

# ENERGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE



*Rohingya children sit beneath a solar lantern in Kutupalong refugee camp, Bangladesh. © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell*

**The Global Compact** sets out a number of measures that can be taken by the international community to address the issues most essential to refugees and host communities. Among these is the provision of energy and infrastructural support, which can be fundamental to survival, protects from sexual and gender based violence, provides employment and educational opportunities, facilitates productivity and can significantly enhance social cohesion.

## Facts and Figures

**Energy.** Human dignity and self-reliance cannot be achieved without energy. Being able to cook without having to collect or purchase firewood, having a light to move around more securely in the dark or being able to study at night is a luxury beyond the reach of most refugees.

Yet, only about 10% of refugees worldwide have reliable access to energy for lighting, heating, cooling, cooking and powering their shelters. Refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than non-refugee children. Access to energy would open up new education possibilities for refugee children, such as through connected learning. Violence against women and girls is common in many unlit camps. One solution is street lighting, which allows people

to move around camps in greater safety at night, particularly women and girls.

**Connectivity.** Displaced people are also living without the connectivity they need to obtain vital information, communicate with loved ones, access basic services and link to the local, national and global communities around them.

UNHCR's research has found that while seven per cent of refugee communities lack the requisite digital infrastructure for internet access and mobile communications, most refugees in urban areas live in places that have mobile coverage. For those in rural areas, however, the situation is far worse, with 20 per cent living in areas with no connectivity. In addition, refugees often spend up to a third of their disposable income on staying connected,

highlighting another crucial obstacle to refugee connectivity: cost.

**Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).** Three out of 10 people worldwide do not have access to potable water – according to the UN World Water Development Report 2019 – despite safe drinking water and sanitation being recognized as basic human rights, indispensable to health and human dignity.

This is particularly the case for refugees. When people flee their homes, they often struggle to safely and easily access adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, endangering their health and survival. According to UNHCR’s WASH monitoring, only 59% of refugee situations had reached the SDG 6 “basic level” of water supply access, well below the global average, and only 17% of refugees had access to their own basic household toilet. Innovative and sustainable WASH solutions will improve the wellbeing of refugee populations, while limiting environmental degradation.

**Health.** Everyone has the right under international law to the highest standards of physical and mental health. But refugees can face challenges in accessing health care for reasons including their legal status, language barriers and discrimination. Providing access to health services to refugees not only save lives, but also cuts care costs, while protecting the health of the refugee and host communities.

## The Global Compact on Refugees

The Global Compact on Refugees aims to transform the way the world responds to mass displacement, by operationalizing the principle of international responsibility-sharing that underpins the protection, assistance and ultimately pursuit of solutions for refugee situations.

It has four key objectives: a) ease pressure on host countries; b) enhance refugee self-reliance; c) expand access to third country solutions; and d) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

In affirming the Global Compact, the international community recognized that host countries require support to address the accommodation and environmental impacts of large numbers of

**Environment.** The vast majority of refugees today are hosted in low and middle-income countries, whose infrastructures – such as schools, shelters, health centers and water supplies – are already overstretched and poorly equipped to support large numbers of new arrivals, putting extraordinary pressures on limited resources and aggravating environmental challenges. Unsustainable use of natural resources can lead to environmental degradation, with lasting impacts on natural resources and on the well-being of the displaced and host communities. Moreover, competition over scarce natural resources, such as firewood, water and grazing land, can lead to friction. Addressing this issues in a sustainable and ecological manner at an early stage, can lead to the improved wellbeing of both the refugee and host communities.



*Ethiopia. Sabriina thinks solar is the future. © UNHCR/Diana Diaz*

refugees, committing to contribute resources and expertise to strengthen infrastructure and to promote sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems in both urban and rural areas.

The Global Compact sets out a number of measures that can be taken by the international community to address these issues.

This support could include contributions to bolster national capacity to address accommodation, water, sanitation and hygiene, infrastructure, and environmental challenges in or near refugee-hosting rural and urban areas; and to invest in closing the technology gap and scaling-up capacity development for smart, affordable and appropriate

technologies and renewable energy in developing and least developed refugee hosting countries.

Environmental impact assessments, national sustainable development projects and business models for the delivery of clean energy that cater more effectively to refugee and host community needs will be actively supported, as well as “safe access to fuel and energy” programming to

improve the quality of human settlements, including the living and working conditions of both urban and rural dwellers. Technical capacity development will be facilitated, including from the private sector and through State-to-State arrangements. Support will also be provided, as appropriate, to include refugees in disaster risk reduction strategies.

## The Global Refugee Forum

The **Global Refugee Forum – on 17 and 18 December 2019** – is an opportunity to mobilize all actors to make **concrete progress** towards the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, including by strengthening infrastructure in host countries and enhancing engagement in the area of renewable and clean energy.

It will also be an opportunity to showcase **good practices** that are making a significant difference in the lives of refugees and their host communities. These approaches and practices can be models to build upon and for others to follow.

Contributions and good practices could centre on the following areas:

- **Energy**, by ensuring that refugees and host communities have access to sufficient amounts of safe and sustainable energy for domestic and productive uses, including through support for the strengthening and expansion of national energy infrastructure.

- **Environment**, by finding solutions to ‘dirty diesel’, CO emissions, plastics, and open solid waste burning in refugee hosting areas, and by advocating for the inclusion of refugees in climate change resilience and adaptation programming, in particular by international financial institutions and relevant funds (such as the Green Climate Fund).
- **Water and Sanitation**: Construct water infrastructure that allows settlements to become connected to a water supply network to avoid water trucking.
- **Health**: Facilitate the inclusion of refugees in national health systems through health infrastructure and national insurance systems.
- **Shelter**: Provide adequate shelter in which refugees can live safely and in a dignified manner.
- **Connectivity**: Facilitate internet connectivity for refugees and host communities.

More examples of contributions and good practices can be found [here](#).