UNHCR’S STRATEGY ON ENGAGING WITH DEVELOPMENT ACTORS
The problem UNHCR seeks to solve

By the end of 2022, the world had over 100 million forcibly displaced people. Fewer than 1 million had managed to return home during the year.

Nearly three quarters of people who become refugees, internally displaced or stateless remain in that situation for over a decade. The majority live in low- and middle-income countries, often in areas vulnerable to climate threats or insecurity. Employment opportunities are severely limited for displaced and stateless populations: an estimated 82 per cent of refugees and all stateless people have restricted access to formal employment. Often unable to find formal work, earn an income, and access public services, large numbers of forcibly displaced and stateless populations remain dependent on an increasingly overstretched humanitarian system that was neither designed nor sufficiently funded to provide long-term protection and solutions.
Important progress has been made in recent years by all actors to use more inclusive and sustainable approaches alongside traditional humanitarian interventions in addressing these situations. UNHCR wants to build on this momentum by further deepening its partnerships with development actors, tapping into their expertise and leveraging their financial and technical resources, benefiting both the affected populations and the countries that host them.

This Strategy is grounded in repeated calls for action by the international community. It supports the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to leave no one behind. It follows the multi-stakeholder ethos of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), aiming to ease the pressure on host countries, enhance displaced people’s self-reliance and improve conditions in places of potential return. It also reflects key points of the outcomes of the 2019 Global Refugee Forum and many of the 20 recommendations from the High-Level Officials’ Meeting that followed in 2021.
“The global compact can help attract support to ensure that refugees and their host communities are not left behind in a country’s progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals” (GCR para 64)

As a central component of its Strategic Directions 2022-2026, UNHCR identified eight focus areas for renewed attention and accelerated effort, including “Mainstreaming development engagement in UNHCR responses from the outset”. This Strategy sets out a vision with concrete and prioritized objectives and actions for how UNHCR and development actors can work together until 2026 to support protection, inclusion and solutions for the people UNHCR serves.

UNHCR Strategic Directions focus areas

1. Safeguard international protection, including in the context of mixed movements.
2. Strengthen accountability to the people we serve, especially women and children.
3. Reinforce efforts to strengthen gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response.
4. Expand on, pursue and adapt options for resettlement and complementary pathways.
5. Mainstream development engagement in our responses from the outset, especially by building coalitions with development partners.
7. Redouble efforts on statelessness so that the objectives of the #IBelong campaign are best pursued.
8. Proactively act to mitigate the effects of the climate change crisis on displacement and in line with our protection mandate.
Vision & objectives

UNHCR’s Strategy is centred on a common vision to be achieved in close collaboration with development actors and in support of governments’ efforts.

By 2026, increasing numbers of refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees and stateless people are able to enjoy their rights and are socially and economically empowered with the means to be self-reliant and to contribute to sustainable development.
In order to realize this vision and progress towards solutions, UNHCR has set four objectives to be achieved by the end of 2026:

**OBJECTIVE 1**

**Increased commitment to protection and inclusion.**

*Our ask to development actors:* UNHCR strives to foster a more predictable dialogue between all actors, in particular governments, the private sector, and development partners, to share responsibilities more equitably in support of refugees, IDPs, returnees, stateless people and their host communities. At the 2019 Global Refugee Forum and the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness, States pledged to provide forcibly displaced and stateless people with greater access to rights. Development partners are invited to step up support to States in the implementation of these pledges. Development partners are also encouraged to routinely engage in policy dialogue for, and offer technical assistance on, the removal of policy and other barriers that prevent forcibly displaced and stateless communities from realizing their rights and full potential to contribute to societies.
At the first Global Refugee Forum, Mauritania made four far-reaching commitments to provide refugees with access to rights and related services on the same basis as nationals. Starting in 2020, refugees are being gradually included in the national systems for health, social protection, water and sanitation, and urban planning. UNHCR is working closely with development partners, including the World Bank, GIZ, the African Development Bank and the European Commission to support central, regional and local authorities in these inclusion efforts.

“Inclusion is one of the best forms of protection. And inclusion – in societies, in services, in the economy – is often obtained or facilitated by development.”

