Evaluation of UNHCR's Innovation Fund

EVALUATION REPORT
NOVEMBER 2020

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UNHCR Evaluation Service

UNHCR's Evaluation Policy confirms UNHCR's commitment to support accountability, learning and continual improvement through the systematic examination and analysis of organizational strategies, policies and programmes. Evaluations are guided by the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility, and are undertaken to enhance the organization's performance in addressing the protection, assistance and solution needs of refugees, stateless people and other persons of concern to UNHCR.

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Acknowledgements

Evaluation information at a glance	
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Executive summary

Overview and objectives of the evaluation

The UNHCR Innovation Fund, launched in 2016, aims to provide funding, support for experimentation and mentorship in order to nurture innovation and adaptability within UNHCR. The Innovation Fund does this by supporting small teams of UNHCR staff to pilot early-stage, novel projects that fall outside the scope of normal UNHCR operations through access to social and financial capital.

An initial three-year programme, funded by the IKEA Foundation, provided $3 million in innovation funding of which $1.2 million was used to fund 17 Innovation Fund projects across 13 country operations.[1] After the IKEA Foundation funding finished at the end of 2016, the Government of Belgium funded a second round of the Innovation Fund. The second round incorporated a number of modifications from the first with a narrower scope, and ran for just over one year from December 2018 to January 2020. A total of 109 applications were received from UNHCR teams worldwide and 19 projects were selected for funding.

The 34 projects that were awarded grants had many diverse achievements including winning prizes, generating media interest, and responding to COVID-19. This evaluation explores the extent to which the design and implementation of the Innovation Fund allowed the fund to achieve its overarching objectives and to support successful implementation of grantee projects. The evaluation was commissioned:

- to assess which external and internal factors, including the Innovation Fund's design and input of resources, propel or hinder its success;
- to review the extent to which the Innovation Fund is aligned with UNHCR's Strategic Directions and policy; and
- to make recommendations about how the Innovation Fund's approach and design can be improved for the next iteration.

Methodology

This evaluation covers the period June 2016 to January 2020. It is based on a thorough review of Innovation Service, Innovation Fund and grantee documents, remote workshops with Innovation Service staff and 58 key informant interviews, comprising 5 senior staff from across UNHCR, 19 Innovation Service staff, 25 project focal points and team members, and 8 individuals from other innovation funds and initiatives. The evaluation also draws on numerical data on grantee projects and a survey of grantees not interviewed. It was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic which limited the intended face-to-face engagements with the Innovation Service and prevented any fieldwork to project locations.

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[1] The rest of the IKEA Foundation grant covered other innovation initiatives, project management and administration costs.

Key findings

1. Alignment of the Innovation Fund with UNHCR's Strategic Directions

UNHCR's Strategic Directions for 2017–2021 are wide-reaching and include commitments to put people first, to strengthen and diversify partnerships, to work across the entire spectrum of forced displacement, and to provide practical, concrete support to States to secure protection and solutions for persons of concern to UNHCR. The Innovation Fund has aligned with and contributed to these directions. In particular during Round 1, it facilitated new collaborations and partnerships, and supported a range of projects that provided more comprehensive protection and assistance to refugees. During Round 2, it supported building information systems and better data. The wide-reaching nature of these Strategic Directions means that although the design of the Innovation Fund changed significantly over time, it nevertheless aligned with (at least some of) UNHCR's priorities at any time. Senior interviewees stated several ways that the Innovation Fund's alignment with UNHCR's strategic priorities could be strengthened in future, including through continuing to fund projects that directly engage refugees and host communities, facilitating a whole-of-society approach, and supporting successful pilot initiatives to scale.

2. Implications of design choices for the Innovation Fund

The Innovation Service did not develop clear objectives for Round 1 or 2 of the Innovation Fund. Without clear objectives, the design of the Fund changed significantly between 2013 and 2019, shaped by changes in the management of the Innovation Service, a growing interest in organizational change among its team, and shifts in other Innovation Service activities. These changes manifested in new approaches to sourcing ideas, different criteria for selecting innovators, changes in how funding was used, and different priorities for the types of support that would be provided. In particular, Round 1 of the Innovation Fund was purposefully open, allowing applications from any UNHCR staff member, in any location, and for any "innovative" project. Round 2 retained flexibility on the applicant and location but focused on projects in four thematic areas: data and artificial intelligence, modelling and simulation, inclusive intelligence, and storytelling and culture. The narrower focus allowed the Innovation Fund to provide greater technical support to some Round 2 grantees but led to a cohort of projects that were primarily focused on addressing internal challenges and that shifted the geographic centre of gravity towards Europe. More projects were implemented in larger offices and at UNHCR Headquarters, and fewer projects were implemented in field offices and by persons of concern to UNHCR. Without clear objectives, the Innovation Service was unable to assess the implications of these changes on the intended results.

3. Implementation challenges limited the efficacy of the Innovation Fund

There were significant challenges in implementing the Innovation Fund, including in implementing procurement processes, distributing funds and managing the competing demands of other Innovation Service priorities. Until 2016, midway through Round 1, there were no dedicated staff working on the Innovation Fund and between 2016 and 2019 the team was small relative to other innovation initiatives. These challenges hampered timelines and resulted in grants that were short in duration and that ended relatively abruptly, with projects receiving $20,000 to $80,000 towards operational costs that were spent over four to nine months. While the Innovation Fund provided the financial capital to test projects that were unlikely to be funded by the core budget, the funding amounts and timeline constraints limited the longer-term sustainability of projects.

4.   Uses of the Innovation Fund

The Innovation Fund successfully recruited and supported 34 innovation projects across two rounds. During Round 1, the Innovation Fund was seen as a relatively flexible resource for fostering innovative projects and it supported several initiatives outside the formal Call for Proposals. Round 1 projects spent the majority of funding on purchasing equipment as well as labour, materials and furniture to pilot and test their innovations. The implementation of Round 2 was more formal, with all projects selected via the Call for Proposals, and a new "Terms of Use" document that formalized expectations for awarded grantees. Due to the additional expertise required by project teams in Round 2 to implement projects within the four work areas, a large proportion of funding in Round 2 was spent on external experts and consultants including data scientists, software engineer consultants and behavioural economics experts. Across both rounds, project spending was hampered by short timelines. In Round 1, grantees had less than six months to implement their projects and the Fund closed with an underspend of €226,340 and reallocation of €563,658. In Round 2, procurement challenges meant that only 43 per cent of funds had been spent by the end of 2019 and the Fund was extended into 2020.

