Women’s Refugee Commission
FY2018-2022 Strategic Plan
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I. INTRODUCTION

This document presents a five-year strategic plan for the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) for FY2018-2022. It is WRC’s first strategic plan since the organization became fiscally and legally an independent entity. Heading into this strategic planning process, WRC wanted to build on needs identified in the previous strategic plan that have not yet been fully and effectively addressed. The aim was to chart a course that would allow WRC to become much more intentional and strategic about our work internally and externally, and in an evolving humanitarian landscape.

For nearly thirty years, since its founding in 1989, the Women’s Refugee Commission has worked to ensure that the needs and priorities of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis are firmly on the humanitarian agenda. Our goal is to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response everywhere and ensure that it engages and builds on the capacity of the affected populations. In addition, that humanitarian efforts ensure that those fleeing persecution and violence have their human rights respected and are able to seek safety and access legal protections and asylum wherever they are fleeing to, including in the United States. We work to change and improve the humanitarian system by developing guidance and tools to shape and strengthen practice on the ground as well as inform policy and funding priorities to secure tangible improvements in the lives of the most marginalized among the displaced persons.

Over the years, WRC has achieved much:

**WRC led international efforts to make reproductive health a humanitarian priority.**

- We were among the first to recognize that displaced women and girls in conflict- and disaster-affected areas had a dire need for reproductive health services. We then helped establish a coalition of partners to develop guidance and tools to improve practice and advocated and monitored implementation. As a result, sexual and reproductive health services are now a standard part of initial humanitarian response.

**WRC documented and created mechanisms to reduce the separation of families and threat to parental rights due to immigration detention and enforcement in the U.S.**

- We led non-governmental organization efforts to identify both the costs to society and the endangerment of children caused by the detention of their parents without mechanisms to ensure that they could continue to communicate and make care arrangements for their children. Following the publication of our report *Torn Apart By Immigration Enforcement* and advocacy efforts, the Department of Homeland Security issued a *Parental Interest Directive* that provides guidelines to limit the use of detention of primary caregivers, allows for communication with children, and provides mechanisms for arranging care, attending family court hearings and making travel arrangements for children. As a result, we saw significantly fewer cases of family separation and child endangerment due to immigration enforcement.
WRC raised awareness of the needs of refugees and displaced persons with disabilities.

- We published the first-ever global research report on disabilities among refugees and those affected by conflict. We then advocated for, drafted, and promoted a UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion to take our findings forward. Subsequently, we have worked with UNHCR and its partners on promoting the inclusion of refugees with disabilities across all programs and services.

WRC helped make gender-based violence a humanitarian priority.

- Through its early research, WRC put gender-based violence (GBV) on the humanitarian agenda and then worked to ensure that the prevention of and response to GBV were integrated in health, livelihood, disability, and protection programming for women and girls. WRC led the multi-agency Call to Action to Address GBV in Emergencies effort and continues to lead work on how GBV risks affect different population groups (LGBTI, persons with disabilities, adolescents, and sex workers) as well as promotes tailored risk mitigation strategies.

WRC led and shaped humanitarian response efforts to protect and empower adolescent girls.

- WRC has and continues to provide technical assistance and tools to operational partners to strengthen, inform the design, and build content for adolescent girls’ programming across humanitarian settings. WRC’s research and work, including on child marriage, has drawn much-needed attention to this at-risk and often overlooked population.

WRC, in partnership with UNHCR, raised the voices and concerns of refugee youth around the world through the Global Refugee Youth Consultations.

- The Consultations reached over 1,300 refugee youth in 22 countries and through their input, participation, and voices led to the creation of the Core Actions for Refugee Youth, which are now beginning to shape youth programming in all UNHCR operations.

WRC advocated and advanced the protection of women and children in conflict settings with the passage of two critical UN Security Council Resolutions.

- Security Council Resolution 1325 – on women, peace, and security, which promotes women’s participation, leadership, and protection from gender-based violence.

- Security Council Resolution 1612 – on children affected by armed conflict, which articulates the grave violations children face and requires reporting on such.

WRC focused international attention on the need for safe access to cooking fuel.

- With our leadership, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Task Force produced the first-ever global guidance documents on implementing safe access to firewood and alternative cooking fuels in humanitarian settings. This led to the establishment of the Global Alliance for Clean Cook Stoves humanitarian initiative and pushed leadership and programmatic responses from both UNHCR and the World Food Program.
WRC helped displaced women support themselves with high-quality and safe livelihood programs.

- We published the first comprehensive manual to guide humanitarian practitioners as they design work programs for displaced and refugee women and subsequently trained 700 practitioners on its use. This and multiple succeeding WRC guidance and tools have led to increased attention to livelihood programming in humanitarian settings that are market-based and safe for women.

While there are more forcibly displaced people in the world today than ever before in recorded history, over 65 million, some 50% of all refugees originate from only four countries — Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria — and roughly 80% are women, children, and youth. The changing nature of conflict and displacement — increasingly urban and protracted, coupled with a growing demand and over-stretched resources — necessitates re-thinking the traditional humanitarian response. To improve sustainability and efficiency, the response must be driven by those closest to the crisis — the affected populations themselves, local NGOs, and host governments and it must build on the strengths, capacities, and coping strategies of the refugees and the internally displaced. This will necessitate moving from a needs-based approach to a resilience-based response.