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, during the biennial High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges: Development Cooperation. 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland.
Two years after the Global Refugee Forum, Rwanda showed how inclusive policies in education, health and livelihoods could unlock the potential of refugees and their hosts.

“Rwanda has done an excellent job integrating refugees in the national education system, including urban refugees in the national community-based health insurance plan, providing them with national ID cards and offering them livelihoods opportunities.”

Nayana Bose, UNHCR’s Comprehensive Refugee Response Officer based in Kigali

Increased proportions of forcibly displaced and stateless populations and host communities have equitable access to public services.

Our ask to development actors: UNHCR seeks to achieve a significant increase in investments to areas hosting refugees, IDPs and stateless people, and the gradual transition from humanitarian to national services. Development actors may wish to consider supporting governments by arranging loans, grants and other instruments that explicitly include displaced communities and local populations, and by strengthening the standards and capacities of national services. Technical assistance on formulating national development plans and the inclusion of these populations in key sectors such as education, health, justice, social welfare and civil registration could also be considered.

At Mugombwa refugee camp in Rwanda, Clementine works alongside her Rwandan neighbours at the Misizi Marshlands project, an agricultural initiative funded by Denmark and the IKEA Foundation and supported by the Government of Rwanda. The programme allocated over 50 hectares of land for some 1,400 refugees and Rwandans to farm together.
UNHCR, together with the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the East African Community (EAC) launched a project to enhance the investment climate in refugee and IDP-hosting and return areas in the East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region in July 2022. The project addresses barriers that hinder the economic empowerment of refugees, returnees and their host communities.

“Supporting investment climate reforms is not only a catalyst for private sector participation in refugee hosting and return areas, but also builds resilience and increases economic empowerment of refugees, returnees and host communities.”

Nnenna Nwabufo, AfDB’s Director-General for East Africa

OBJECTIVE 3

Increased proportions of forcibly displaced and stateless populations and host communities have access to economic activities and employment opportunities.

Our ask to development actors: Development actors and the private sector are invited to leverage their comparative advantages in supporting agricultural production, viable market systems, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities, paving the way for inclusion into labour markets and promoting active contribution to local economies. Development actors are also encouraged to support governments, private sector and other relevant actors to provide and scale up access to financial services and training to forcibly displaced, stateless and host communities. Development actors and the private sector can as well play a critical role in creating and scaling labour mobility opportunities.

1 See also https://www.jointdatacenter.org/labor-market-access-and-outcomes-for-refugees/. This Joint Data Center Quarterly Digest (Jan. 2023) discusses the barriers that host governments impose on refugees’ labor market access and reviews the academic research on the effects of these policies and practices have on refugees and host communities.
Increased proportions of refugees and IDPs can return voluntarily to areas where they are able to live self-sufficiently.

Our ask to development actors: UNHCR strives to attract a significant increase in investments by development and peacebuilding partners in areas of return. Where conditions allow, development actors may wish to strengthen their engagement on issues that are crucial for voluntary and safe return, such as the restoration or scaling up of public services, livelihoods and economic opportunities, specifically on housing, land and property rights and access to justice. UNHCR’s data on the intention of affected populations to return, countries of origin and specific locations of return is available to assist in the assessment and planning processes.

UNHCR and the European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA) support the Solutions Initiative for Sudan and South Sudan through community-based assessments in areas of return, representing “pockets of hope”. This includes conducting intention surveys that inform planning and durable solutions and gathering information on conditions of return, which supports evidence-driven planning for return and reintegration. It also involves providing legal and documentary assistance and support to a reception centre to facilitate access to services for refugee returnees.
What is UNHCR’s commitment?

UNHCR will prioritize the following five actions at the operational, regional and headquarters levels in support of the above objectives. Contextualization of these actions in a particular country will depend on the operational environment as well as presence and level of engagement of development actors.

Joint impactful advocacy

Leveraging development actors’ technical and financial capacity

Programming across the nexus

Joint evidence generation

Deeper partnerships with UN agencies
1. Joint impactful advocacy

**What we will do differently:** UNHCR will more systematically engage development actors on co-creating advocacy messages for the protection of forcibly displaced and stateless people and their inclusion in public services and socioeconomic opportunities through policy dialogues with governments. UNHCR will improve its own protection data and analysis to inform dialogues, investments and advocacy.