5.   Importance of mentoring and technical support to grantees

Grantees were particularly positive about the non-financial support that they had received from Innovation Service staff, which included training and mentoring in innovation processes and technical support. This ranged from business insight and long-term strategy for projects, to convening teams of relevant experts across UNHCR, as well as being a sounding board for new ideas or project-related problems, providing programme support, and participating in meetings on project progress and milestones. Non-financial support was essential to the success of many projects but was overly dependent on one individual and their ability to respond to project needs as these arose, making it difficult to sustain, codify and track.

6.   Achievements of grantee projects

The 34 innovation projects supported by the Innovation Fund enjoyed diverse achievements and successes. These range from capacity-building of persons of concern to UNHCR, to expanding projects, securing additional funding, winning prizes, fostering private sector partnerships, and generating international media coverage. Among the project team members interviewed, the vast majority had a positive perspective on their project and an overall feeling of success. The interviewees felt that funding had allowed teams to implement multi-stakeholder approaches in a way that their regular work did not necessarily allow and had given them greater flexibility to respond to changing needs. This was exemplified by the involvement of four projects in the COVID-19 response, where small amounts of flexible funding allowed teams to adjust their project implementation in ways that allowed their operations to be more relevant.

7.   Sustainability and replication

The sustainability and replication of projects was a stated objective of Round 1 and an emphasis of many consultations with senior staff. However, this was not the primary aim of most project teams nor was it the focus of the Innovation Fund or the support it provides. Scaling humanitarian innovations is notoriously difficult and requires flexible multi-year funding and long-term support. Data collected through interviews and surveys from 10 of the 17 Round 1 teams indicate that of those projects we were in contact with, 90 per cent are still operational after three

years; 50 per cent expanded in their original location; and 50 per cent expanded to another location.[2] Whether the project continued, expanded, or was replicated, depended on the specific context and on the project teams' own initiative and connections to access further funding and identify pathways to scale. Project teams were unaware of each other's work, and where dissemination did take place, this was mainly because of the relocation of staff or the activities of partners. Few projects had "champions" that could help with the dissemination of their idea at senior levels across departments, bureaux or operations. Significantly greater financial and staff resourcing would be needed to support initiatives to scale in future rounds, including investment in the capacity of the team, and support to broker partnerships within and beyond UNHCR.

8. **Opportunities for making learning more systematic**

Project teams could all describe examples of how they had learned from their innovation projects. There are also examples of how the Innovation Fund has learned from research, other initiatives within the Innovation Service, and other Innovation initiatives in the public and private sectors. However, limited staff capacity at both project and Fund levels meant that there were few systematic approaches to sharing this learning. Opportunities to improve how learning is captured and shared were described at all levels. Within the Innovation Service, the plan to implement an assessment of the Innovation Fund to guide senior management (noted in the report to the IKEA Foundation) was never written. As a result, there have been insufficient opportunities to formally reflect on and generate learning around stakeholder relationships, Innovation Fund management and impact. There was a lack of awareness among teams of the work each was doing and no systematic opportunities for disseminating ideas with other parts of UNHCR. This represents an important opportunity for future work. For example, 12 of the 34 projects included a focus on testing new approaches to feedback, access to information or inclusion of affected people; learning from these projects would be valuable in enabling UNHCR to continue to innovate in its approach regarding Accountability to Affected People (AAP).

Recommendations

The evaluation offers the following recommendations, with additional detail and sub-recommendations in the main body of the report.

Recommended actions	Responsible Unit	Anticipated time frame
Increase staff resourcing for the Innovation Fund. The evaluation highlights the remarkable achievements of the Fund given its small implementing team. However, it also identifies a range of opportunities to increase the non-financial support and post-project support to grantees. The evaluation recommends increased staffing, in particular to allow the Fund to invest in communications, innovation support, in building peer networks among grantees, and in supporting grantees beyond the project lifecycle. This should also include clarifying the	Innovation Service	Complete by Q4 2020 to support the next Fund

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[2] It is too early to provide this analysis for Round 2 projects.

roles and expectations of Innovation Service staff situated in other offices globally in promoting the Fund.		
Clarify the strategic objectives of the Innovation Fund. Respondents interviewed during this evaluation had different perspectives on the purpose and objectives of the Innovation Fund. This lack of clarity is also reflected in Fund documents. The Innovation Service should narrow and clarify the objectives for Round 3, including clarifying whether the **primary** purpose of the Fund is to invest in potential innovations with the aim of testing them and supporting them towards sustainability and diffusion, or whether the primary aim is to help a broader cross-section of staff to learn about innovation by doing. In the longer term, the objectives of the Fund should be protected from frequent changes in the Innovation Service management, staff and other initiatives. The objectives should be defined within the Innovation Service's strategy and should complement other components of this strategy as well as UNHCR's strategic position on innovation.	Innovation Service and strategy endorsers	Complete by Q4 2020 ahead of the next iteration of the Fund
Revisit application criteria for the Fund, including requiring innovators to work with persons of concern to UNHCR. The evaluation highlighted an important tension between innovations that include persons of concern to UNHCR as end-users versus innovations that focused on data analytics and performance. The review of other innovation funds also highlighted a prevalence of top-down approaches to problem definition that has been critiqued in the literature. The original focus on operational challenges and involvement of persons of concern to UNHCR resulted in a geographically diverse portfolio and built on operational priorities. In several instances this built on teams' capacities and priorities for meaningful participation of persons of concern to UNHCR. The evaluation recommends that the Innovation Service narrows the scope of the Fund by revisiting the application criteria, including reintroducing the criteria for team members to engage with persons of concern to UNHCR and promoting whole-of-society approaches. At the same time, the Innovation Service should invest in its capacities to support stronger engagement of persons of concern to UNHCR in innovation processes.	Innovation Service	Complete by Q4 2020 ahead of the next iteration of the Fund
Develop approach to supporting innovators in defining problems. Defining clear and narrow problem areas for innovators can improve learning between grantees, help identify synergies and promote peer	Innovation Service	Complete by Q1 2021

support. At the same time, senior interviewees articulated opportunities for future iterations of the Fund to address challenges more closely aligned to UNHCR's strategic priorities. The evaluation recommends that the Innovation Service develop an approach to working with potential innovators (outside funding rounds) to formulate clear problem statements based on their operational priorities. To promote synergies and ensure a cohesive portfolio, the Innovation Service should also refocus its support on connecting projects with other parts of UNHCR, brokering partnerships, and generating and sharing learning.

