

RESEARCH BRIEF

WHOSE PROGRESS GETS COUNTED?

Standard impact metrics systematically miss what matters most for displaced populations. A new field-tested framework shows what to measure instead.

120M+

PEOPLE FORCIBLY
DISPLACED GLOBALLY

<5%

RESETTLED
EACH YEAR

10

NON-MONETARY
OUTCOMES
IDENTIFIED &
VALIDATED

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The measurement gap is growing — and the stakes are rising.

Over 120 million people are displaced globally, with fewer than 5% resettled each year. Most spend years or decades in legal limbo — without the right to work, a bank account, or a fixed address. Social enterprises and NGOs serving these populations face mounting pressure from funders to demonstrate quantifiable ROI: income generated, jobs created. This creates a dangerous mismatch: financial metrics designed for stable populations, applied to people in transit, systematically undercount the most durable forms of progress.

This gap is widening. The U.S. resettlement program has effectively closed. Global displacement is expected to grow.

How we define and measure success for these populations is no longer a technical issue. It is a question of whose progress gets counted.

HOW WE LOOKED

Year-long qualitative study with eight Afghan refugee women entrepreneurs in transit in Malaysia. Six rounds of in-depth interviews conducted in Pashto and English, synchronized with milestones in a six-month business training program and continued after its conclusion. Phenomenological and grounded theory methods. Participants averaged 29 years old and had already spent six years in Malaysia at the time of the first interview. None had legal right to work.

WHAT WE FOUND

Most participants did not report significant income from their enterprises. But ten non-monetary outcomes emerged consistently across all six rounds:

TEN NON-MONETARY OUTCOMES — CONSISTENT ACROSS ALL SIX ROUNDS

- Independence & Autonomy
- Confidence & Self-Worth
- Mental Well-Being
- Skills Development
- Social Contribution
- Purpose & Aspirations
- Social Recognition & Belonging
- Family & Spousal Collaboration
- Work-Life Balance
- Adaptability & Resilience

These outcomes emerged progressively — autonomy and confidence first, deeper relational and social outcomes over time — and participants consistently identified them as the most meaningful results of their training. They led to the 3P Framework for evaluating programs serving transitory populations.

THE 3P FRAMEWORK

Three questions that align evaluation with lived displacement.

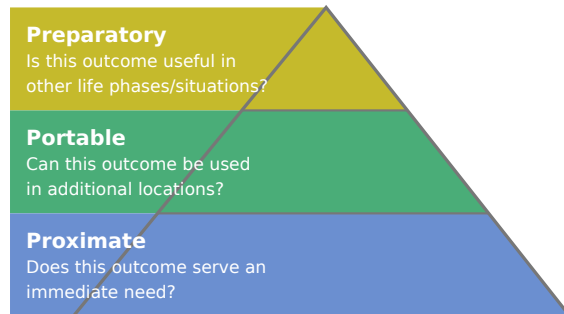


Figure 1. The 3P Framework for Evaluating Social Enterprise Impact

PREPARATORY

Does it hold up next? Adaptability, critical thinking, and life-planning equip people to navigate contexts that cannot yet be defined.

PORTABLE

Does it travel with the person? Skills, confidence, and resilience are internal capabilities that retain value across geographies and legal statuses.

PROXIMATE

Does it meet an immediate need? Stability, safety, and belonging are the foundation without which any longer-term goal remains out of reach.

Liminality is not a temporary disruption. For millions of displaced people, it is a structural condition lasting years or decades.

SEE AROUND IT

Implications for funders, social enterprises, and policymakers.

FOR FUNDERS

Rigid accountability frameworks focused on quantifiable returns may inadvertently distort mission focus. Building flexibility, stage-specific metrics, and participatory assessment into funding agreements will better support adaptive, mission-driven organizations serving mobile populations.

FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Incorporating the 3P dimensions into outcome design — beyond typical economic factors — enables more realistic, inclusive impact reporting that captures what displaced beneficiaries themselves identify as meaningful progress.

FOR POLICYMAKERS

Liminality is not a temporary disruption. For millions of displaced people, it is a structural condition lasting years or decades. Policy instruments should encourage evaluation models that capture outcomes proximate, portable, and preparatory to the lived reality of people in transit.

FULL CHAPTER

Ong, L.L. & Nungsari, M. (2026). "Proximate, Portable, and Preparatory: Non-Monetary Performance Measures for Social Enterprises Working with Transitory Populations." In Pira, M. (Ed.), *Sustainable Business Practices and Social Entrepreneurship*. Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-7437-7_8