

UNHCR engagement in the Grand Bargain

Progress made over the past 5 years

In the five years since the [Grand Bargain](#) was launched to improve aid effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian response, UNHCR has increased funding and support for national and local responders, simplified reporting requirements, and successfully partnered with development actors, including International Financial Institutions.

Greater aid effectiveness has been achieved through coordinated initiatives including the UN Partner Portal, the Business Operations Strategy, and participation in joint needs assessments. The change in policy and systems has improved effectiveness and efficiency, and ultimately helps to better serve UNHCR's persons of concern. Despite the progress, this has so far not resulted in a greater proportion of unearmarked contributions. In fact unearmarked funding has not increased since 2016, holding steady at an average of 15 % annually.

In addition to the progress made as an organization, UNHCR has continued to support collective progress through engagement with other UN agencies, INGOs, NNGOs and donors. Since October 2021, UNHCR has taken on a facilitation role, representing the UN constituency within the Grand Bargain governance structure. The forthcoming period is of particular importance with a revised framework adopted in 2021 – the “[Grand Bargain 2.0](#)” – which aims at political resolution to ensure progress towards the overall priorities of quality funding and localization.

UNHCR progress against the ten core commitments

1. Greater Transparency

UNHCR's commitment

Publish open data allowing traceability of donors' funding throughout the transaction chain.

When the Grand Bargain was launched, UNHCR was publishing data on donor funding on its Global Focus webpage as well as on the Financial Tracking Service managed by the OCHA. This provided donors familiar with UNHCR relevant data, but did not reach all stakeholders, nor was it easy to see the level of earmarking or compare the data with other systems. The organization has since worked on its own systems and liaised closely with partners within the transparency workstream to rectify this.

UNHCR began publishing data to the [International Aid Transparency Initiative \(IATI\)](#) standard in September 2018. In 2021, UNHCR enhanced the quality of the data provided to IATI, by publishing the earmarking level of all donor contributions and, where possible, including reference to the donor's own IATI data. Additionally, breakdowns by the OECD DAC and UN System Function were given for all IATI activities. This has helped ensure progress to the extent that today, according to data published on the [Humanitarian Data Portal](#), UNHCR is one of few signatories meeting all five indicators used to track progress against the Grand Bargain data publication commitment.

2. Support and funding tools for local and national responders

UNHCR's commitment

Transfer at least 25 per cent of programme expenditures to local and national responders by the end of 2020.

The amount allocated to local and national responders has steadily increased since 2016. UNHCR first met the target of 25 per cent in 2019, exceeding this in 2020 by transferring 28 per cent of its annual programme expenditure to national and local responders.

According to provisional expenditure figures (*), in 2021, UNHCR disbursed approximately US\$1.2 billion to national and international NGOs. Of this, some US\$751 million was provided to 951 local and national responders, of which 728 were national NGOs. This is the highest number of local and national partners that have received funding by UNHCR to date.). In terms of number of partners, local and national actors now comprise 82% of all UNHCR's partners.

* Expenditure figures as of 17.01.2022



Nigeria. Cameroonian refugee organisation protects community from COVID-19. © UNHCR/Tony Aseh

UNHCR's commitment

Expand investment in institutional capacity-building for national partners to support effective emergency preparedness and response by engaging proactively with first responders at the local level as leaders and equal partners, and fostering their participation in coordination mechanisms

UNHCR is one of very few agencies within the UN to have established a predictable way to support local NGOs with an administrative support that is traditionally only given to international NGOs. Today, following a series of partnership reforms over the past two years, all of UNHCR's local NGO partners receive 4 per cent of their contract amounts as flexible indirect support costs. This allows local partners and first responders to improve their own administrative systems and implement programmes in a more sustainable manner.

In addition to allocating indirect support costs to local NGOs, in 2021, UNHCR formalized eligibility and selection criteria for partnerships with organizations led by persons of concern, piloting a simplified small-grant partnership arrangement of up to US\$4,000 per project. The grant is being piloted in 10 country operations including Argentina, Chile, Uganda and Switzerland, and provides direct funding to organizations led by persons of concern to realise their own projects. In addition, [in 2020 the UNHCR NGO Innovation Award celebrated the achievements of Refugee-led Organizations \(RLOs\) who developed innovative solutions to combat COVID-19.](#)

The seven winning RLOs - one from each region - also provided input to the design of UNHCR's new Innovation Fund. The process of selection enabled UNHCR to better map and engage with RLOs in different regions. [In 2022, UNHCR's NGO innovation award will recognize the work of Women-Led Organizations](#), with priority given to women and girl-led organizations engaged in displacement settings.