Systematize support for innovation projects, including for mentorship, technical support and brokering partnerships. Mentoring support was highly valued by the innovators but limited by resourcing within the Innovation Service. The evaluation recommends building on the existing, highly valuable non-financial support, including codifying the approach and developing a way to resource it. The approach should include support for peer learning, a mechanism for grantees to "graduate" from the Innovation Fund, and clarity on the support that innovators can expect afterwards. The Innovation Service should also incorporate provisions for face-to-face support where that is needed.	Innovation Service	Complete by Q1 2021
Leverage the Innovation Fund's position in UNHCR to identify potential pathways for grantees to scale. Many of the projects supported by the Innovation Fund did not obtain ongoing funding after the first grant and very few projects have been implemented in a second location. Resourcing and extending non-financial support beyond the lifetime of the implementation period is vital to help ensure that projects continue after the first year. The Innovation Service should also explore supporting projects to scale, including identifying ways of sharing successful project ideas through the divisions and other internal structures.	Innovation Service	Complete by Q2 2021
Extend the project implementation period. Grantees struggled to implement their projects in short time periods of four to nine months. Long procurement processes and inflexible end-of-year deadlines exacerbated this problem and resulted in some underspends. The evaluators recommend extending the implementation period to at least 9 to 12 months. Given the administrative restrictions around spending cycles, this could be through a phased approach where projects are	Innovation Service	Complete by Q4 2020 ahead of the next iteration of the Fund

first supported to design their innovations and then provided with funding to implement their innovations in a second phase. More flexible resourcing of grantees will require the Innovation Service to secure multi-year funding.		
Clarify internal communications objectives and channels in ways that facilitate access to the Innovation Fund from UNHCR's diverse workforce. The language used in the Call for Proposals was relatively technical, particularly in Round 2, and the interviews suggest that this may have been a barrier to some innovators applying. The evaluation recommends reviewing the Fund's approach to communications with the aim of making the language as simple as possible and promoting access to the Fund across the organization.	Innovation Service	Complete by Q2 2021
Clarify administrative requirements at the outset. During interviews, project team members noted significant procurement and administrative challenges involved in implementing their projects. Interviewees felt that greater clarity regarding administrative requirements and timelines at the Call for Proposals stage would help to prepare for implementation and engage programme administrators. The evaluation recommends updating the Terms of Use for the Innovation Fund to include information regarding procurement and contracting processes, as well as continuing to encourage teams to include staff with a programme background, where possible.	Innovation Service	Complete by Q4 2020 ahead of the next iteration of the Fund
Invest in learning. Limited staff capacity at the project and fund levels meant that there were few systematic approaches to documenting or sharing this learning either at the grantee or the Innovation Fund level. Investment in learning might include developmental evaluation approaches, annual reviews of stakeholder relationships, fund management and impact, or other approaches to encourage reflection. It might include establishing and nourishing a community of practice.	Innovation Service	Complete by Q2 2021

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List of case studies, figures and tables

List of abbreviations

AAP	Accountability to Affected People
AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity
ALNAP	Action Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
API	Application Programming Interface
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CFP	Call for Proposals
DIP	Division of International Protection, UNHCR
GBV	gender-based violence
GCC	Grand Challenges Canada
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GIS	Geographic Information System
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications
GTRM	Working Group on Refugees and Migrants (Spanish acronym)
HGC	Humanitarian Grand Challenge
HIAS	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
HIF	Humanitarian Innovation Fund
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IF	Innovation Fund, UNHCR
IS	Innovation Service, UNHCR
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
JIPS	Joint IDP Profiling Service
KPI	key performance indicator
M4H	Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MNO	mobile network operator
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSTS	Operational Solutions and Transitions Section
PR	Public Relations
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

1. Introduction

In 2012, an external innovation assessment highlighted innovative potential across UNHCR and recommended intentionally introducing and embedding new processes and structures in UNHCR to advance innovation, with a focus on field-based response. Tentative funding for innovation was identified in 2011 and an Innovation Unit established in 2013.

The Innovation Fund was conceptualized as part of the Innovation Unit's (later Innovation Service's) first large grant from the IKEA Foundation in 2014. It was launched in 2016 to provide financial support to innovative projects across UNHCR operations and at Headquarters. A second round of the Innovation Fund received funding from the Government of Belgium. It incorporated a number of modifications from the first round, had a narrower scope and ran for one year from December 2018 to January 2020. Since its inception, the Innovation Fund has supported 34 projects with a total of $1,939,327.

Over this period UNHCR as a whole, and the Innovation Service from which the Innovation Fund is managed, have undergone significant changes. UNHCR has experienced pronounced budgetary reductions and an ongoing transition of staff and resources away from Headquarters towards regional offices. UNHCR's approach to refugee protection and response has been reconfigured by the New York Declaration and the Global Compact on Refugees, with an increased focus on a whole-of-society approach and international burden-sharing. At the same time, the Innovation Service has experienced multiple changes in senior leadership and staffing, accompanied by shifts in strategy and approach, while also facing reductions in its operational budget.

In this context, the Innovation Fund has evolved, learned and adapted. Through the IKEA Foundation and Government of Belgium grants, the Innovation Fund has selected, funded and supported some extremely promising innovative projects across the organization as well as encouraging, enabling and promoting innovation within the organization, and providing learning on innovation. With funding from the Government of Belgium coming to an end, this is a critical juncture for the Innovation Fund to determine the way ahead.

The aim of this evaluation is therefore to explore the extent to which the design and implementation of the Innovation Fund supported the successful realization of the project's overarching objectives. Its objectives are:

- to assess which external and internal factors, including the Innovation Fund's design and input of resources, propel or hinder its success;
- to review the extent to which the Innovation Fund is aligned with UNHCR's Strategic Directions and policy; and
- to make recommendations about how the Innovation Fund's approach and design can be improved for the next iteration.

2. Methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to undertake the first assessment of the UNHCR Innovation Fund and to provide key lessons for the Innovation Service that can be used to shape the future of UNHCR's innovation programming. It focused on reviewing the first and second iterations of the Innovation Fund, which were implemented from June 2016 to June 2017, and January 2019 to January 2020.

The primary audience for this study is the UNHCR Innovation Service. However, it is anticipated to have relevant findings for other key audiences, namely, grantees/ innovators, UNHCR country operations and the Government of Belgium.

The evaluation follows a structured framework that outlines seven key questions (see Annex 1):

- How was the Innovation Fund designed and implemented (at an operational level)?
- How were Innovation Fund projects selected, funded and supported during Round 1 and Round 2?
- What have been the achievements and results of the innovation projects?
- To what extent has the design and implementation of the Innovation Fund enabled it to meet its objectives?
- How does the design and implementation of the Innovation Fund compare to other initiatives and what can be learned given the Innovation Fund objectives?
- How are lessons generated by the Innovation Fund captured and used in UNHCR?
- To what extent is the Innovation Fund aligned with the broader strategic goals of the organization, including UNHCR's Strategic Directions?

Multiple sources were consulted for each evaluation topic in order to triangulate assertions and compare the different perspectives of stakeholders. The evaluation followed a mixed-methods approach that focused on exploring the Innovation Fund's approach, processes and achievements. It leans heavily on qualitative data collection including: (1) a review of key documents; (2) in-depth interviews with key stakeholders; (3) an exploration of three case studies; and (4) analysis of relevant numerical data.

- The evaluators conducted eight focus group discussions with 17 of the Innovation Service staff at the inception phase of the evaluation. A detailed document review was undertaken to understand the reported activities, challenges and outcomes. The key documents fell into five categories:
  Documents on strategy and direction;
- Communications on strategy and direction;
- Documents on the Innovation Fund, including the "Year in Review 2013–2019" and donor proposals, agreements and annual reports;
- Project documents, including applicants' submissions and reports from Round 1 and Round 2; and
- Evaluations and learning reviews from other innovation funds.

A total of 58 key informant interviews were conducted, comprising 5 senior staff from across UNHCR, 19 Innovation Service staff, 25 project focal points and team members, and 8 individuals from other innovation funds and initiatives. Interviews were conducted remotely using a semi-structured interview template adapted to each interviewee, and lasted 45 to 60 minutes.

The evaluation included interviews with team members from 10 projects. The projects were sampled to account for a diversity of perspectives using five criteria: geography, sector, thematic focus of the project (Round 2), funding round (Round 1 or 2), and level of funding. From this cohort, three case study projects were identified for deeper exploration, including through interviews with three to four other team members and a review of project documents. Examples from these projects are included throughout the report.

Where possible, relevant numerical data on grantee projects and data on reach were obtained to strengthen the analysis. This included key performance indicators (KPIs) for the Innovation Fund, analytics of Innovation Fund email communications and webpage access, and applicant demographics. In addition, the evaluators surveyed grantees who did not participate in interviews in order to gather data relating to what happened to their projects after the end of funding. A total of 22 grantees were contacted and asked to fill in the online survey consisting of 10 open questions. Projects that had recently ended (during the course of the evaluation) were not contacted as it was considered too soon to consider what happened to those projects after funding ended. Nine responses were received, a number of the grantees contacted had moved to other duty stations and were unable to provide information about the current status of their projects. In total 19 different projects were represented in the survey and interviews combined.

While the analysis includes factors that support and hinder the Innovation Fund's success, it does not include an in-depth analysis of UNHCR's organizational culture and bureaucratic impediments, as these have been partially covered in recent organizational assessments and evaluations.

Limitations

There were four limitations associated with this evaluation. First, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic at the start of the evaluation period meant that all interviews had to be conducted remotely. This had particular implications for the inception phase which was originally planned to be face-to-face with the Innovation Service team but had to be conducted remotely. It was also not possible to conduct fieldwork in one or two project locations as planned. In addition, given operational pressures on UNHCR staff, we limited the number of interviews with senior staff members outside the Innovation Service and grantee teams.

Second, the evaluation was broad and ambitious in scope and it was not possible to analyse the efficiency of project resourcing within the scope of this evaluation. Instead the evaluators compared the approach taken by UNHCR and other humanitarian innovation funds as well as noting where research has identified the efficiency and effectiveness of different models. Only top-level budgets for the Innovation Fund and the projects it funded were included, and the evaluation does not include a detailed analysis on use of resources for staffing and operational costs. Similarly, in reviewing the UNHCR model compared to other innovation fund models, we only drew upon publicly available information on costs and financing.

Third, the Innovation Service did not define a clear set of objectives for Round 1 or Round 2 of the Fund, which posed a significant challenge for conducting a robust evaluation. The evaluation team and Innovation Fund lead were able to navigate this by reconstructing the theory of change for the Fund post-hoc, although there are obvious disadvantages with this as it skews the evaluation based on what is known now, looking back on the two iterations of the Fund.

Finally, the evaluators were unable to locate any data on how many people had opened, forwarded or clicked on links within the broadcast emails. This limited the findings and conclusions that can be drawn on the Innovation Fund's engagement with UNHCR staff.

3.Alignment with strategic direction

The Innovation Fund was implemented during a period of significant change in UNHCR. Midway through Round 1 of the Innovation Fund, in 2016, the shape of global refugee response shifted significantly following the unanimous adoption of the New York Declaration and its Annex I, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) by member States. At the same time, UNHCR also began embarking on far-reaching efforts to regionalize and decentralize. These shifts exemplify UNHCR's determination to innovate and the adaptive nature at its core. This section examines the Innovation Fund's alignment with the Innovation Service, UNHCR's Strategic Directions, the CRRF, regionalization initiatives, and the Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The Innovation Fund sits within the Innovation Service and is part of its strategy. Knowledge exchange and linkages between the Fund and other initiatives within the Innovation Service have been organic and depended on the initiative of individual team members.
- The Fund is aligned with and has contributed to UNHCR's Strategic Directions. In particular it has facilitated new collaborations and partnerships, supported a range of projects that provided more comprehensive protection and assistance to refugees (particularly during Round 1), and supported building information systems and better data use (particularly during Round 2).
- Senior interviewees consistently felt that UNHCR's Innovation Fund should support scaling[3] of promising new ideas. Given that scaling is not a current focus of the Fund, this presents a reputational risk for the Innovation Service and its perceived success among senior staff within UNHCR.
- Of the 34 projects, 12 included a focus on testing new approaches to feedback, access to information or inclusion of affected people. There are opportunities to leverage the learning from these projects to enable UNHCR to continue to innovate in its approach regarding Accountability to Affected People **(**AAP).

