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Presentation slides, "Beauty and Beautification in Refugees' Lives and its Implications for Refugee Policy"

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Beauty &
beautification

in refugees' lives
& its implications for
refugee policy

Beauty

Refugees

Refugees

- **Scale:**
32.5 million refugees
- **Growth:**
Number has doubled in a decade
- **Lack of solutions:**
Each year only found for 2%-3% of refugees

Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>. Retrieved November 23, 2022

Beauty

- **Vivid**

makes the “heart beat faster...life more vivid, animated, living worth living” (Scarry, 2006, p. 25).

- **Hope**

creates a hope for the future that can be experienced in the present (Coleman & Figueroa, 2010).

“means for building a new sensible world” (Rancière, 2009, p. 8)

- **Mysterious**

“a linguistic categorisation of a non-linguistic experience” (Mandoki, 2007, p. 8).

“Beauty is an option
for art and not a
necessary condition.

**But it is not an
option for life.** It is a
necessary condition
for life as we would
want to live it”

Danto, cited in Neumark

If it is **central to the
human experience**
and could be a force
for good **why would
our policies ignore
it?** Is it a luxury only
for those with
permanent places to
call home?

Beauty

Refugees

Beauty

Refugees



Beauty in Refugees' lives?

Questions

- What do refugees do with beauty?
- Is it present in their lives and communities?
- Does it matter? Is there evidence?

Approach

- what beauty *does, not* defining *what it is*.
- loss of/beauty of - physical space & structures
- homemaking