Further, as current responses have not advanced the needs, protection and participation of displaced women and girls far enough or fast enough, re-emphasizing the promotion of gender equality is vital to improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response. Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women, men, girls, and boys. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of groups of women and men. Gender equality is not only a women’s issue and should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is both a human rights issue and a precondition for sustainable human development.

At WRC, we advocate for equal rights, equal access, and equal opportunity for women, men, girls, and boys. We work to ensure that humanitarian policy and practice are both gender-sensitive and gender-transformative — availing of the opportunities conflict and displacement provide for the expansion of women’s rights and for challenging existing inequalities and practices that can affect all groups, such as gender-based violence (GBV). Further, we understand that gender equality in its broadest sense is essential to the achievement of freedom, human dignity, and self-reliance, and to the provision of meaningful and durable solutions to pressing humanitarian challenges. Domestically for WRC, advancing gender equality necessitates ensuring that women with protection needs can fully exercise their right to asylum: that they are informed about their rights, have access to legal counsel, are appropriately interviewed, do not face separation from their children, and are not placed in detention facilities.

To maximize the impact of humanitarian programming, equal access and opportunity must be provided as well as measures to ensure that all those affected can safely avail of those opportunities. Only through advancing gender equality throughout all humanitarian programs and services can strides be made in reducing gender-based violence. Too often, these two areas of work have been disconnected in practice, resulting in missed opportunities to improve both the protection and empowerment of women and girls. Gender equality is a prerequisite for economic and social development. As such, advancing gender equality in humanitarian settings can also contribute to better outcomes for hosting states.
Even as needs continue to grow, increasing insecurity impedes safe humanitarian access in ever more places, from Syria to Yemen and Somalia to Afghanistan and parts of Mali, Niger, and Iraq. Because they are harder to access and reach, supporting affected populations and local civil society groups to participate in and lead the response, as well as contribute to longer-term solutions, is ever more vital.

Displacement, too, has become increasingly complex and multi-faceted. Those displaced no longer fall into distinct categories of “refugee”, “internally displaced person” (IDP), “asylum seeker” or “economic migrant” as the crises that drive them from their homes involve complex, overlapping issues that reflect multiple human rights abuses often coupled with famine, poverty, and lack of opportunity. Those fleeing the Northern Triangle of Central America, for example, are fleeing gang recruitment, drug cartels, and generalized violence that impedes school access, economic opportunities, and personal safety.

One constant throughout this changing landscape is that those most at-risk and neglected continue to be women, children, and youth. But it is not all women — or all children or all youth — who are the most marginalized. Humanitarian practitioners need to identify which women, which children, and which youth are left behind. Often it is those with intersecting vulnerability factors, such as a female with a disability, a child in a female-headed household, or a gay or transgendered youth. Improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response will require an understanding of gender diversity and intersectionality in order to ensure that we are reaching those who are hardest to reach. Additionally, the humanitarian response must not treat them as “vulnerable” or “victims” but as individuals who have multiple vulnerability factors — which impede their access to opportunities and protection — and the system must work to mitigate those factors while strengthening those factors that make them resilient.

Over the past thirty years, WRC has made great strides in putting the specific needs of displaced women, children, and youth on the humanitarian agenda, and developed and promoted guidance and approaches for better addressing those needs. Sexual and reproductive health services, especially for refugee women, have dramatically improved over the past twenty years. Livelihood programs for refugees have become ever more specialized, effective, and market-based. Though the need to prevent and respond to gender-based violence is now recognized as an essential component of any effective humanitarian response for women and adolescent girls, in practice, responses are still greatly lacking, and violence against men and boys remains both largely overlooked and poorly understood, as is its impact on families and communities.

Despite these advancements, however, erosions in the humanitarian system are also apparent. Developed nations are increasingly looking to methods that “stem the tide” and reduce protection obligations to meet ever-increasing needs for protection. As a result, access to asylum, including in the U.S., has become increasingly restricted. Worldwide, human rights are violated with increasing impunity, and refugees and migrants continue to be demonized, criminalized, and scape-goated by politicians and the press. Lasting solutions to refugee crises seem ever more remote, and the humanitarian system is increasingly overwhelmed and under-funded. New actors, including new donors, development agencies, and the private sector, though, are beginning to play a larger role, as the scale and scope of these problems move well beyond the remit of humanitarian actors alone. The engagement of these new actors, while welcome, comes with new challenges: they are not versed in refugee protection, humanitarian codes of conduct, a rights-based approach, or in humanitarian principles and policy — instruments that have evolved and shaped humanitarian response over the past several decades.
Coupled with the above challenges to the humanitarian system, there has been a rollback of women’s rights in many countries around the world, including many of those hosting displaced populations. Access to some sexual and reproductive health services have been curtailed, access to education for girls and young women has become increasingly difficult, and even dangerous, and access to employment and even mobility in the public sphere has been restricted. The retrenchment of women’s rights affects not only the host populations but also those being hosted, impacting their access to services and opportunities and rendering the advancement of gender equality ever more difficult.