In 2021, UNHCR and the Somalia NGO Consortium also chaired the sub-group on localization in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Under UNHCR's leadership, the IASC established a [Localization Repository](#) as well as [Guidance on strengthening participation, representation and leadership of local and national actors in IASC humanitarian coordination mechanisms](#). More than 100 local actors participated in the drafting of this Guidance.



Chile. UNHCR staff using UNIGLO masks during CBI distribution. © UNHCR/ Eugenia Paz

3. Increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming

UNHCR's commitment

Double the amount of funds programmed for cash-based interventions (CBIs) in aid delivery by the end of 2020 as a proportion of its overall assistance.

UNHCR met its commitment in 2019, delivering \$646 million in cash assistance, representing 22% of its overall programme expenditure, and exceeding in-kind assistance and services. This trend has continued with some US\$670 million provided in cash to 8.5 million people in over 100 countries, including in challenging emergencies such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Iran and DRC. In 2021, digital payment methods were employed in 48 operations, compared to just 5 countries in 2015.

UNHCR has solidified its policies, systems and tools to provide cash assistance, and trained more than 6,000 staff and partners. The organization also delivered collaborative cash arrangements in 25 countries in line with its commitment to the [UN Common Cash Statement](#). The UN Common Cash Statement (UNCCS) was launched in December 2018 by the principals of OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF

and WFP to collaborate on cash and voucher assistance. The UNCCS signatories' commitments relate to collaboration around procurement of financial services, data interoperability, systems development and harmonized programming. The progress report can be found [here](#). The 2021 publication [UNHCR - Cash Assistance and Protection: Why, What and How?](#) offers information and guidance on how UNHCR's leverages cash to provide protection. UNHCR continues to draw on lessons learned, which will be reflected in the forthcoming Policy on Cash-Based Interventions 2021-2026. The policy focuses on actions required to achieve results for people, including increasing cash in emergencies, cash for protection and cash that promotes inclusion and access to local sustainable services.

UNHCR is a member of the [caucus on cash coordination](#) established under the Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework, and has engaged substantively in discussions through the related Principals meeting and senior technical meetings which took place in late 2021. In February 2022, the Principals endorsed a new model for inter-agency cash coordination developed by the caucus, which will be taken forward in 2022.

4. Reduce duplication and management costs

UNHCR's commitment

Expand the use of biometrics for refugee registration to a total of 75 country operations by 2020

In 2020, UNHCR met its commitment to use biometrics for refugee registration in 75 operations globally, against the 2016 baseline of 34 operations. More than 7 out of 10 refugees currently registered by UNHCR have a biometrically-anchored digital identity. Over 10 million individuals are currently enrolled. UNHCR has successfully protected the identities of persons of concern from theft and substitution through biometric data collected during registration. The use of biometrics has also reduced duplication and management costs for UNHCR and its partners, including WFP and IOM, as well as for refugee-hosting States and resettlement countries.

UNHCR's commitment:

Use technology and innovation to reduce the costs of delivering assistance; reduce the costs of procurement and logistics by 10 per cent by the end of 2020 through the use of shared services with partner agencies.

The relative procurement cost of goods and services decreased by 12 per cent in 2020 compared to the 2016 baseline, continuing the trend of progressive reduction of 10 per cent in 2019, 7 per cent in 2018 and 10 per cent in 2017. Of the total procurement amount of US\$1.373 billion in 2020, US\$223 million represented personal protective equipment (PPE), medicines, medical items, and other goods and services procured on a no-regrets basis for the COVID-19

pandemic. As of January 2020, UNHCR reduced its indirect support cost from 7 per cent to 6.5 per cent against all voluntary earmarked financial contributions, with the exception of funding towards the operational reserve and Junior Professional Officers.

Two years of work by the [United Nations Business Innovation Group](#) (BIG) co-chaired by UNHCR and WFP from 2018 to 2020 paved the way for increased simplification and harmonization of business practices, including shared services and common back offices. UNHCR's Global Mobility and Infrastructure Service (GMIS), established in July 2020, contributed to the roll-out of the [Business Operations Strategy](#) in 129 locations, saving on costs and improving business processes. GMIS has also been instrumental in driving forward the partnership with WFP on global vehicle leasing, expected to be launched in the coming months with the objective of reducing CO2 emissions, reduce costs, improve technology and standardize United Nations global fleet arrangements.

