



## Energy Access in Humanitarian Settings

More than 59.5 million people are displaced from their homes due to conflict, war, and disaster. Of these, 19.5 million are refugees living outside their home nation and 38.2 million are internally displaced people (IDPs) who remain in their own countries but are forced to leave their homes. They leave with few possessions and in fear of their lives. Some find refuge in official camps; others in the homes of distant family or friends.

Most of the food provided by humanitarian agencies must be cooked before it can be eaten, but cookstoves and fuel are rarely provided. As a result, women and children must risk their safety, health, and sometimes their lives, to search for and collect firewood in order to cook food over smoky, polluting open fires. In many cases, displaced women walk for hours to find firewood and have to carry heavy loads back to camp, which puts them at risk for physical and sexual attack, dehydration, and physical injuries. At night, lack of access to lighting further increases women's vulnerability when navigating camps to use latrines and other services.

Women and children are also exposed to health risks, including respiratory infections from smoke produced by inefficient stoves and fuels such as firewood. Children who collect firewood, or accompany their mothers, cannot attend school. Refugees may also engage in coping strategies, such as survival sex or

selling food rations, to be able to afford cooking fuel. Such coping mechanisms can have serious consequences, including malnutrition and the loss of livelihood options, and is a risk to personal safety and dignity.

In situations where firewood is the main source of fuel, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, the competition for dwindling natural resources is a trigger for tension between refugees and host communities.

*The only security issues in Geti are if we go far out to find firewood or foraging in the forest for food – then we fear being raped, especially if we're alone, and especially in the mornings and evenings and especially on the roads toward Uganda or Kasai. Sometimes they take our clothes and we have to run back home naked. The perpetrators are strangers, fishermen or militias. To protect ourselves, we try to go out in groups of five to ten.” – IDP woman interviewed by WRC in Geti, Democratic Republic of Congo*

Firewood collection also has negative impacts on local ecosystems, which often contribute to the livelihoods of refugees. In these situations, environmental degradation is inevitable and can be long lasting and difficult to reverse. It can also lead to a total ban on firewood collection, which keeps refugees from being able to cook their food and leads to devastating consequences for food and nutrition.



Lack of access to energy for lighting means that refugees cannot study during dark hours or safely navigate camps. Without energy, hospitals and medical clinics cannot store blood or refrigerate life-saving medication.

## But there is a solution.

FAO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, International Lifeline Fund, Mercy Corps, IFRC, Women's Refugee Commission, Energy Access Practitioner Network, and others have joined forces to coordinate the work being done to improve access to fuel and energy in humanitarian settings.

Together, these organizations have formed the Safe Access to Fuel & Energy (SAFE) Humanitarian Working Group, whose mission is to facilitate a more coordinated, predictable, timely, and effective response to the fuel and energy needs of crisis-affected populations.

Members of the SAFE Humanitarian Working Group envision a world in which all crisis-affected populations are able to satisfy their fuel and energy needs for **cooking, heating, lighting, and powering** in a safe and sustainable manner, without fear or risk to their health, well-being, and personal security.

Together, the SAFE Humanitarian Working Group encourages humanitarian organizations to utilize comprehensive, cross-sectoral approaches when addressing the fuel and energy needs of the world's most vulnerable people. Energy interventions should include considerations for protection and security, health, nutrition, education, livelihoods, and the environment.

Examples of humanitarian energy interventions include providing solar lighting, manufacturing and/or distributing cookstoves and fuels, setting up mini grids for camp electrification, establishing and managing woodlots for fuel provision and environmental protection, improving protection mechanisms for women during firewood collection, and many others.

Safe and reliable access to energy for cooking, heating, lighting, and powering is a basic need. Creating programs on energy access saves lives and protects livelihoods in emergencies and crisis settings by integrating energy needs into emergency preparedness and response, improving access to household fuel and lighting using appropriate technologies and renewable energy, increasing access to energy for schools, health centers, and other institutions, and establishing and managing sustainable forestry resources for fuel provision and environmental protection.

To learn more, visit [www.safefuelandenergy.org](http://www.safefuelandenergy.org), contact [info@safefuelandenergy.org](mailto:info@safefuelandenergy.org), or tweet [@safefuelenergy](https://twitter.com/safefuelenergy).