A definition

Beauty

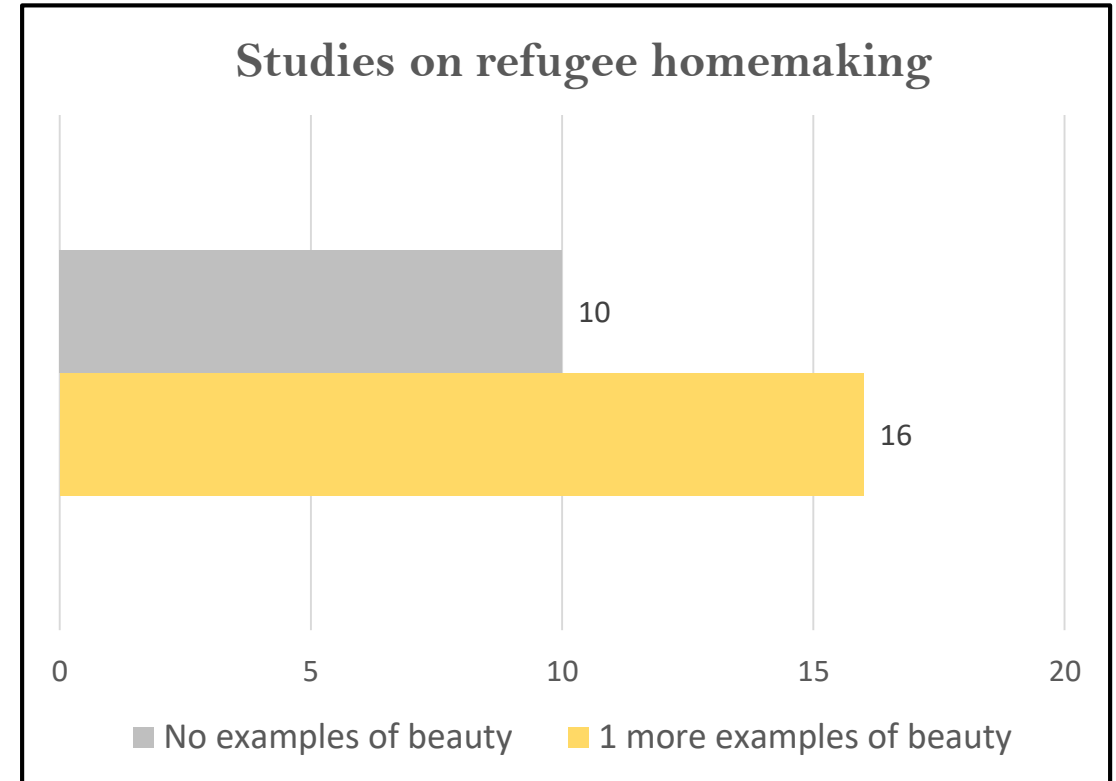
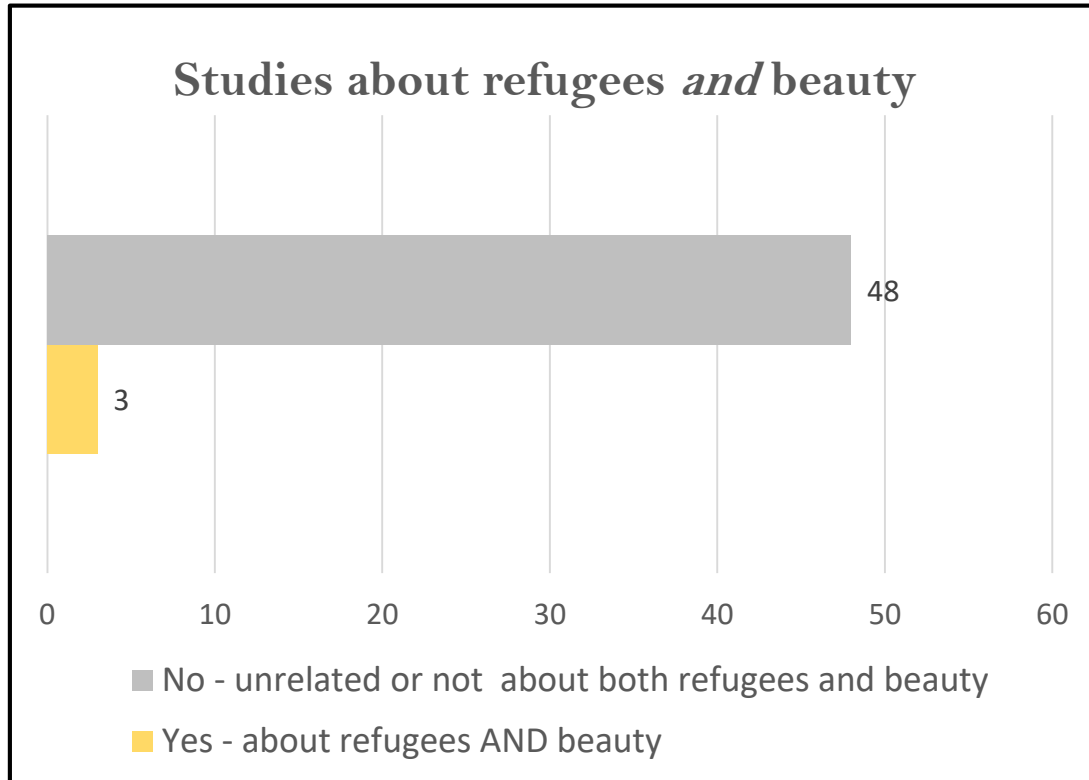
The **qualities** in a person, object, or experience, which tend to be **ornamental, intentional, and/or meaningful**, that **positively advance** the mind, spirit, or soul of an individual or community.

Beautification

The attempt to make sensorial changes to increase these **qualities**.

Are there studies of beauty* among refugees?