The [United Nations Partner Portal](#) was launched in November 2018 by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. Membership has since expanded to UNFPA and the UN Secretariat, with processes underway for IOM and UNDP to join. By mid-2021, some 17,000 partners had been registered, an increase from 12,000 the previous year. As one example of how this simplifies process, instead of INGOs having to undergo multiple capacity assessment on implementing measures on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, one standard, mandatory assessment, was rolled out through this Partner Portal during 2021. While currently undertaken offline, the assessment will be fully incorporated in the Portal in the first half of 2022. This will allow participating UN entities to conduct and share partner assessment results through the Portal and avoid INGOs having to undergo multiple assessments for the UN.

5. Improve joint and impartial needs assessments

UNHCR's commitment

Undertake coordinated joint needs assessments and continue sharing evidence-based needs assessment data.

UNHCR is committed to participation in joint and coordinated needs assessments. Since the launch of the Grand Bargain, the organization has strengthened its internal tools and systems by introducing a [needs assessment handbook and accompanying toolkit](#); an e-learning programme, and software to facilitate qualitative analysis. Regional data hubs have been established in all seven regions following the de-centralisation process, increasing the number of data personnel who are able to support country operations engaged in joint needs assessments.

UNHCR has contributed to Grand Bargain principles and interagency bilateral data sharing agreements to enable collaborative and joint needs assessments. In 2021, UNHCR made the [Microdata Library](#) publicly available which contains data from 359 studies about persons of concern. Several global data sharing initiatives have also been initiated, including the [UNHCR refugee statistics platform](#), the [UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub](#) and the [UNHCR-UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action](#).

UNHCR has also actively engaged in the development and pilot roll-out of the Joint Inter-sectoral Analysis Framework in 2021 to inform the development of interagency humanitarian response plans. There are numerous examples of country-level initiatives in 2021. For example a joint assessment was led by UNHCR and WFP to review the situation and multi-sectoral needs of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazaar; and the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) was conducted jointly by UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF in Lebanon.

Despite challenges posed for data collection by COVID-19, UNHCR was able to increase its participation in joint needs assessments from 105 in 2019 to 129 in 2020.¹ UNHCR also maximized its use of secondary data and phone surveys, and developed blogs and webinars to share good practices with others on modalities for remote assessments. Along with OCHA, IOM and WHO, UNHCR co-led [GIMAC, a global level needs assessment cell responding to the COVID-19 pandemic](#). GIMAC managed and analysed COVID-19 related information; providing technical support to prioritised countries and global decision making.

¹ Figures for joint assessments completed in 2021 are still pending



Honduras. UNHCR and partners deliver aid to storm-affected Garifuna community. © UNHCR/Juan Camilo Jiménez Garcés

6. A participation revolution

UNHCR's commitment

Ensure equal (50 per cent) and meaningful participation of women and adolescent girls in all decision-making processes and structures in forced displacement contexts by 2020.

UNHCR's commitment to gender equality was reinforced in the [2018 Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\)](#), with updated commitments to women and girls, including equal and meaningful participation; alongside individual registration and documentation; equal access to assistance and economic opportunities; and comprehensive gender-based violence services. In 2020, the organization produced a [Gender Equality Toolkit](#), with a range of tools including guidance and methodology to increase and enhance the meaningful participation of women and girls, and to integrate gender equality within the operations management cycle. In 2020, UNHCR launched its

first ever [Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation and Response to Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\)](#). The Policy makes it mandatory for UNHCR operations to advocate, plan and implement prevention programming that promotes gender equality with the aim of addressing the root causes of GBV.

The organization has also made efforts to enhance participation in global processes. A Gender Audit Team led by refugee women has collaborated with UNHCR at the global, regional and country level since 2017, auditing the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in 2019, the High Commissioner's 2020 Dialogue on "Protection and Resilience during Pandemics", as well as the High-Level Official's Meeting which took place in December 2021. As mentioned above, in 2022, UNHCR's NGO innovation award will recognize the work of Women-and Girl-Led Organizations, prioritizing those working in displacement contexts.

UNHCR country operations systematically engage with women and girls, through community

structures, and networks of women and girl-led organizations, and re-doubled efforts through remote and virtual means in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Malaysia, for example, UNHCR partnered with refugee women and NGOs on a social media project to facilitate virtual safe spaces. In Syria, partners worked with a network of 91 women committees across 12 governorates to share information on COVID-19 prevention measures.