The Innovation Fund's position within the Innovation Service

The Innovation Fund sits within a broader innovation strategy and services offered by UNHCR. The Innovation Service is based in Geneva with some staff members in Budapest, Panama City, Nairobi and now Bangkok. It aims "to support and facilitate a culture that encourages and promotes innovation and creativity at all levels of the organization".[4] The Innovation Service provides and facilitates a collection of interlocking services that include the following:

- **The Innovation Fund** – provision of funding, support for experimentation and mentorship to small teams of UNHCR staff to pilot early-stage, novel projects that fall outside the scope of normal UNHCR operations.

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[3] For the purpose of this evaluation, the term "scaling" includes expanding the project within the same location through working with different partners or end-users, or addressing a different but related problem, or replicating the project in other locations, countries or offices.
[4] UNHCR Innovation Service, "Strategy 2020–2021"

- **Digital Inclusion and Connectivity for Refugees Programmes** – provision of financial support to country operations that submit Expressions of Interest to address specific challenges, related to digital access, inclusion and participation.
- **The Innovation Fellowship** – a 12-month learning programme for UNHCR staff members focused on building innovation skills and competencies and supporting Fellows to facilitate innovation in their own operations or divisions.
- **Big Data, Climate and Environment**[5] – this is a new initiative and details are yet to be released.

The Innovation Fund has been implemented as a stand-alone initiative within the Innovation Service, with few formal linkages with other initiatives. There have been several examples of Innovation Fellows applying to the Fund at the end of their year-long training programme and during Round 1 the Fund also provided small grants to 13 Innovation Fellows. Staff within the Innovation Service have also been involved in selecting and providing technical support to grantees. However, the strategy does not specify how different initiatives within the Innovation Service relate to each other and so these examples are ad hoc.

Instances of learning and knowledge transfer between initiatives have also largely centred on exchanges between the Innovation Fellowship and the Innovation Fund. For example, the Innovation Fellowship and Fund have exchanged ideas about criteria for selecting innovators and the Fund has been informed by the Fellowship's approach to training staff in innovation methods. There were also examples of the Fund exchanging learning on procurement and funding processes with the Connectivity for Refugees Programme and the Humanitarian Education Accelerator (which no longer sits within the Innovation Service).

Stronger strategic directions for the Innovation Service are needed to define more clearly the objectives for the Innovation Fund and how these interlink with other elements of the Innovation Service. In particular, it was unclear whether there were intended linkages between the Innovation Fund and other mechanisms including the Connectivity Fund (now renamed the Digital Inclusion and Connectivity for Refugees Programme) or the Innovation Fellowship. While the current strategy outlines intentions to support different phases of the innovation cycle (problem identification, ideation, experimentation and testing, production of a viable solution, scale), the Innovation Service has not yet articulated whether and how different services support different parts of this pathway. This meant that grantees completed their involvement with the Innovation Fund without knowing what other funding or non-financial support might be available for them to develop the innovation further.

Alignment with Strategic Directions

The UNHCR Strategic Directions for 2017–2021 include commitments to put people first, to strengthen and diversify partnerships, to work across the entire spectrum of forced displacement, and to provide practical, concrete support to States to secure protection and solutions for persons of concern to UNHCR. Within the Strategic Directions, embracing innovation is identified as one of the main ways for the organization to pursue these overarching goals.

[5] This replaced the former Foresight and Futures work of the Innovation Service during the course of this evaluation.

In this context, interviews with senior staff across UNHCR highlighted four themes regarding the Innovation Fund's alignment with and contribution to UNHCR's Strategic Directions:

First, the Innovation Fund included a focus on collaboration and partnerships. This is a primary focus of UNHCR's Strategic Directions, which describe an emphasis on brokering key partnerships and developing the services, platforms and products needed to drive institutional change. The Innovation Fund recipients tended to work closely with a wide range of new collaborators including other team members, external partners such as universities and the private sector, persons of concern to UNHCR, other parts of UNHCR, staff working in the Innovation Service, and UNHCR staff in their country operations.

Second, the Innovation Fund supported a number of projects directly aligned with the priority directions included in the Strategic Directions (see Table 1). The directions describe an intention "to embrace innovation in a way that would ensure the people UNHCR is trying to help have more control of their lives". This motivation is reflected in the selection criteria for Round 1 and in the result that 65 per cent of the projects funded under Round 1 were implemented with persons of concern to UNHCR as the user. Examples of projects implemented under the five priority directions are provided in Table 1, illustrating how the Innovation Fund particularly contributed to innovative projects relating to protection and the empowerment of the people that UNHCR serves.

Third, Round 2 of the Innovation Fund supported building information systems and better data use. The Strategic Directions were intended to be implemented in a way that strengthens UNHCR's ability to analyse, research and learn. In Round 2, the focus of the Innovation Fund shifted significantly towards innovations that would support stronger data analytics and better organizational decision-making. In total, 11 of the 17 projects funded in Round 2 focused on use of data and artificial intelligence or modelling and simulation. However, at the same time, this emphasis also resulted in fewer innovation projects being implemented directly with refugees.

Fourth, so far, few of the funded projects have been adopted into a new context. The Strategic Directions describe an aim to design and develop scaled solutions.[6] The Innovation Fund provides limited short-term funding to allow UNHCR staff to test new solutions, but is unable to provide the financial, technical or mentoring support needed to scale. Without greater resourcing and longer time frames, it was not possible to develop scaled solutions (see Section 5). The lack of clearly defined objectives for the Fund (see Section 4) and expectations among senior interviewees that an Innovation Fund should service the scaling of promising new ideas present a reputational risk for the Innovation Service and its perceived success within UNHCR.

