

**“Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”
March 2023**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereinafter referred to as UNHCR) refers to the letter dated 05 December 2022 by which it was invited to provide substantive inputs to the 2023 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on its review of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure); 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (on partnership for the goals) and the 2022 theme.

(a) Progress, experience, lesson learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6,7,9,11 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs

A core principle of the 2030 Agenda is to Leave No One Behind, a commitment to make concerted efforts to identify and lift-up the most vulnerable that societies so often miss and “*a conditio sine qua non*” for its full implementation. Refugees and stateless persons are among those furthest behind. Approximately **74% of refugees** live in low and middle income and **27%** in least developed countries.

2022 has witnessed the highest number of people forced to flee war, violence and persecution worldwide, reaching a staggering **103 million people**. The international community has so far been unable to resolve the root causes of forced displacement; the absence of peace and security, combined with the accelerating impacts of the climate emergency, the debt crisis, global impacts of the war in Ukraine including the spiraling costs of living, mean that reaching the SDGs by 2030 will be an exceedingly difficult goal to achieve.

[2023 is a moment of truth for global displacement](#) and for the SDGs. The SDG Summit in September and the [Global Refugee Forum](#) in December will provide a key opportunity to take decisive action towards sharing responsibility for the protection and wellbeing of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in a more equitable manner, and making progress towards including and giving agency to refugees, as one of the most vulnerable groups in society.

(b) Three key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and three key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023

1) Leave no one behind

80% of refugees and 70% of internally displaced persons are from **highly climate vulnerable** countries. Climate change amplifies inequality. Without a concerted, integrated response from the international community, UNHCR anticipates that the number of persons forced to flee will continue to increase, as new emergencies overlap with existing ones. **Forced displacement is not solely a humanitarian concern; it is equally a development challenge, with long-term economic and social impacts.**

Social and economic inclusion implies giving all members of society, including non-citizens and vulnerable and underserved groups, access to labor markets, finance, entrepreneurial expertise, and economic opportunities. Economic inclusion starts from the moment an influx begins (both internal displacement and refugee settings); if humanitarian assistance and development interventions and access to basic rights, especially education, are facilitated and supported from the start, refugees experience better outcomes in later phases of displacement.

Access to and participation in market systems (through wage or self-employment, for example) depends not just on access to finance, training, education at all levels, coaching, job placement, and other support services, but also on the presence of an enabling environment with rules and regulations to protect rights and offer security. **Refugees who enjoy economic inclusion are more likely to be self-reliant and resilient, to meet their needs in a safe, sustainable, and dignified manner, to avoid aid-dependency and reliance on negative coping mechanisms, to contribute to their host economies, and to be prepared for their future, whether they return home, integrate in their country of asylum, or resettle in a third country.**

2) Eradication of Poverty and socioeconomic inclusion

Continued efforts to promote inclusion, as well as targeted support are needed to promote refugees' self-reliance and address poverty among refugees. **Policies to enhance freedom of movement, the right to work, property rights, and other aspects of the regulatory and institutional environment are especially important where refugees find themselves in unsustainable or economically dependent situations.** There has been progress on livelihoods, with three-quarters of refugees in countries surveyed having legal access to key attributes of decent work¹. However, in practice, access to decent work often remains limited, due to high unemployment rates, risks linked to participation in informal economies, administrative challenges, and other barriers. While participation in the social and economic life of host countries also depends on freedom of movement and choice of residence, one-third of refugees globally do not enjoy freedom of movement under existing regulations. In addition, self-reliance and resilience of both refugees and host communities have deteriorated during Covid-19 pandemic. **A growing body of evidence shows that mitigating the long-term socioeconomic impacts of forced displacement and addressing poverty, require a strong focus on access to and inclusion in health care systems (including mental health), education and basic services, particularly for women and children².**

Quality socioeconomic data is necessary for engaging governments and development organizations to plan and sustainably finance programmes that promote resilience: supporting outcomes related to employment, education, social protection and wider human development objectives described in the Sustainable Development Goals, among others. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic shocks have specifically impacted the most vulnerable in society including people forcibly displaced, as illustrated by socioeconomic data. The analysis of these data must inform evidence-based and inclusive responses, Thus, understanding the socioeconomic recovery of forcibly displaced and stateless communities, compared to host communities, is necessary to inform actions towards inclusive and equitable recovery.