WRC’s work must be responsive to tensions within the humanitarian system, to the changing nature of crisis and displacement, and to the varied populations that find themselves affected. The system must work more effectively and efficiently for women, children and youth uprooted around the world. WRC believes that in order to achieve this, humanitarians must move from a needs-based approach to one that recognizes and builds upon the capacity of the affected populations to be a part of the solution. In addition, humanitarians must use the opportunities that displacement provides to truly advance gender equality – a gender equality that recognizes the diversity and intersectionality that exists within all populations, and how they affect marginalization and access to resources and opportunity.

WRC’s vision cannot be achieved without making significant strides in the advancement of gender equality in all contexts of displacement. Our mission cannot be realized without promoting and capitalizing on the capacities of displaced women, children, and youth, and strengthening their resilience.

II. VISION, MISSION, AND THEORY OF CHANGE

Vision

Our vision is a world in which refugee and internally displaced women, children, and youth:

- are safe, healthy, and self-reliant;
- have their human rights respected and protected; and
- inform and drive their own solutions and development.

Mission

Our mission is to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies that strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.
**Theory of Change**

Our theory of change begins and ends with the communities that we serve. WRC’s three-pronged approach consists of researching the needs of women, children, and youth, collaboratively identifying community-driven solutions, and advocating for change through targeted policies and programming. That is the expertise WRC brings to bear — expertise grounded in what we learn by listening to crisis-affected people themselves. The graphic below illustrates how WRC works to bring about change under three progressive action areas: Research, Rethink, and Resolve.

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### WOMEN’S REFUGEE COMMISSION | **HOW WE ACHIEVE CHANGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH</th>
<th>RETHINK</th>
<th>RESOLVE</th>
<th>OUR VISION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUR MISSION</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A world in which refugee and internally displaced women, children, and youth:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to and learn from affected populations and practitioners</td>
<td>Develop guidance, tools, and advocacy reports based on findings</td>
<td>Communicate and advocate to implement proposed solutions</td>
<td>• Are safe, healthy, and self-reliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct research and fact-finding missions</td>
<td>Provide technical expertise and training to donors, governments, and practitioners</td>
<td>Build alliances and partnerships to achieve change at donor, policy, and practitioner levels</td>
<td>• Have their human rights respected and protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify challenges and available capacities</td>
<td>Promote rights-based, gender-inclusive, and community-driven humanitarian action</td>
<td>Monitor change on the ground to ensure positive impacts on the lives of affected women and children</td>
<td>• Inform and drive their own solutions and development</td>
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III. CORE VALUES

Our core values are the foundation of all our work, as well as our internal organizational culture, policies, and practices.

Inclusion

We value and promote inclusion and diversity of identity, opinions, talents, and capacities, both within our organization and within the communities we serve. Inclusion is pivotal to WRC’s work and to our organizational culture.

Equality

We believe in the universal and inalienable human rights of all individuals, and we strive to ensure that all persons should have equal access and opportunity to realize these rights without discrimination on any grounds.

Integrity

We consistently uphold the highest levels of excellence, honesty, and transparency. We strive to be principled, fair, and ethical and are each personally accountable for the highest standards of behavior in all aspects of our work.

Dignity

We believe in the intrinsic value of every human being and respect the dignity of each individual. We are committed to promoting the human rights of each person we work with and serve.

Forward-Thinking

We bring new perspectives to intractable problems and are not afraid to take on new issues, and speak out forthrightly on our findings and recommendations. Our work is grounded in critical thinking, and we consistently challenge ourselves to put forth thoughtful solutions that lead to meaningful change.

IV. HOW WE WORK

WRC’s research and advocacy focuses on women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis throughout the world, including marginalized and highly vulnerable migrants entering the United States. We look across geographic settings and populations to identify common needs, concerns, and potential solutions. Our approach — identifying needs, developing tools, guidance, and recommendations to address those needs, and undertaking sustained advocacy until we achieve the change required—is WRC’s unique niche and greatest strength. WRC is also unique in targeting donors, policymakers and practitioners with our guidance and advocacy in an attempt to push the system at all levels, through all actors and at all entry points.
WRC’s action research is guided by the voices and priorities of those displaced, bridging the oft-disparate worlds of academia and practice. Affected populations not only know what they need best, but they are also first to respond during a crisis. In addition to identifying the needs of affected women, children, and youth, WRC identifies solutions proposed by the communities. We research what has worked in other places and pilot new approaches to capture learning and build the often-absent evidence base. We also provide technical assistance and capacity-building trainings to strengthen program responses, and we promote implementation of our tools and guidance to practitioners, donors, and affected community members.

Through this strategic plan, WRC will focus on systems change within the humanitarian sector writ large, including how donors, practitioners, host governments, and affected communities perceive and respond to crises. In addition, WRC will continue to work to bring about change at the individual programmatic level in each of the sectors of WRC focus.