TABLE 1: EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS THAT SUPPORTED THE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS		
Strategic Direction	**Detail**	**Example**
Protection	Seven projects implemented, including within	• Project in Ecuador to analyse and visualize qualitative indicators and results, so that they

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[6] UNHCR (2017) "UNHCR Strategic Directions 2017–2021", https://www.unhcr.org/5894558d4.pdf

Including advocacy and outreach, strengthen protection and operational capacity to protect	the Department for International Protection	can be shared quickly with partners and reporting officers (Round 2).
Responding in emergencies and beyond Including emergency preparedness and response, capacity of national actors, early focus on solutions, technical capacity to set policies and standards	Two projects focused on emergency preparedness and response	• Establishing a radio station, which is owned, run and sustained by the community, to strengthen communication with and between refugees from Mozambique in Malawi, including on communicable diseases (Round 1).
Promoting inclusion and self-reliance Including the inclusion of persons of concern to UNHCR in National Development Frameworks, mainstream national systems, while discouraging camps and encouraging cash-based assistance	Two projects relating to inclusion of persons of concern to UNHCR	• The second Refugee Food Festival was held in Strasbourg, where French restaurants opened their kitchens to refugee chefs who cooked alongside their French counterparts to change negative perceptions of refugees and open employment opportunities for the refugee chefs. It then expanded to 15 more cities through the development of a toolkit to help organizers across Europe and beyond establish Refugee Food Festivals of their own (Round 1).
The empowerment of the people UNHCR serves Including feedback mechanisms, programming for diversity, building on skills of displaced people, and access to information for displaced people	12 projects relating to feedback, access to information and inclusion	• Created and furnished a GIS Lab where 13 refugees were trained in spatial data collection and map design. The refugees have since been deployed in the 12 districts of Za'atari camp in Jordan to collect spatial data using mobile devices (Round 2).
The pursuit of solutions Including engagement with development actors, partnerships with political, security and HR actors, peacebuilding initiatives, reintegration of returnees and expansion of third-country solutions	No direct projects in this area	• N/A

Alignment with the Global Compact on Refugees

During Round 1, many of the projects supported by the Innovation Fund were aligned to the CRRF objectives to ease pressure on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third-

country solutions and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.[7] This included projects to increase refugees' access to information and employment and to facilitate positive relationships between refugees and host communities. Many of the projects also allowed teams to take multi-stakeholder approaches, although only one of the projects interviewed included national or local authorities and host communities in the project team.

Regionalization initiative

The High Commissioner launched a Headquarters Review process in late 2016 and appointed a Director for Change in early 2017. UNHCR is now redesigning its approach to operations, based on concepts of decentralization, regionalization and new approaches to resource allocation and accountability.[8] It aims to address concerns among field operations that Headquarters has become insufficiently responsive to their priorities and is too occupied with poorly coordinated top-down initiatives.

Five of the senior-level interview participants included in this evaluation spontaneously noted that there was limited alignment between the Innovation Fund and UNHCR's regionalization agenda. The Innovation Fund collaborated with more than 20 field operations to develop, launch and support innovation projects. However, overall the Fund is seen as a top-down initiative where the design and funding allocation is exclusively determined at Headquarters. Interviewees concluded that future iterations of the Fund should align with the regionalization agenda and should consider UNHCR's intention to "make [innovation] accessible to as many actors as possible, including, in particular, to persons of concern, staff and affiliates, and partners".[9]

Regionalization is a new and ongoing initiative. The process was initiated following a Headquarters Review in 2016, which made several recommendations aimed at reducing constraints to responding to local and regional dynamics. A restructure of bureaux took place between 2017 and 2020, with a new Division of Strategic Planning and Results established in January 2020. The broader redesign of UNHCR's organizational structure is still ongoing. It is anticipated that the Innovation Service and other "units" within Headquarters will be subject to future reviews, but this is yet to be communicated.

Age, gender and diversity

The Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy is an important component of UNHCR's strategic priorities. It was developed as part of UNHCR's approach to AAP and incorporates UNHCR's updated commitments to women and girls as well as clarifying actions for the engagement of refugees, local partner organizations and field staff.

Table 2 indicates how the Innovation Fund contributed to three elements of the AGD policy: inclusive programming, participation and gender equality. The policy includes six core areas of engagement all of which hold direct relevance for the Innovation Fund. Due to the broad scope of the policy, three elements were selected for detailed analysis in this evaluation based on available data. The table highlights that data were collated on sex,

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[7] United Nations (2018) "Global Compact on Refugees", https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4.pdf
[8] UNHCR Manual, "Organizational Structure", Chapter 2, 2019
[9] Ibid.

location and role of project teams and that the projects supported by the Fund had 50 per cent female focal points and 51 per cent female team members. Although individual projects have collected data on recipients of assistance, these were not collated across the Innovation Fund. There are also limited data regarding the age and other diversity characteristics of grantees and participants.

Senior interviewees emphasized that innovative approaches have the potential to be leveraged to allow UNHCR to "perform better and in a more inclusive manner". In particular, they suggest that the Innovation Fund should continue to support projects that allow UNHCR to innovate in its approach to AAP.[10] The Innovation Fund supported 12 projects that included an AAP element, including projects relating to feedback, access to information and inclusion. Since the interviews, the Innovation Service has included "institutionalizing AAP" as a goal in the 2021 planned activities and launched a Digital Access and Inclusion Fund with a focus on AAP. In interviews senior management staff also noted that the Innovation Fund should have a greater emphasis on sharing feedback and learning from AAP approaches. This requires stronger relationships with senior stakeholders across the divisions and an emphasis on divisions taking greater responsibility for informing project criteria and selection, providing technical support and sharing results.