¹ [UNHCR 2021 Global Compact on Refugees – Indicator Report 2021](#) (page 13)

² [UNHCR 2021 Global Compact on Refugees – Indicator Report 2021](#) (page 7)

3) Localization

Local communities, including host communities and those made up of refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons, are often the first responders in crises, providing support and services from the onset of an emergency, as the COVID-19 pandemic has amply demonstrated. **Community members are most knowledgeable about their own needs, and the best advisers on appropriate local responses.**

However, **local actors** - including organizations led by refugees, IDPs, stateless persons, women or youth – face challenges in accessing predictable, flexible core funding and/or international and national funding streams; they also face obstacles in being recognized and visible as key stakeholder in decision making fora.

Local authorities and municipalities are not systematically included in planning or national and global policy-making forums, and as a result, coordination and resourcing are seldom sufficient at the municipal level. Key to addressing these gaps are:

- Comprehensive frameworks involving local authorities in planning processes to facilitate coordination and adequate resourcing.
- Financing mechanisms accessible to local, community-based actors, acknowledging local expertise, boosting local capacity and strengthening agency.

(c) Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerated progress towards multiple SDG targets including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs

SDG 6

The COVID-19 pandemic brought increased attention to the importance of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services for the health, wellbeing and protection of refugees, including in the recovery phase.

Currently, **UNHCR delivers WASH services in 29 countries to over 4,4 million refugees in over 150 settlements.** An average of 19 liters of water per person per day is provided, and only at 39% of settlements the UNHCR minimum standard of 20 liters/person/day met. On average 14 people share 1 toilet. Targets are not reached in many settlements and without sustainable, long-term responses, the 2030 target of SDG 6 will not be met for millions of refugees and their hosting communities. Further, millions of refugees under UNHCR's mandate reside in countries with high risk of floods and/or droughts, creating additional challenges in the provision of sustainable WASH services and reaching the targets of SDG6.

ON a more positive note; UNHCR WASH programmes aim to enhance the resilience of refugees to climate-related and other environmental risks, while also preserving the natural environment and mitigating environmental degradation in displacement settings. **46% of boreholes providing water to refugees are solarized**, and UNHCR is committed to transition away from fossil fuel in order to further mitigate the climate impacts of UNHCR WASH programmes. Efforts are underway to speed up the solarization of boreholes, enhance sustainable use of groundwater resources and improve efficiency of water delivery.

SDG 7

Reliable access to electricity is required to deliver quality health services, including to prevent nosocomial infections, to strengthen hygiene practices and help reduce mortality and morbidity. UNHCR is investing in the use of renewable energy sources: based on data from surveyed health care facilities supported by UNHCR, **44% of health care facilities are solarized. Some 41% are in immediate need of improved access to sustainable energy**, thus requiring further commitments and cooperation to facilitate such access.

In some 20 countries UNHCR provides cooking solutions to refugees, addressing context-specific needs in line with cultural preferences, existing resources, environmental considerations, and supply availability. For example, the **Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) programme implemented by UNHCR enabled 68% of refugees in Rwanda to access clean cooking in 2022, increasing from the 50% in 2021.**

However, currently only an estimated 15% of refugees have access to clean cooking. Continuous efforts are needed to facilitate access to cleaner and safer energy sources for cooking. Furthermore, UNHCR is supporting refugee access to clean energy sources for lighting and electricity. For example, a joint intervention by GIZ, UNHCR and other donors provides solar electricity to more than 14'000 refugees in Kalobeyei Settlement, Kenya.