V. WHO WE WORK FOR AND WITH

Established in 1989, the Women’s Refugee Commission focused on the lack of attention to and unmet needs of refugee women and children. As the world changed over the years, WRC has included internally displaced persons (IDPs), migrants, and asylees into its programs as well as increased attention to adolescents and youth, as these population groups were also historically overlooked and underserved – not unlike women and children.

While prioritizing focus on displaced women, children, and youth, WRC recognizes that other population groups are also neglected and marginalized in humanitarian response, such as refugees and IDPs with disabilities (as with all refugees - women and children comprise some 75% of refugees with disabilities) adolescent girls, and LGBTI refugees and IDPs.

WRC also recognizes that attention and services must include and engage men and boys as a means of enhancing protection and expanding opportunities for women and girls. Displaced women and girls’ roles, risks, and potential are influenced by their households, their husbands and partners, their fathers and brothers, and by their communities. As such, WRC understands that creating a world where women and girls are safer and able to achieve their full potential necessitates involving the men and boys in their lives.

We work closely with the affected displaced populations themselves as we conduct research, identify needs, and build community-driven approaches. They are an integral part of the implementation of better policies and practices. WRC also collaborates with a range of partners and reaches out to diverse audiences, all of whom play valuable roles in helping shape the future of humanitarian practice for crisis-affected women, children, and youth. Our partners and audiences are UN agencies, donor and host governments, international and local NGOs, NGO consortia and networks, foundations, and individual supporters.
VI. CHANGING LANDSCAPE & IMPLICATIONS

The humanitarian landscape is changing more rapidly than ever. The numbers of people displaced by war and human rights abuses has surpassed 65 million, the largest number ever recorded. Increasingly, they reside in urban areas, not traditional camps, and although refugees are moving further and faster than ever, 86% remain in some of the world’s poorest countries. Their reasons for fleeing are multiple: seeking safety and opportunity; escaping war, environmental degradation, and famine; and trying to find better lives for their children. The overwhelming majority continue to be women and children.

Challenges to Protection and Access to Resources

Growing Restrictions on Freedom of Movement for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

As the number of refugees has increased, so too have the restrictions imposed on them by governments who seal their borders, deport asylum seekers, and enact punitive measures to deter people from arriving on their territories. The new U.S. Administration is impacting asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, as well as the humanitarian response writ large. Fewer refugees are being accepted for resettlement in the U.S.; there has been an increase in deportations; and implementation of harsher border enforcement measures limit due process and access to asylum. Coupled with these restrictions is an increase in discrimination and xenophobia against refugees, as well as and a criminalization of migrants and asylum seekers, including enforcement practices — and even laws — that criminalize the act of seeking protection. They have been demonized by some media sources as well as by some politicians who target them for political gain. Fear-mongering — rather than sharing realities of their plight and recognition of international protection law — has become de rigueur.

Insufficient Resources and Outdated Response Models

As old conflicts continue to fester and new crises displace more people, resources are not keeping pace with needs and traditional program approaches can no longer achieve the desired results. Many refugees are trapped in limbo for years — more often for a decade or a generation. Providing services to large numbers of people for ever-extending periods of time has proven expensive, ineffective, and increasingly unsustainable. Limited resources, combined with weak analyses of vulnerability, mean those most in need of support may not receive it.

While there is broad awareness that structural gender inequality often limits women’s and girls’ access to resources and increases protection risks, advancing gender equality in humanitarian response is still viewed by many actors as outside their humanitarian remit or a second-tier priority after immediate needs have been addressed. Further, the utilization of gender analysis in programming is weak and usually does not consider intersecting factors such as gender identity, disability, ethnicity, or other social markers of difference that heighten or mitigate risk. The opportunities to leverage changing gender roles and norms are generally missed in the response. The result: programming is less effective, less likely to ensure equal access and opportunity, and less likely to channel limited resources to the most marginalized.
Funding sources, while increasingly diverse, fail to meet the demand to cover even the most basic of needs. The U.S. is the largest single donor of humanitarian aid; as such, the Administration’s plans to significantly cut foreign assistance, including funding to U.N. agencies, is sowing unease throughout the humanitarian community and in refugee hosting countries. The imposition of policies that restrict access to comprehensive reproductive health services is particularly troubling for the WRC. As traditional humanitarian funding sources and models evolve, it will require WRC to develop a greater understanding of how, where, and in what capacity we can engage.

**Opportunities for New and More Effective Approaches**

The silver lining to the current crisis is that business as usual cannot continue. There is renewed commitment from the international community to find better ways to work. The European refugee crisis in particular informed or directly influenced such high-level convenings as the World Humanitarian Summit, the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on the Large Movement of Refugees and Migrants, and President Obama’s Leadership Summit. These have expanded the engagement of new actors — including local NGOs, host governments, development agencies, and the private sector — have led to new funding mechanisms like the Grand Bargain, with new funding partners, such as the World Bank, the Gulf States, and the private sector. Other changes and opportunities include the use of cash transfers — which are increasingly replacing NGO programs and food distributions to promote efficiency, choice, and dignity — and the increased use of technology to capture data and maximize reach, disseminate information, and store and share learning.

