominant beliefs. However, they do not deliver social good in an equitable manner and often are deigned to preserve the status quo for the already advantaged. For example, in every society there are different levels of education, health care, access to the law, to wealth and access to human rights (*See Module 3, Session 2, The Power of Privilege*). This can particularly impact on refugees, when they are not granted citizenship, work rights, access to good quality education, health services training, income.

Unregistered and registered refugee led groups

A major structural impediment to refugee led organisations, in particular WRLOs, is lack of the ability to **register** their organisations in the countries where they have sought refuge. and the impact this has on their ability to function effectively. It can pose major problems to their smooth operation, and to receiving funding from major donors. They include issues such as not being able to open Bank accounts, to rent or hire premises, purchase equipment, legally hire staff and provide proper employment conditions, to advertise their goods and services. They do not receive the protection of the law to which other businesses may be entitled. While many unregistered organisations find ways around some of these barriers, they leave them very vulnerable to exploitation to coercive control, by authorities, sometimes by NGOs and service providers. They are at risk of arrest because they have no legal status, and usually, no work-rights. Women often lack access to the education and training which is necessary to assist small business operators everywhere. Lack of support from men in their communities can pose a major problem. The marketplace is often a dangerous place for women and girls, with an increased risk of GBV, and protections have to be in place to respond to this.

In sites where refugee led organisation are allowed to register, many of these barriers disappear, but it is still not easy being a minority group dependent on the good-will of others. There are reports of some government authorities paying particular attention and harassing registered refugee led groups, because they are visible. This causes fear and can be a disincentive to registering an organisation, or even to local stakeholders assisting refugees. This is very political and has to be handled with care and diplomacy. These structural issues are beyond the power of refugees to address them alone and need the support for key stakeholders, host, and donor governments to bring about change.