SDG 11

Local communities, including refugee, internally displaced and stateless communities are often the first responders in crises and provide support and services from the onset of an emergency, as demonstrated in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community members are the most knowledgeable about their own needs, and the best advisers on what approaches are appropriate in their context. UNHCR established a representative and inclusive [Advisory Board](#), consisting of 16 organizations-led by refugees, IDPs, stateless people, women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities, and other diverse groups from all seven regions where UNHCR works. The Board will advise over the next two years (2023-2024) on how to strengthen UNHCR partnerships with organizations led by forcibly displaced persons.

in 2022, UNHCR disbursed \$850 million to 1,043 local and national partners, some 24 percent of overall programme expenditures. Local and national responders made up 84% of UNHCR partners (a 1% increase from the previous year) and received more than 58% of the overall funding UNHCR provided to partners (up 4% from 2021)³.

Additionally, UNHCR launched the **Refugee-Led Innovation Fund**, supporting innovation by organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people. The fund provides comprehensive support, including financial resources (up to US\$ 45,000 per supported project), mentoring, and technical expertise to both registered and unregistered organizations. More information can be found [here](#).

³ The drop in the proportion of overall global programme expenditure implemented by partners – both local and international – was due to the Ukraine Situation, where UNHCR directly procured and delivered very large-scale cash and relief items assistance programmes. Discounting the Ukraine situation from the overall calculation, an estimated 29% of UNHCR global programme expenditure was implemented through local and national responders. Final expenditure figures will only be available in May 2023 after the closure of prior year accounts.

UNHCR country operations with large urban refugee populations continue to collaborate with local authorities and support their efforts as frontline responders and service providers in refugee situations. UNHCR country operations partner with local authorities on refugee inclusion through initiatives such as the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions ("MIRPS") Platform, and Cities of Solidarity in the Americas. Multiple UNHCR Country Operations implement strategies for engagement with local authorities, including Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Caribbean, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Georgia, Greece, Iraq, Italy, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Turkey, Ukraine, United States, and more.

Thirty-six new pledges were made through the [Call to Local Action](#) by cities in the Americas, Mena, Asia, Africa, and Europe in areas of financial inclusion, climate change mitigation, as well as new programmes increasing access for refugees in areas of nutrition, health and education. This call enables cities to make pledges towards the objectives of the Global Compact for Refugees.

UNHCR is a strategic partner in the Global Cities funds which has provided \$200,000 to 21 cities since its launch. The [Mayors Migration Councils'](#) \$3M Global Cities Fund is funded by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation (BvLF) and Hilton Foundation.

The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) launched their [Online Course on Local and territorial Approaches to Migration and Displacement](#) on how local and regional governments can implement the Global Compact on Refugee (GCR) and on Migration (GCM) with the inputs of UNHCR, IOM, and the Mayor Migration Council. This course will be disseminated through platforms such as the UN Network Core Working Group on National Implementation, UN Network Executive Committee and GCM Champion Country work.

UNHCR launched a toolkit called [UNHCR - Effective Inclusion of Refugees: participatory approaches for practitioners at the local level](#) —which provides local authorities engaged in refugee integration with practical checklists, good practices and step-by-step questions that can be used when designing or evaluating new measures

Cities continue to be encouraged to participate in the [Cities #WithRefugees](#) initiative, which has brought together more than 285 cities in 50 countries, calling on local authorities and municipalities to welcome and include refugees in their communities.

(d) Assessment of the situation mid-point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Below is a graphic that highlights the situation mid-point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In summary - while efforts to include refugees in national education and health systems have seen progress, other areas like economic inclusion – from right to work and access to formal employment to access to credit, need much more support.






UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

LIVE NO ONE BEHIND BY NUMBERS (source UNHCR Global Appeal 2023)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 18 UNHCR operations signaling a high risk of an emergency potentially leading to new or escalated displacement ✓ An estimated 117.2 million people will be forcibly displaced or stateless in 2023 ✓ 74% of refugees are hosted in low- or middle-income countries ✓ 27% are hosted in Least Developed Countries ✓ 20 States still have not acceded to either of the two statelessness conventions.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 11 million refugees are receiving humanitarian assistance to meet their food and nutrition needs ✓ Due to funding shortfalls, refugees in 15 countries are facing cuts to food assistance and experiencing high levels of food insecurity. ✓ Acute, chronic and micronutrient malnutrition remain above emergency thresholds, a serious public health concern in refugee populations in several countries ✓ 60% of refugees live in countries restricting their access to land, which would allow them to cover their food and nutrition needs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 92% (of 48 operations surveyed) report refugees having access to national primary health care facilities under the same conditions as nationals ✓ 96% reporting refugees having access to all relevant vaccines under the same conditions as nationals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 42% of refugee children are enrolled in pre-primary level; ✓ 68% of refugee children are enrolled in primary education; ✓ 37 % of refugees are enrolled in secondary education ✓ 6% in higher education ✓ Refugee boys do slightly better than girls in terms of enrolment, with 68 to 67 per cent at primary level and 36 to 34 at secondary.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ An estimated 1 in 5 forcibly displaced women experience sexual violence and a 20% increased risk of intimate partner violence ✓ 67% of refugee girls are enrolled in primary level, and 34% at secondary level ✓ 24 countries are still now allowing women to confer nationality to their children
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Over 8 million forcibly displaced will rely on humanitarian partners to access basic water, sanitation and hygiene services
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Currently only an estimated 15% of refugees have access to clean cooking. Continuous efforts are needed to facilitate access to cleaner and safer energy sources for cooking.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Refugees do not have the right to work in 50% of the asylum countries ✓ 49% of refugees live in countries restricting rights to register and operate a business ✓ 56% of refugees live in countries where the legislation does not recognize UNHCR or government-issued ID as a valid document to open a bank account ✓ 60% of refugees live in countries where they have restricted right to access land for agriculture ✓ 62% of refugees live in countries with restricted access in practice to formal employment business
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 149 states are party to 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol; 96 states to the 1954 Convention; 78 to the 1961 Convention
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Majority of forcibly displaced settle in congested, underdeveloped areas, in houses offering substandard living conditions

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 23 million people displaced within 137 countries and territories by extreme weather in 2021 alone ✓ 80% of refugees and displaced come from the most climate vulnerable countries
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In some emergency situations, 90% of those forced to flee are women and children ✓ Some 2million refugees will need resettlement or complementary pathways ✓ Stateless people will pass 5 million in 2023
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Local actors, including organization led by refugees, women or youth cannot access predictable, flexible core funding, meaningfully participate in decision making processes and be visible⁴.

At the 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF), the international community came together to demonstrate solidarity with refugees and their hosting countries and communities. Through stakeholder pledges, the GRF mobilized support to empower and include refugees and achieve tangible benefits for them and host communities.

The SG and the UN’s Emergency Relief Coordinator committed UN entities to systematically include refugees in their analyses and plans, working towards their inclusion in national systems. 15 UN entities pledged and stepped up their inclusion of refugees, as documented in a [stocktaking report, assessing implementation of these common pledges](#).

Moving towards the 2023 GRF, over 20 UN entities are co-creating a “[UN common Pledge 2.0](#)”, expanding their support to host communities and accelerating refugee inclusion, thereby contributing to the SDGs. UNCTs are contributing to refugee inclusion through country-specific, collective commitments, led by RCs. The Pledge co-creation process is co-led by DCO, OCHA and UNHCR, and started with an Innovation Lab in January 2023.

The UN Common Pledge’s primary objective is refugee inclusion and leaving no one behind, through measurable actions to improve access to national services and social safety nets for refugees. It will positively contribute towards achieving several of the SDGs, particularly **SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 10**. The Common Pledge structure requires co-creation with a wide stakeholder group led by the UN but inclusive of donors, refugees, host countries and communities. This is a strong example of creative multilateralism and partnership, actively contributing to **SDG 17**. The Common Pledge initiative is part of a broader pledging initiative under the Global Compact on Refugees which has so far seen **1,685 pledges, touching upon all the SDGs in general, and SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 16 and 17 in particular**.