UNHCR's commitment

Continue to strengthen engagement with and accountability to the communities affected by crisis

Putting affected people at the center of humanitarian work has long been UNHCR's approach to protecting displaced populations, and underlies the agency's [Strategic Directions](#) and [Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\) Policy](#). UNHCR's

AGD policy was updated in 2018 with strengthened operational commitments, which led to the development of a framework for "Accountability to Affected People". This includes minimum core actions on participation and inclusion, communication and transparency, feedback and response, and organization learning and adaptation. [Operational guidance on accountability to affected people accompanying the AAP framework](#) was issued in September 2020. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR produced guidance on [risk communication and community engagement](#), [engaging with communities via WhatsApp trees in the context of the pandemic](#); and in early 2021, on [using social media in community-based protection](#).

UNHCR engages refugee and community outreach volunteers and committees who offer a critical link with displaced communities to share and receive information, conduct outreach activities, as well as refer individuals at particular risk. Importantly this is a 2-way channel of



Kenya. Refugee fights coronavirus one bottle of soap at a time. © UNHCR/Samuel Otieno



South Sudan. Refugee volunteer group opens community pre-school. © UNHCR/Elizabeth Marie Stuart

engagement, which has also been critical for COVID-19 prevention and response activities. Examples include extensive refugee outreach volunteer networks in Lebanon, Turkey and Syria; WhatsApp trees to share information for refugee leaders in Ethiopia; community health workers supported to disseminate information through home visits in Bangladesh; youth-led initiatives to develop COVID information videos in Yemen and the capacity-building of refugee-led organizations in Italy, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Malawi. UNHCR's specific engagement and work with youth has been informed by the Global Youth Advisory Council and Tertiary Refugee Student Network, two global networks of forcibly displaced youth. Displaced youth have participated in key consultative events including UNHCR-NGO consultations, the Global Refugee Forum and subsequent High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021.

The organization is committed to putting in place accountability measures for the communities we serve - across operations, channels are in place to receive feedback include dedicated email addresses, hotlines, call centers, complaint boxes and online forms for feedback through unhcr.help.org pages. In mid-2021, 61 per cent of UNHCR

operations reported having multi-channel feedback and response systems designed in consultation with persons of concern, accessible for diverse groups of affected communities, and with standard operating procedures and referral mechanisms in place. This percentage represents a slight decrease from previously reported figures due to a revision of indicators. Only feedback mechanisms with quality assurance indicators, such as specific features enabling effectiveness and accessibility, can now be counted towards this figure.

At the interagency level, [UNHCR co-chairs the IASC Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion](#), and ensures coherent linkages with the Grand Bargain through the participation revolution workstream, strengthening accountability to and participation of affected people in the broader humanitarian system.

The [Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability report 2020](#) offers further detail and examples of how UNHCR is meeting commitments to accountability to affected people and gender equality across the organization, as well as areas for improvement.

7. Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding

UNHCR's commitment

Pursue the institutional changes needed to facilitate multi-year protection and solutions strategies, as well as programming in partnership with humanitarian and development actors.

In 2016, amounts of multi-year funding were not being systematically tracked. Since the Grand Bargain, UNHCR tracks and publishes multi-year funding amounts in Global Focus. In 2019, UNHCR revised its own policies, so that country operations would be able to enter into multi-year partnership agreements. At the end of 2021, there was a total of 26 multi-year agreements in place. While this is new and while multi-year partnership agreements are expected to grow, the challenges associated with giving multi-year partnership agreements stem from the overall lack of multi-year, unearmarked contributions to UNHCR.

In 2021, UNHCR's new multi-year approach for results-based management - COMPASS - was rolled out. To facilitate integration with national programme cycles, UN Sustainable Development Country Frameworks, and humanitarian response plans, the new approach is being rolled out in a staggered way; 24 operations have developed multi-year strategies for 2022 and beyond, while 50 operations are preparing multi-year strategies for 2023 and beyond. The entire organization will have moved to a multi-year programming cycle by 2024.



8. Reducing the earmarking of donor contribution

UNHCR's commitment

Increase the visibility of unearmarked and softly earmarked funding, recognizing the contributions made by donors.

UNHCR presents earmarking information in accordance with the definition of “earmarking” as collectively agreed to through the Grand Bargain process. In addition, UNHCR has started to systematically track the amount of multi-year funding received, using the OECD definition that such funds need to be pledged for 24 months or longer. While UNHCR was publishing reports on the use of unearmarked funding prior to the Grand Bargain, in 2017 it also began reporting on the use of “softly earmarked funding”. Since 2019, UNHCR’s annual reports on the use of flexible funding also contain information on multi-year funding.