TABLE 2: ALIGNMENT OF THE INNOVATION FUND WITH KEY AGE, GENDER AND DIVERSITY ACTIONS		
Action	**Summary of minimum actions**	**Contributions**
AGD inclusive programming	• Disaggregate all data by age, sex and diversity for analysis and programming.	• The Fund collects data on applicants and selected project focal persons and team members, including on sex, location and role. • Disaggregated data on age and other diversity characteristics are not currently systematically collated.
Participation and inclusion	• Country operations to employ participatory methodologies at each stage of the operations management cycle.	• 65 per cent of the projects funded under Round 1 and 18 per cent of projects funded under Round 2 were implemented with persons of concern to UNHCR. Many of these involved participation of and/or feedback from persons of concern to UNHCR as part of the approach, including several with leadership from refugees or host community members. • 12 of the 34 projects included a particular focus on testing new approaches to feedback, access to information or inclusion of affected people.

[10] Since this evaluation was drafted, the Innovation Service has relaunched the Connectivity Fund as the Digital Inclusion and Participation Fund, which will be specifically dedicated to AAP initiatives. See: www.unhcr.org/innovation/digital-inclusion-call/

Gender equality and commitments to women and girls	• 50 per cent female participants in management and leadership structures under UNHCR authority • Protection documentation on an individual basis • Increase the percentage of women as primary recipients of assistance • Ensure equal access to livelihood, education and health programmes • Implementation of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) standard operating procedures (SOPs) (safety/ security, legal, medical, psychosocial).	• The Innovation Service has historically had a majority female team (in 2017 it was reported to be 73 per cent female) although representation in management has been lower. • 51 per cent of project teams and 50 per cent of project focal persons were female. • Some individual projects have data on recipients of assistance, but these are not collated across the Fund.

CASE STUDY 1: QUALMINER PROJECT, ECUADOR

"Humanitarians really like to put the narrative out there, so you tell the story, because it's more compelling and also because you can show a lot more." – UNHCR team member, Qualminer project, Ecuador

Project overview: In a sector dominated by quantitative reporting, the Qualminer project sought to better analyse and visualize qualitative indicators and results so that they could be shared quickly with partners and reporting officers. It operated in Ecuador and worked with the GTRM (working group on refugees and migrants) to coordinate the response of UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international and regional organizations to the Venezuelan situation in Ecuador. The project ran from April 2019 to June 2020.

Problem identification and development of the solution: The GTRM recognized that they may be missing some important information by monitoring only quantitative data and in 2019 introduced qualitative indicators. However, reading and analysing the data was time-consuming. The coordination team together with the UNHCR Information Management Officer sought ways to make the process faster and more effective. The team came up with the idea of applying text mining techniques to analyse and visualize data stored in the monitoring and evaluation software ActivityInfo, and of working with researchers from the University of Pennsylvania to assess whether these information products affect programmatic decisions. The team agreed on an overall objective to improve the systematization of qualitative data that partners were including in the online monitoring software ActivityInfo. They did this through three activities: 1) updating the script in the ActivityInfo system to extract qualitative information; 2) developing text mining analysis techniques and evaluating with partners their use of qualitative data; 3) building some prototype information products to use qualitative indicators in an automated

way. By the end of the funding period (June 2020), the project had successfully completed the three planned areas of work and identified strong support among partners in Ecuador to continue developing the project.

Project team: The project team at the time of application consisted of seven people, including three from UNHCR: Information Management Officer (project focal point), Interagency Coordinator, and Americas Operations Manager (Information Management); and four external team members: ActivityInfo Lead Developer and Director (BeDataDriven), Penn State University Professor, HIAS Ecuador National Director, and Data Scientist (BeDataDriven). It has since grown to incorporate additional team members. By identifying the problem collectively with the GTRM coordination team and incorporating external team members from a software company, academia and relevant staff from the UNHCR regional office, the project generated a broad support and ownership from the outset. The project team also provides an example of the whole-of-society approach reflected in many Innovation Fund projects. The diverse mix of members in the project team and the engagement and implementation of the project through the GTRM contribute to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the Global Compact on Refugees, in line with UNHCR strategic priorities.

Further funding: At this stage, generating additional funding to be able to continue the project remains critical. Large amounts of the initial project budgets were spent on fees and expenses for consultants, which it is not possible to maintain without continued funding. Identifying that the project had potential, the team were encouraged by the Innovation Service to apply for additional funding from an external source in 2019, but the application was unsuccessful. This highlights the transitional period that most projects face as they complete the proof of concept phase but are not yet ready to scale, and the need for support and brokering to access appropriate funding opportunities to support "transition to scale".

Scaling: The project team continues to be focused on the project in Ecuador, but there is strong potential for scaling the project, particularly for the Venezuela crisis within the region, and also to other crises. UNHCR project team members working at the national level do not have a frame of reference for how the project would scale, and do not know if and how any other Innovation Fund projects have scaled within UNHCR. Because of Regional Office involvement in the project from the outset, the project is well connected with colleagues working at a regional level. The presence of BeDataDriven on the project team provides another potential avenue for scaling but also raises questions around long-term ownership of the project. Within the team there are varied perspectives on scaling, and from an academic perspective the project is already scaling in an organic way, through personal connections, students, shared learning through academic publications and other projects that team members may be working on in other countries and regions. These different perspectives and avenues for scaling highlight the myriad possibilities to scale some Innovation Fund projects, but also the fact that pathways to scaling are unclear to UNHCR project members. This is an area where post-project mentoring and brokering support would be valuable.

COVID-19: The added value of the project became more apparent during the COVID-19 situation. Many partner activities have stopped but partners are still expected to report. Having narrative reporting indicators allows partners to provide an explanation of the challenges they may be facing in assisting refugees and migrants in this period.

4. Design and implementation of the Innovation Fund

The design and implementation of the Innovation Fund changed significantly over its two rounds. This section explores the rationale and implications of the approach as well as analysing the application and selection processes, and the financial and non-financial support to projects.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Between 2013 and 2019 the intent and design of the Innovation Fund changed significantly, with shifts away from the open and flexible approach in Round 1 that facilitated refugee involvement, to a focus on themed work areas and innovation for the organization. These changes were strongly shaped by internal factors within the Innovation Service including changes in management, a growing interest in organizational change, changes in other Innovation Service activities and learning from other initiatives.

- Following its launch, the newly developed Innovation Fund encountered a number of significant implementation challenges including a lack of clarity on the objectives of the Fund, challenges in innovating around UNHCR procurement and administrative processes, limited staffing and competing demands. These were accompanied by rapid timelines, a low implementation rate and ad hoc spending. These challenges persisted from Round 1 to Round 2, partly because those implementing the Fund lacked the time to support learning from implementation.