Largely no

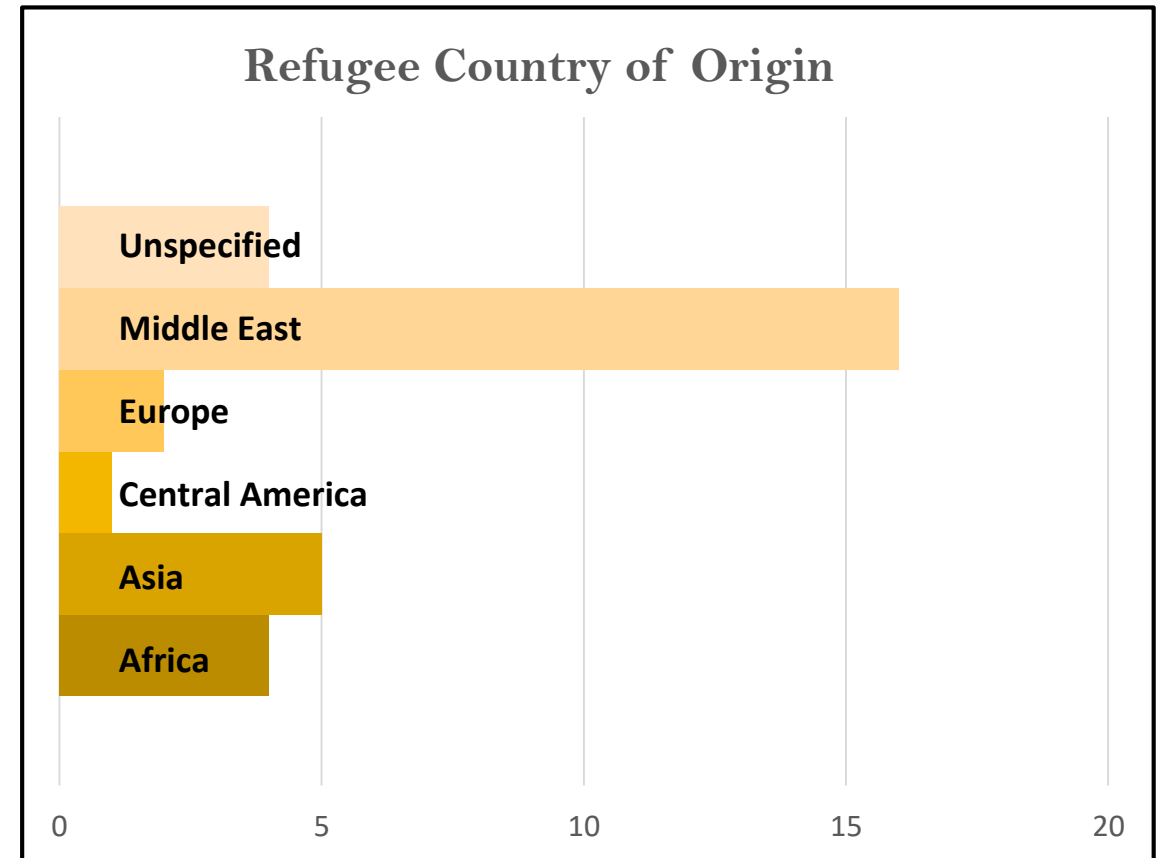
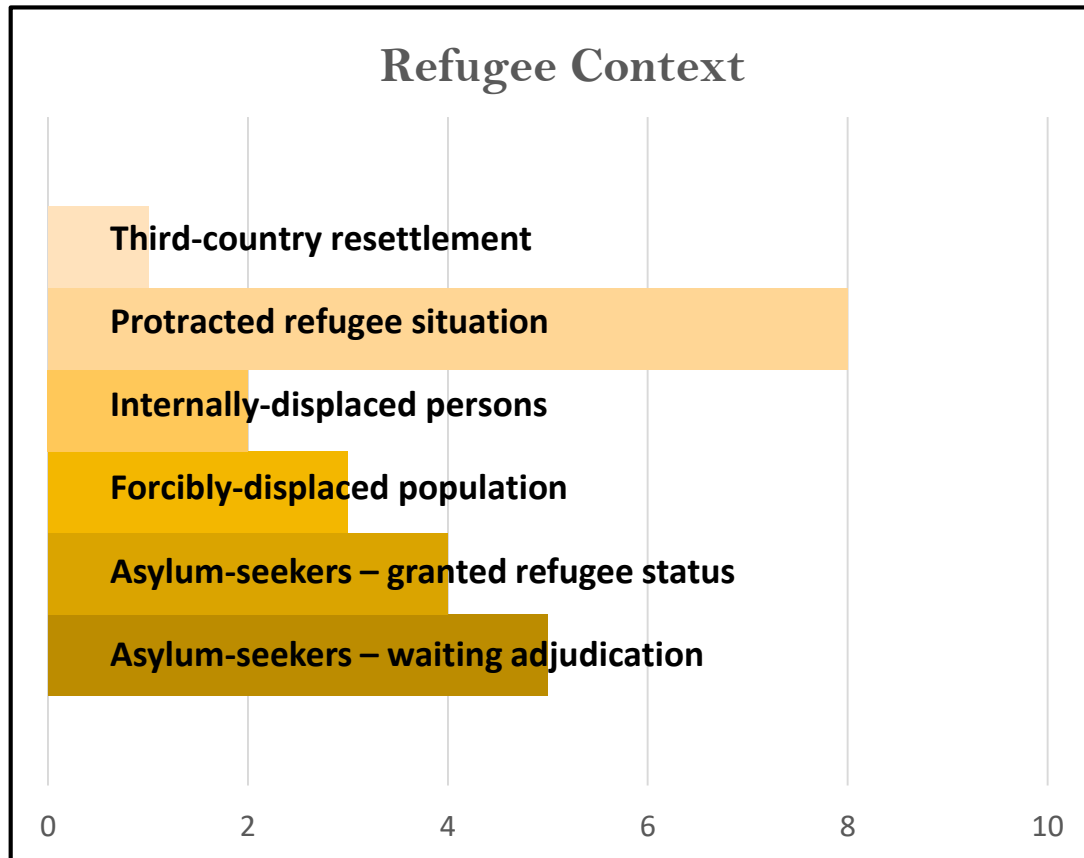