**Increased Attention to Gender Equality in Humanitarian Response**

While much work remains to be done to move from pledging to advance gender equality to actually doing so effectively in the field, there are new openings for action and accountability. The World Humanitarian Summit gave priority attention to the importance of catalyzing action to achieve gender equality, and commitments were made by multiple actors to advance this body of work. The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, adopted by the General Assembly last September, includes a strong section on mainstreaming a gender perspective, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and protecting the human rights of women and girls in response to large movements of refugees and migrants. However, overall recognition and use of the term largely treat “gender equality” and “women’s rights and empowerment” as interchangeable, rather than applying “gender equality” to mean equal access and opportunity for all.

**Greater Focus on Self-Reliance**

The scale of the displacement challenge, and the limited resources to address it, requires humanitarian actors to promote the self-reliance of refugees as early as possible in a crisis so that resources can be targeted to those in the greatest need. We know from our own work that most refugees do not want to be dependent on aid; self-reliance is their priority, too. Strained resources are putting increased emphasis on the need to promote refugee self-reliance early and sustainably. Some host governments are even granting refugees access to their labor markets, which creates new opportunities and the potential for innovative approaches in certain humanitarian settings. However, advancing gender equality must be seen as part and parcel to achieving self-reliance for refugee women and female youth.
Implications of the Changing Landscape for WRC’s Work

Growing Restrictions on Freedom of Movement for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Growing xenophobia, the criminalization of migrant and asylum seekers, and increased restrictions on asylum seekers and refugees impact much of WRC’s work, particularly its work ensuring that asylum seekers coming to the U.S. are able to safely access asylum in this country. As such, our work now requires more robust advocacy with the U.S. government to push and promote fair and humane legislation. We also must strengthen and broaden our partnerships with a wide range of grassroots organizations and coalitions on our issue areas. The growing restrictions force asylum seekers — both in the U.S. and internationally — to go underground, leading them into the hands of smugglers and traffickers and less able to access the opportunities, protections, and services available to them. These changes in landscape have specific implications for WRC’s communications and how we effectively portray refugees, asylees, and migrants in our messaging and advocacy. WRC must increasingly use individual stories to humanize the issues and advance its advocacy work, thereby strengthening its commitment to bringing forward the voices of those affected.

New and Different Partners

The rapidly changing humanitarian landscape has major implications for WRC and its work model. Historically, WRC has advocated on policy, funding, and programming with UN agencies, a small cadre of government donors led by the U.S., and targeted international NGOs. We now see an increased focus on local communities as frontline responders, a potentially more limited role for the UN, and a proliferation of new donors and actors engaged in humanitarian response. This means that the WRC must broaden its advocacy reach and engage a much more diverse set of practitioners, from refugee community-based organizations, to local NGOs, development agencies, for-profits, host government ministries and departments, and the World Bank. We will need to integrate these actors into our field assessments and research, expand the targets for our reports and tools, and find new ways to communicate effectively with these new audiences.

New and expanded partnerships with local partners will become increasingly important, particularly as WRC responds to the changing nature of displacement by focusing the bulk of our work in non-camp and urban settings. WRC will need to devise ways of reaching them through, for example, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) — which includes partners from the Global South as members — and regional networks, such as the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN). WRC should marry an increase in its local partnerships with more meaningful engagement with refugee communities themselves as agents of change.

More Diverse Funding

Like most nonprofits, WRC must continue to diversify its donor base, recognizing that traditional donors — like the U.S. government and UNHCR — may have fewer resources and more resource restrictions. In order to be responsive and flexible in addressing emerging issues, as well as explore and capitalize on new advocacy opportunities, there is a need for WRC to increase its unrestricted funding. Such funding would allow the organization to be present during new emergencies, support diverse communication strategies, engage in robust, targeted advocacy, and pursue a more intentional thought-leadership role in order to affect change in the humanitarian field. WRC will also need to expand its traditional donor base to include more European government donors and a more diverse portfolio of foundations, as well as engage with new funding mechanisms and structures to help cushion the effects of expected U.S. government and potential UN funding cuts.
WRC’s Priority Programmatic Themes 2017-2021

To meet the myriad challenges facing the humanitarian system, new models must be developed that emphasize protection, equal access, and opportunity, and they must be based on sound analyses of differing needs and capacities. As an organization focused on improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response, WRC is well placed to lead on how to shape these efforts to best serve the needs of displaced women, adolescents, and youth. WRC has identified two overarching themes, which are prerequisites to reshaping humanitarian response, advancing our mission, and measuring what we achieve:

1. Promoting gender equality in all humanitarian response programming – gender equality that recognizes the diversity within and among genders; acknowledges that, when gender intersects with other social markers (disability, age, displacement, etc.), it results in further marginalization; takes account of power relations; and ultimately pushes for women and girls’ access to and control over resources. The promotion of gender equality in humanitarian response improves program effectiveness, reduces longer term need, ensures equal access and opportunity, and assists with channeling limited resources to the most marginalized.