(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit

- **Socioeconomic inclusion of refugees, and their inclusion in national systems (such as health or education) and social safety nets (such as health insurance), improves refugee lives, and accelerates the achievements of the SDGs for all.**
- **When meaningfully included, refugees contribute to solving sustainable development challenges in their host communities, as educators, entrepreneurs, climate activists and health care workers, among others.**

⁴ Listed as challenges by over 3100 participants from local actors communities in the [UNHCR NGO Regional Consultations](#),“ localization of humanitarian action and engagement with communities in the COVID-19 context:

- **While refugee-hosting countries often benefit economically from the contributions of refugees in the long term, they continue to need international solidarity and support, both to respond to immediate needs, and with adaptation of their national systems to make refugee inclusion possible.**

Inclusive development, with refugees and their host communities contributing to and sharing in a country's progress towards the SDGs, requires:

- A. Economic Inclusion.** Self-reliance of refugees so that they can also contribute to economic prosperity of their host communities requires upholding, promoting, and recognizing the right to work of refugees, by removing obstacles and bottlenecks in accessing formal employment; with flexibility in existing accreditation systems and certification. When refugees are allowed to work, their diverse skills and talents contribute to the wellbeing of their host communities and to thriving local economies. For example, during the pandemic, refugees played an active part in the fight against COVID-19 as [frontline health workers](#), educators, volunteers and awareness-raisers. Several countries appealed for refugee health professionals to join national health responses and several others eased or accelerated residency and licensing requirements to allow foreign-trained refugee doctors and nurses to [join COVID-19 responses](#).
- B. Legal Inclusion.** Access to justice is crucial for refugee inclusion. This includes access to recourse in case of discrimination, extortion and abuse as well as the ability to access identity and other legal documentation, such as birth certificates. Documentation is required in relation to essential aspects of life, from determining when you are born, to confirming marriage, immigration status, necessary for employment, housing, education, accessing social benefits or credit, and formal education.
- C. Inclusion in national Education systems.** Education is a basic right enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Education protects refugee children and youth from forced recruitment, child labor, sexual exploitation and provides them with the skills and knowledge to contribute meaningfully to their communities and live fulfilling lives. Refugee learners must be included at every point in the education cycle, with their specific needs recognized and addressed. Without refugee inclusion in national education systems, SDG 4 will not be fulfilled.
- D. Inclusion in national Health systems.** Refugees must be included in national health systems and have access to all areas of health care, including psychosocial care, without discrimination. This includes primary health care and referral for secondary health care; community health; noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) Prevention and Treatment; communicable diseases prevention and treatment; immunization; essential medicines, medical supplies and equipment. Practical and legal obstacles to refugee access to national health systems must be addressed.
- E. Inclusion in national Social Protection programmes.** Social Safety nets help to alleviate poverty and social exclusion. Inclusion in national social protection programmes can help prevent refugee families and children from falling even

further behind. Inclusion in, for example, cash-based social safety nets, or health insurance programmes, has offered a lifeline to refugees in an increasing number of countries, and access to such programmes for refugees must be expanded further.

- F. Inclusive Climate Action.** Refugees and displaced people are among those most exposed to the climate crisis. Many are seeking safety in countries that have not contributed much to the causes of climate change, yet often have the least resources to adapt to its consequences. Displaced people possess knowledge and capacities critical to effective and inclusive climate action, but all too often they are left out of the global conversation. Their inclusion and meaningful participation in policy processes and lifesaving decisions is both their right and necessary for impactful, inclusive, local solutions in response to the climate crisis.

- G. Data Inclusion.** Refugee inclusion in census exercises must be ensured as much as possible, as well as the availability of data disaggregated by age, gender, and geographical location. Priorities must be defined based on data and evidence. Including refugees in national statistics benefits refugees and host communities in national and development plans and responses.