

## International

# For women refugees, finding work is doubly hard: 'You have to fight'

## UN initiative seeks to make over 25 million refugees self-sufficient

**GENEVA:** In the 25 years since she was forced to leave her homeland, Congolese refugee Jacqueline Zandamela has built up her own fashion business and raised four children alone after she was widowed in 2001. It has not been easy.

A housewife until she fled conflict in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo for Mozambique, Zandamela first had to learn Portuguese, then go through the long, bureaucratic process of applying for permission to work. "It was just another reality. Hard. Far from my family," the 52-year-old told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on Wednesday on the sidelines of a United Nations conference on refugees. "When I started to support my family through sewing, I hadn't really thought of setting up a fashion studio. "But because of the demand there was for my clothes, I took on some Mozambicans, and now we have 10 industrial sewing machines and four domestic ones and I work with 11 people."

Finding work is not easy for any refugee, but women say they face particular challenges in accessing jobs, from sexism to the burden of caring for children and elderly relatives. Many come from cultures in which women traditionally have not gone out to work, a problem compounded by issues such as domestic violence and child marriage, which disproportionately affect

refugees as they grapple with poverty and trauma. This week the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a US aid agency, published a study that found women refugees also face significantly higher legal barriers to employment than men. These range from laws that stop women entering certain industries to a failure to mandate equal pay for equal work in many countries that host high numbers of refugees. Some also restrict women's right to work after marriage or childbirth.

Even in Germany, often cited as a model system, just 6 percent of refugee women work, compared to 53 percent of local women, according to the IRC. Anila Noor, a Pakistani refugee in the Netherlands who campaigns for the rights of refugee women, said that for many, even the idea of going out to work was difficult. "My mother thought I'd be married and that's it. And then in Europe they suddenly ask, 'what do you want to do?'. This is a new question for me," she said. "Every time, someone else is deciding for me, and now you're asking what I want to do?"

### Gig economy

IRC President David Miliband said the significant social and economic gains to be had from bringing more refugee women into the workforce meant it was essential to overcome those barriers.



BERLIN: Two women visit the second job fair for migrants and refugees in Berlin, Germany. — Reuters

"It's not good enough just to say there are cultural barriers to refugees working," he said while in Geneva for the Global Refugee Forum, a two-day conference of political, business and humanitarian leaders. "It's really important that we

take advantage both of the traditional jobs, where you've got an employer, but also self-employment, home working, flexible working, and offer real opportunities to turn the gig economy into a lifeline for refugees." — Reuters

## UN hails 'decisive shift' in refugee assistance at global meet

**GENEVA:** The UN hailed Wednesday a "decisive shift" in the approach to helping surging numbers of displaced people, after a summit ended with billions in donations and concrete promises to simplify refugee integration. The Global Refugee Forum, which opened in Geneva on Tuesday, saw high-level speakers like Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan lambast the current lack of international solidarity in caring for the world's some 26 million refugees.

But as the meeting concluded late Wednesday, the UN refugee agency hailed that it had "secured wide-ranging and substantial commitments" to turn the tide.

In all, it said more than 770 pledges were made for financial support but also for things like improving refugee access to employment, education, electricity, infrastructure and promises of more resettlement spots for the most vulnerable. "Refugee situations are crises only when we let them become so, by thinking short term, by failing to plan or work together across sectors, and by neglecting the communities they arrive in," UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi said in the statement.

"At this forum, we have seen a decisive shift towards the longer-term view," he said.

The meeting was the first of its kind, pooling together heads of state, government ministers but also business leaders, humanitarians and refugees themselves. It was convened exactly a year after the UN General Assembly in New York adopted the Global Compact on Refugees—a framework aimed at creating a more predictable and equitable approach to providing assis-

tance to refugees and host communities. At the end of 2018, nearly 71 million people were living in forced displacement due to war, violence and persecution, including nearly 26 million people who had fled across borders as refugees.

### 'Making of success'

With a full 80 percent of the world's refugees living in poor and developing countries, which often feel left to shoulder the heavy economic and societal costs alone, burden-sharing was high on the agenda at the meeting. Erdogan, whose country is the world's biggest refugee host, on Tuesday criticised wealthy nations for setting "tiny" refugee quotas and for not providing enough financial support to Ankara and others accommodating large numbers of displaced people.

Grandi voiced hope Wednesday that the forum had laid the foundation for "better responses to refugee crises", pointing to a broad range of commitments made by governments around the globe.

"The forum has the making of success," he told journalists, stressing though that "to make it a success... is the responsibility of all of us".

UNHCR said it had received a number of major financial pledges, including more than \$4.7 billion by the World Bank Group, and \$1.0 billion from the Inter-American Development Bank.

In addition, a broad range of states and other entities had jointly pledged more than \$2.0 billion to support refugees and host communities. The private sector meanwhile made a wide range of pledges, including funding and initiatives making at least 15,000 jobs available to refugees, as well as some 125,000 hours per year of pro bono legal counselling.

The UN also welcomed that more resettlement spots had been offered in third countries for the most vulnerable people already living as refugees. The European Commission said 30,000 resettlement places had been offered throughout Europe for 2020. UNHCR meanwhile estimates there is a need for 1.44 million resettlement spots worldwide next year. — Reuters

## Trump impeachment based on 'made-up grounds': Putin

**MOSCOW:** Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said that the impeachment of Donald Trump was based on "made-up" grounds, adding he did not believe it marked the end of the US president.

"It still needs to go through the Senate, where the Republicans have a majority," Putin said after the House of Representatives voted to impeach Trump for abuse of power. "And it is hardly likely that they are going to push out of office a representative of their own party, on grounds that are absolutely made-up," he added.

Speaking at his marathon end-of-year news conference, Putin described the events in the US legislature as "simply the continuation of a internal political fight" between Democrats and Republicans.

He reproached the journalist who asked the question for "speaking about Trump as if he is finished". Trump was impeached Wednesday over a telephone conversation where he pressured Ukraine's president to investigate his potential White House challenger in 2020, the veteran Democrat Joe Biden. Putin indicated he believed this was only a pretext used by the Democrats to impeach Trump after failing to corner him over claims that Moscow interfered in the presidential elections that brought him to power. "The Democrats accused Trump of a plot with Russia, and then it emerged that there was no kind of plot. It could not be the basis of an impeachment," said Putin. "Then they thought up some kind of pressure on Ukraine." — AFP