But are there examples of beauty in studies about refugees?

Yes

Where were these examples found?

Among refugees in different legal contexts and from different countries of origin.



Making spaces and structures beautiful

What: cosmetic improvements, renovations, building/creating

When: began in the first few days; continued for quite some time

Where: in temporary & permanent places



“The youths had managed to secure the support ... in order to provide Tempohome residents with furniture, decoration, building materials and tools” (Steigemann & Misselwitz, 2020, p. 643)

“we often encountered freshly tilled soil and recently planted flowers, plants and herbs upon our arrival,... [they] talked about how they had to invest a lot of time and effort into decorating the house... [they] were proud to show us their house and give us a tour...”
(van Liempt & Miellet, 2021, p. 2384)

“All to various levels and degrees, devoted some time, energy and funds to consciously transform their living environments to places with meaning and value.”
(Hadjiyanni, 2009, pp. 544–547)

Using spaces & structures for beauty

Used their physical spaces for sensorial and ornamental rituals associated with hosting, spirituality, and food

Examples

- burning incense
- special tea and coffee in decorative porcelain
- daily prayers on ornate mats
- rearranged for meals and celebrations
- symbols & pictures on street signs
- businesses with decorative banners and music

Its impact

Making home, no matter where

- honoring past and present
- hope for the future, agency in the present
- connection to a collective, cultural community

These acts “reveal the resilience of a need to exert some control over everyday space and time ... [the] ability and desire to make oneself at home...no matter where.”

(Boccagni, 2022a, p. 147).

“establishing a garden, and making the house look nice, people made a place for themselves...and a home that connected with the memories of a past home” (Brun, 2015, p. 50).

These intentional acts of adornment “helped create and strengthen bonds with friends and neighbors,...[and] evoked a sense of community and joy... that [was] crucial to life” as a refugee (Rajan, 2022, p. 10).