2. Moving the humanitarian system from a needs-based approach to a strengths-based, resilience approach that uses as a starting point refugees’ capacities rather than their vulnerabilities. Such an approach will engage them not as people with needs to be met but as people with capacities to tap and contribute to responses, solutions, and to host communities.

3. Establishing a measurement and learning framework to capture what we are achieving through our work on the two programmatic priorities above, as well as improving mechanisms to collect, collate, and use data captured across programs. By Year Five of this strategic plan, WRC also plans to have an external evaluation conducted to measure and capture organizational impact across the humanitarian system.
VII. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES

In support of our new strategic plan, WRC is focusing on three strategic priorities for the five-year period FY2018-2022:

**Strategic Priority 1:**

WRC informs and influences the integration and promotion of gender equality in humanitarian contexts to improve outcomes for displaced women, children, and youth. We do so by advocating for a humanitarian response that reflects a rights-based, progressive concept of gender that respects gender diversity, and recognizes and addresses the impact of power relations on access to and control over resources.

**Strategic Priority 2:**

WRC informs and influences the development and implementation of resilience-based approaches in humanitarian settings, to improve outcomes for displaced women, children, and youth. We do this by (i) promoting the inclusion of women, children and youth, in resilience-based approaches and frameworks, and (ii) advocating for humanitarian response that strengthens the capacities of women, children and youth in all their diversity.

**Strategic Priority 3:**

WRC has an organization-wide, cross-departmental planning, measurement and learning framework that clearly integrates the theory of change and allows the organization to monitor progress, identify gaps, learn from its experiences, and make decisions.

These three strategic priorities are complementary and interconnected — one cannot build the resilience of refugee women and girls, for example, if they are not provided the same opportunities as refugee men and boys. Likewise, gender equality cannot be advanced if refugees continue to be seen and treated as merely vulnerable people with needs and without the agency or capacity to act on their own behalf or for their own betterment. And unless we are tracking indicators to measure change in humanitarian response, we will not know if and how our work is leading to systemic change and working effectively to improve the lives of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crisis.

All WRC’s current program areas align with — to various degrees — and drive each of this plan’s strategic priorities. WRC’s adolescent girls work, for example, promotes access and inclusion of adolescent girls, improves their protection and enhances their empowerment, all of which are critical to advance gender equality. WRC’s disability program promotes, advocates, and provides technical assistance and good practice program examples for advancing disability inclusion in all programs and services – viewing persons with disabilities as more than people with needs but as people with capacities that can be strengthened to promote their resilience. Each current program area could be similarly highlighted across one or more of the strategic priorities. Over the course of strategic plan implementation, each program area will continue to strengthen its alignment with the strategic priorities. In addition, funding will be pursued for more direct resourcing for implementation of the strategic priorities, including for allocation of more dedicated staff time to each of the priorities.
**Strategic Priority 1:**

WRC informs and drives the integration and promotion of gender equality in humanitarian contexts to improve outcomes for displaced women, children, and youth. We do this by advocating for a humanitarian response that reflects a rights-based, progressive concept of gender that respects gender diversity, and recognizes and addresses the impact of power relations on access to and control over resources.

**RATIONALE:**

Under established standards, humanitarian response is required to be gender-responsive and promote gender equality. But the gap between this mandate and implementation remains wide, particularly when it comes to advancing a more truly transformative agenda that can challenge existing inequalities and power relations. The gender analyses conducted in humanitarian settings are often overly simplistic and may only engage the most privileged and easily-accessible individuals. These flawed analyses do not adequately inform programming.

To keep faith with its own principles and standards, the humanitarian community must recognize that current policy and programming often leaves behind those most in need of support. A humanitarian response that is accountable and effective must be founded on a holistic understanding and analysis of gender. Gender, and its intersection with age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, ethnicity, and religion, impacts power relations and access to resources and opportunities. Separately or in combination, these factors enhance or threaten an individual’s safety and wellbeing, as well as their ability to realize their rights.

WRC is one of the few humanitarian organizations that has documented the effects of these intersecting identities. Our aim over the next five years is to increase this body of knowledge and step up our advocacy in support of a humanitarian response that is more gender responsive and inclusive for displaced women, children, and youth.

**OUTCOME:** The rights and protection of displaced women, children and youth are enhanced by a humanitarian response that more effectively advances gender equality, inclusion, access, and opportunity for all.

**SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:**

- **Practice:** Actors engaged in humanitarian response and partnering with WRC implement gender analyses in their programs, which incorporate an inclusive understanding of gender equality and diversity. Actors engaged in implementing or advocating for immigrant rights and protection of asylum seekers and refugees consider gender in their around introducing and improving legislation.

- **Policy:** Inter-agency policies and guidance, global policy instruments, and national immigration policy, all incorporate an inclusive understanding of gender equality and diversity. Humanitarian organizations incorporate institutional policies that have an inclusive understanding of gender equality and diversity.