Reporting on flexible funding in UNHCR’s Global Reports has greatly increased since 2016 and now clearly shows the major donors that provide flexible funding. Supplementing this, UNHCR’s weekly funding update has now also include an indicative allocation of funds. This helps donors and other stakeholders see the actual level of funds available to each UNHCR operation at any given time.

Over the years, the amount of unearmarked funding has stagnated, while the ratio of unearmarked funding against overall income has steadily declined. From 2016 to 2021, unearmarked funding represented an annual average of 15 per cent of contributions. Government donors remain the main contributors, though private sector growth has been observed. Provisional figures from 2021 indicate that private donors contributed 39 per cent of UNHCR’s unearmarked funding, a 7 per cent increase from 2020.

Concerted efforts are underway to enhance visibility for donors that provide flexible funding through the use of social media. A dedicated Visibility Officer position was created in 2018, assisting operations in providing donor visibility through various media such as social media, video and visibility signs. In March 2021, UNHCR updated its donor visibility guidelines for field use.

9. Harmonise and simplify reporting requirements

UNHCR's commitment

Harmonize and simplify reporting requirements by the end of 2018.

UNHCR has fully adopted the 8+3 simplified narrative reporting template for downstream partners. To provide the most current funding data in a transparent manner, UNHCR's main reporting and transparency portal, Global Focus, includes: dashboards offering information on budget and income, as well as a dedicated dashboard on flexible funding; donor profiles showing the

quantity and quality of contributions, as well as where contributions were allocated; and, operational and situational reporting tools. The functionality of Global Focus is constantly enhanced to provide the most up-to-date operational information as well as financial data.



Mali. Women's community association boosted by EU grant. © UNHCR/Mark Henley

10. Enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors

UNHCR's commitments

- **Cooperate with multilateral development banks (MDBs) to facilitate their active engagement in situations of forced displacement where their technical and financial comparative advantages can contribute to improved socio-economic outcomes for refugees, IDPs and affected host communities;**
- **Support efforts that enable economic participation of forcibly displaced persons and access to finance, in collaboration with partners.**

The UNHCR-World Bank Group (WB) partnership has continued to thrive over the years. From mid-2017 to mid-2022, some US\$2.46 billion has been allocated for 45 projects in 14 low-income refugee-hosting countries. A further US\$380 million has been made available through concessional grants for 18 projects, leveraging a total of US\$1.96 billion in loans in 4 middle-income countries. A unique feature of the UNHCR/WB partnership is that it brings additional funding to refugee hosting countries using the normal development approach of allocating funding through the national authorities, thereby ensuring humanitarian/development cooperation that maximizes the strengths of each respective approach.

In addition to the ongoing partnership, during the response to the COVID-19 crisis, the WB committed to provide eligible countries up to US\$1 billion from 1 July 2020 onwards, as an exceptional measure to encourage inclusion of host and refugee communities in pandemic responses. UNHCR continues to provide the WB regular protection assessments, including comprehensive and publicly available refugee policy reviews for low-income countries eligible for support.

UNHCR significantly stepped up engagement with regional Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) in 2021. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Inter-American Development Bank, and an exchange of letters took place with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) outlining mutual engagement in future projects under the ADB's Expanded Disaster Response Facility. Collaboration continued with the African Development Bank (AfDB) on projects benefiting displaced persons in Zimbabwe, the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, and in the Sahel. UNHCR also engaged in the development of the ADB's Approach Paper on Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations and Small Island Developing States and the AfDB's Strategy on Addressing Fragility and Building Resilience to ensure adequate reflection of forced displacement situations.

In 2021, UNHCR has continued to engage with through the MDB [Coordination Platform on Economic Migration and Forced Displacement](#), including a stocktaking session to reflect progress made against GRF commitments for the High-Level Officials Meeting held in December 2021.

The [Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement \(JDC\)](#) was established by UNHCR and the World Bank in October 2019 to improve and support the collection and analysis of socioeconomic microdata and population data to inform policymaking and programming. During its first 18 months of operation, the JDC was able to develop a solid portfolio of 51 activities on a range of subjects, including COVID-19 response, at global, regional and country levels, while strengthening the partnership and collaboration with the World Bank and other organizations. The [JDC Strategy for 2021 – 2023](#) is available online and shares in detail its strategic objectives, activities and expected results.



Bangladesh. Families settled in Nayapara camp. © UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau

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