Its implications

Beauty can inform how we

- conceptualize policy
- develop policy
- measure and fund policy

But first, a word of caution



Conceptualize

- See beauty as central, not peripheral
- Transform our language used in refugee policy

Develop

- Make refugees the central drivers of policy solutions

Measure

- Measure holistic wellbeing, not simply durable solutions



designated a refugee

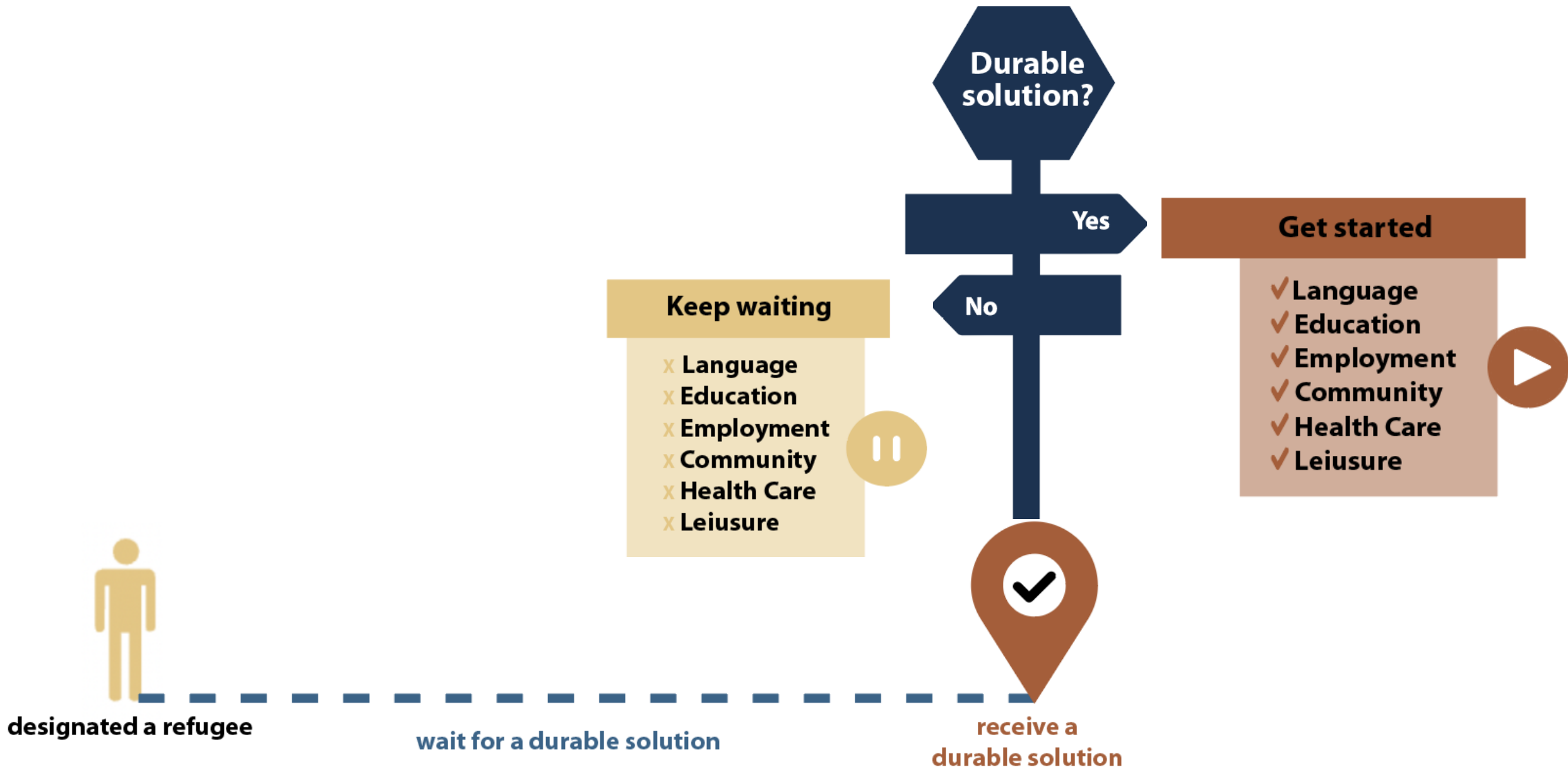
wait for a durable solution

Durable Solution

Life begins again

Life on hold





Where do we go from here?

- Limitations, yes
- Learn more, yes
- Join me, please

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