- **Funding:** Five donors require their implementing partners to include gender analyses and/or gender markers that incorporate an inclusive understanding of gender equality and diversity in not only the design but also in the implementation of programs.
KEY ACTIVITIES:

- **Document**, through desk and field research, how gender and gender equality are currently understood and integrated into program design and implementation.

- **Develop** a gender analysis tool and policy paper to promote a more progressive and comprehensive understanding of gender, diversity, and gender equality programming in humanitarian settings.

- **Analyze** proposed legislation on immigration reform, amendments to immigration laws, and access to asylum and legal protection of migrants, with a gender lens. WRC identifies gaps or issues that result in hampered access to protection, proposes solutions and advocates for their implementation.

- **Convene** thought-leaders, experts and stakeholders from humanitarian, development, human rights, academia, and private sector actors to engage, solicit input, and promote uptake.

- **Provide** technical assistance to key actors and conduct missions to advance and evaluate gender equality programming.

- **Produce** a seminal, annual report on the state of the field on gender equality in humanitarian programming.

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**Strategic Priority 2:**

WRC informs and influences the development and implementation of resilience-based approaches in humanitarian settings, to improve outcomes for displaced women, children, and youth. We do this by (i) promoting the inclusion of women, children and youth, in resilience-based approaches and frameworks, and (ii) advocating for humanitarian response that strengthens the capacities of women, children and youth in all their diversity.

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**RATIONALE:**

Humanitarian response only rarely identifies and leverages coping strategies and capacities of women, children, and youth, and certainly falls short of engaging diverse individuals within these groups. As such, populations affected by crisis are viewed as recipients and beneficiaries of aid, rather than as partners, with experience and skills to contribute to their own recovery, resolution to the crisis, and resilience. By shifting humanitarian response to a resilience-based model — one that engages with communities themselves, and specifically women, children, and youth, to develop and implement solutions — the response itself is of higher quality, is more inclusive, embraces concepts of dignity and self-determination, and improves effectiveness and efficiency while improving community and individual level resilience to future shocks. WRC has a long history of working with marginalized population groups and wants to promote the inclusion and capacity of these groups, to build their resilience. Humanitarian programs should provide disenfranchised groups with a greater voice in decisions that affect their lives and communities. Resilience-based approaches must be inclusive of women, children, and youth in all their diversity in order to fully support individuals, households, and communities that build resilience and gradually strengthen assets, skills, and capacities.

**OUTCOME:** Women, children, and youth are safer and more resilient to the stresses and shocks of displacement in humanitarian crises.
SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:

- **Practice:** Actors engaged in humanitarian response and partnering with WRC implement a resilience-based approach in humanitarian settings, which builds on the capacity of and engages women, children, and youth in all their diversity, in all stages of the program cycle.

- **Policy:** Inter-agency policies and guidance, and global policy instruments incorporate resilience-based approaches, which reflect inclusion of women, children, and youth in all their diversity. Humanitarian organizations incorporate resilience-based approaches, which reflect inclusion of women, children, and youth in institutional policies.

- **Funding:** Donors require partners to incorporate resilience-based approaches, building the capacity of, and engaging women, children, and youth in the design and implementation of programs.

KEY ACTIVITIES:

- Conduct a literature review and stock-taking to identify documented resilience-based approaches.

- Undertake field research in at least three humanitarian settings — including domestically with vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers entering the U.S. — to identify good practices for engaging diverse groups of women, children, and youth in resilience-based programming.

- Develop an organizational position paper based on literature review and field research.

- Develop guidance, tools, and resources on the engagement of women, children, and youth in resilience-based programming including resources for the affected populations.

- Provide technical assistance and capacity development using developed resources with at least 10 key partners, including those new to humanitarian response.

- Convene diverse stakeholders and advocate with donors to promote uptake and adopt resilience approaches that effectively strengthen the capacities of women, children, and youth.

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**Strategic Priority 3:**

WRC has an organization-wide, cross-departmental planning, measurement and learning framework that clearly integrates the theory of change and allows the organization to monitor progress, identify gaps, learn from its experiences, and make decisions.

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**RATIONALE:**

Measurement and learning is essential to show that WRC is doing what it says it is doing to and to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders. Measurement and learning are also important to identify WRC progress and challenges, as well as learning which strategies are most effective to achieve organizational and departmental (administrative, advocacy, development, communications, finance, human resources, legal, and programs) commitments.
WRC needs to build its capacity to set measurable objectives with indicators and systematically collect, aggregate, analyze, review, and use data and information collected. This data and information can be used to inform WRC planning, learning, communications, and development, and thereby also contributing to risk mitigation. Program data is also important to capture and articulate success to donors who now require tangible quantitative data to assess impact. Through a better understanding of WRC strengths and weaknesses, we will be equipped to leverage our added value in the changing humanitarian landscape.

**OUTCOME:** WRC becomes a leading measurement and learning organization where data drives internal and external decisions, informs our advocacy, and leads to increased effectiveness of humanitarian response.

**SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:**

WRC data shapes, informs, and provides evidence for the organization’s planning, monitoring, evaluation, advocacy, external communications, and development strategy.

WRC plays a leadership role in documenting global progress on the advancement of gender equality and the use of resilience-based approaches in humanitarian response.

**KEY ACTIVITIES:**

- Capture and consolidate all data collected at the program level, including participant demographic data. Synthesize for use by advocacy, communications, and development.
- Develop and track indicators for monitoring progress on the organization’s gender equality and resilience priorities.
- Utilize data captured on WRC gender equality and resilience strategic priorities to advocate with donors, policymakers, and practitioners for changes in funding, approaches, and practice.
- Conduct an external evaluation of the organization’s effectiveness influencing the broader humanitarian system and progressing toward its mission and vision.

**VIII. ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

With any new strategic plan, there will be implications for how an organization allocates its resources and organizes its systems and structures, including management capacity and human and financial resources. Over the next five years, organizational structure and systems will need to be reviewed and updated as needed to ensure alignment with the strategic plan, so that the plan effectively guides WRC strategy, prioritization, and decisions.

WRC Policy Committee, which is composed of cross-department representation, will oversee implementation of this strategic plan. In addition, working groups have been established for each strategic priority (gender, resilience, and measurement and learning). The working groups will develop annual work plans for their priorities and guide implementation thereof, which will be monitored by the Policy Committee.
• Structure and systems: As WRC moves forward, it will ensure that organizational and department/unit structures align with — and have priorities are driven by — the plan and the strategic priorities. This includes the potential restructuring of the organization; capacity building, training, and other professional development needs of staff; review and reconsideration of WRC’s grants management and sub-granting mechanisms; internal collaboration and coordination across departments; and reviewing financial management systems.

• Business development and fundraising strategy: Fundraising provides an organization with the resources necessary to carry out its mission and overall strategy. A business development strategy, therefore, both informs and is responsive to an organization’s overarching mission, strategic plan, and priorities. Moreover, such a strategy provides a clear and coherent plan to help prioritize funding opportunities and the types of donors that are best suited for WRC. As a result, given the new strategic plan, WRC will develop a new Business Development and Fundraising Strategy that contributes to the strategic plan and its priorities. This strategy will look at WRC’s past fundraising efforts, provide a mapping of potential future donors; articulate fundraising priorities and resources and systems necessary to achieve those priorities; establish a way to track and measure fundraising performance; and present an action plan for operationalizing the strategy.

• Department/unit annual work plans: During the implementation of the FY2018-2022 strategic plan, WRC departments, units, and program areas will develop annual work plans that link with and contribute to the fulfillment of the strategic plan and priorities. To ensure consistency, these work plans will use a template that is common across the organization.

IX. MONITORING AND MANAGING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

As referenced above, one of the most important elements of the strategic plan will be the system that is put in place to monitor and manage progress towards achieving the plan’s objectives. WRC Policy Committee will have overall responsibility for the strategic plan. In addition, the three Strategic Priority Teams (one for each priority) will have responsibility for planning, monitoring, and coordinating execution of the tasks outlined in the strategic priority work plans. Any additional working groups, committees, or teams related to implementing the strategic plan and its priorities will be established as needed.
X. CONCLUSION

This WRC strategic plan will help transform the humanitarian system to make it more effective in advancing our mission to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis.

Moving from simply addressing women’s needs to advancing gender equality will make humanitarian programs and services work better for women and girls; it will also help transform both their communities and the communities that host them, leading to better development outcomes for all. Advanced societies that promote equal educational and economic opportunities for women and girls accelerate economic development, improve security, and encourage reductions in early pregnancy and child marriage.

Similarly, promoting the move from a needs-based approach to a strengths-based approach, which identifies and builds on the capacities and coping strategies of those uprooted, engages populations in contributing to and being part of near and longer-term solutions. Such an approach ends cycles of forced dependency, recognizes refugees’ dignity, builds their agency, and allows humanitarian assistance to be maximized and used more strategically and effectively.

Finally, by measuring and capturing the learning and results of our efforts on the organization-wide priorities, as well as of individual program achievements and impacts, WRC will build evidence of how change is achieved, and how the humanitarian system can be transformed, and using such data to further strengthen our planning, external communications, and advocacy.

Each of these priorities will assist in positioning WRC as a more robust thought leader, increasing our visibility and strengthening our credibility. More importantly, the priorities have the potential to dramatically alter the way humanitarian assistance is delivered and conceptualized, promoting needed changes to make the system work more effectively and efficiently for the displaced women, children, and youth of concern to WRC.

WRC’s strategic plan is a living document that will serve as a guide to the staff and the Board of Directors as we work together to turn these priorities into reality. Board and senior staff will regularly assess progress on the execution of these strategies and make necessary adjustments as circumstances change.

The next five years will be incredibly challenging ones for the humanitarian field as it struggles to help millions more displaced by conflict or uprooted by natural disasters. A more vibrant and impactful Women's Refugee Commission will continue to be at the forefront of improving the lives and protecting the rights of displaced women, children, and youth.