2. Leveraging development actors’ technical and financial capacity

**What we will do differently:** UNHCR will work with development actors to further increase the number of such partners who integrate forced displacement into their work, establish dedicated financial instruments, or allocate an increased percentage of assistance to address forced displacement. UNHCR is working with the OECD DAC and its members to establish a system that tracks ODA financing to forced displacement situations. UNHCR will use this data, *inter alia*, in its own multi-year plans. In addition, UNHCR will increase the number of strategic discussions with development partners at regional and country level on policy, financing and data. UNHCR and development actors have already achieved transformational change through growing partnerships in many regional and national contexts. The OECD estimates that approximately $3.3 billion of bilateral development funds are directed to refugee situations each year.

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In 2018-2019, $24.2 billion of ODA, 6.7% of the total, was allocated to refugee situations. 29% of this was development funding and 71% humanitarian funding.

3. Programming across the nexus

What we will do differently: UNHCR aims to facilitate transition from humanitarian assistance to development programming by investing in projects that benefit people living within a geographic area, regardless of their legal status, and transition to, in the medium to long-term to governments, with the support of development actors. Projects should be implemented at local levels under government leadership and supported by development interventions, as necessary.

4. Joint evidence generation

What we will do differently: UNHCR will further strengthen its work with governments, research institutions and development partners to systematically generate data that shows the costs and benefits of hosting refugees and receiving returnees, especially with regard to labour market, access to services, prices, housing and other relevant sectors of inclusion. Together with its partners, UNHCR will also work to ensure that refugees, IDPs and stateless people are included in national statistics, including censuses, household surveys and administrative data.

The Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement is a partnership of the World Bank and UNHCR. It works to enable sustainable change for affected populations by improving the evidence-base for national policy, development and humanitarian operations.

5. Deeper partnerships with UN agencies

What we will do differently: At the global level, and in line with the GCR, UNHCR is advocating for comprehensive responses by UN sister agencies to situations of forced displacement. At the country level, UNHCR will work with Resident Coordinators and their offices to rally the UN development system to support governments efforts towards the long-term development needs of forcibly displaced, stateless and host communities. UNHCR will continue to systematically engage in the elaboration of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) at the country level to adequately reflect the specific needs of forcibly displaced and stateless populations. In addition, UNHCR will work closely with UN Development Agencies to ensure that their country programmes contribute to progress towards the inclusion agenda.
Strengthening municipal resilience in response to the impact of the Syria crisis in Türkiye

Under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), a multi-stakeholder collaboration brings together humanitarian and development actors to complement the Government of Türkiye’s strong leadership. Agencies support municipalities in distinct but complementary ways. For example, UNDP and IOM develop programmes on municipal service delivery, infrastructure and inclusion; UNHCR and the World Academy of Local Government and Democracy focus on social protection and coordination support; UNICEF supports municipal staff on child rights, participation and policy development; UNFPA works on improving the employability and inclusion of vulnerable women and youth; ILO promotes access to decent work and inclusive economic growth underpinned by decent work principles; and GIZ works on building the resilience of refugees and the host community.

While their parents are at the vocational training courses to learn skills such as Turkish language, cooking and sewing, Syrian children living in Ankara participate in a drawing activity at the UNHCR-supported vocational training centre, run in coordination with the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality.

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What will success look like?

UNHCR has set out an ambitious strategy in leveraging its partnerships with development actors in support of governments and populations affected by forced displacement.

It hopes that the common vision of enabling refugee, internally displaced, stateless and host communities to enjoy their rights, and socially and economically empowering them to become self-reliant and agents of sustainable development, will galvanize all stakeholders in the pursuit of the objectives of the GCR.²

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2 Progress towards their realization of the GCR will be measured at the Global Refugee Forum and High-Level Officials Meeting. The GCR Indicator Framework will guide UNHCR, States and development partners in assessing the cumulative actions of all stakeholders.
Displaced people install new street lights at the Corrane site for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Nampula Province, Mozambique. They have been trained to work with electrical systems through a project funded by UNHCR and partners.

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