- In line with the shifting focus of the Fund from Round 1 to Round 2, changes to the application and selection processes had a significant impact on the geographical location of projects. These moved away from a majority of projects in the Africa region, where the majority of populations of concern are located, and towards a greater concentration of projects in Europe and the Americas. The introduction of the themed work areas was also accompanied by a reduction in the number of field-based projects, and saw the predominant use of funds by projects shift from ICT equipment to fees for consultants and specialist external support to inform projects around the themed work areas.

- In both rounds, the achievements of many projects were hampered by short project timelines. Non-financial support provided by the Innovation Service was highly valued and contributed to the success of projects and to the long-term sustainability and growth of innovations within UNHCR, but was limited by lack of resources and staffing capacity in the Innovation Service.

Strategy and focus

The original concept for the Innovation Fund was developed during 2013 in close collaboration with the IKEA Foundation which saw it as an opportunity that "enables and facilitates the prototyping, testing, and production of

new, creative solutions to the challenges faced by refugees and the forcibly displaced".[11] The proposal described a loosely defined intention to offer a separate and additional source of funds (and mentoring) for discrete and well-defined projects that fell outside the scope of regular programmes. Since then, the design has changed significantly in response to changing priorities and dynamics within the Innovation Service as well as in response to implementation realities.

FIGURE 1: DESIGN OF ROUND 1 AND ROUND 2 OF THE INNOVATION FUND

INNOVATION FUND DESIGN

	ROUND 1	ROUND 2
Focus	None	Decision-making, work areas: data and artificial intelligence, modelling and simulation, inclusive intelligence, storytelling and culture
Potential innovators	Individual UNHCR staff	Teams of UNHCR staff
Phase of the innovation	Any	Early-stage ideas
Key selection criteria	Quality of challenge statement, refugee participation, a feasibility assessment	Innovative potential, a team interview and their understanding of the problem
Funding amounts	$24,000 - $60,000	$28,000 - $80,000
Time for implementation	4 months	6 - 9 months
Other support	Intention to accompany innovators through the process	Mentoring in innovation processes and technical support
M&E approach	Project reports	Progress against innovation milestones

[11] UNHCR (2014) "Annual progress report and next year plan", submitted to the IKEA Foundation

Round 1 was designed rapidly and was characterized by an open and flexible approach. During the final year of the IKEA grant, the concept for the Innovation Fund was developed during a one-month secondment by a former UNHCR Innovation Fellow. Criteria were developed associated with the quality of the challenge statement and the idea as well as an assessment of the feasibility of implementing the project within the time frame. The design was also very flexible. For example, there was a relatively "arbitrary" decision about limits to the size of projects (fund amounts were small but there was not a decision to focus on a particular part of the innovation cycle) and the Innovation Fund was open to all staff. There was a strong emphasis on "accompanying" the innovators through the process, and although the nature of this support was not clearly codified, it was intended to support project implementation and to come from staff within the Innovation Service or its Labs.

This design of Round 1 facilitated a focus on bottom-up innovation and refugee involvement in identifying priorities. The proposal to IKEA stated that the Innovation Fund would seek to address problems under two categories: problems affecting persons of concern to UNHCR and internal challenges faced by UNHCR in fostering innovation. It noted that "refugee involvement is crucial from early on".[12] This ethos was reflected in the 2016 "Year in review", in which Andrew Harper, the then-head of the Innovation Service, emphasized "the promise of evolving technologies, the possibilities of new partnerships, and the prospect of fundamental cultural change in our organization that values proactive, ground-up problem-solving". He stated that the priority was to support field operations and deployable innovation support.[13]

Round 2 of the Innovation Fund incorporated a number of modifications in design with an emphasis on the innovation process and staff learning. A report to the IKEA Foundation at the end of Round 1 stated that the Innovation Fund needed to focus on internal barriers to change and to support projects that could have a positive impact on the lives of refugees, coupled with assessments of internal barriers to change. It also emphasized that "sufficient skills and time are needed to involve end users". By 2017, this had been codified into a new design including the themed work areas of data and artificial intelligence, modelling and simulation, inclusive intelligence and storytelling and culture, and advocated for culture change in order to become a data-driven organization.[14]

The change in focus was primarily driven by a growing interest in organizational change among some Innovation Service staff. Staff within the Service were conscious that internal processes were often a barrier to decision-making and a series of discussions among the team and with people outside the Service led them to conclude that the Service should explore how innovation could facilitate better decision-making processes. However, potential recipients of the Innovation Fund were not consulted in this process, and there was little consideration of how the new focus would align with the UNHCR Strategic Directions. The new design for the Innovation Fund focused on solutions to challenges in decision-making processes. It was developed during July to December 2018, including a new "Terms of Use" document for awarded grantees.

[12] IKEA Foundation grant agreement, 24 April 2014
[13] UNHCR Innovation Service (no date). "Year in review 2016", Essay Edition.
[14] UNHCR Innovation Service. "Essays from the edge of humanitarian innovation: 2017 Year in review". Main Article.

Changes to the eligibility criteria for Round 2 narrowed the scope of projects that applied and were selected. These changes demonstrate a number of overarching shifts in the design of the Innovation Fund, including shifts towards:

- **themed work areas** – the introduction of a decision-making thesis and four themed work areas for projects (data and artificial intelligence, modelling and simulation, inclusive intelligence, and storytelling and culture);
- **innovation for the organization** – removing refugee participation as a criterion, considering "end-users" more broadly;
- **early-stage innovation** – funding only proof of concept stage innovations in Round 2, reducing the focus on assessing feasibility in the selection process, and employing a build, test and learn cycle;
- **focus on people** – the introduction of a team requirement for projects, stated expectations of individual commitment to innovation learning and milestones, introduction of Terms of Use.

The introduction of the decision-making thesis aimed to provide a clear problem-driven approach. This allowed the Innovation Fund to build momentum around a fixed set of problems and to provide tailored technical support. However, the problem statement was described in a way that many interviewees found confusing. It also led to lower engagement of persons of concern to UNHCR (as innovators or as users) as well as shifting the geographical focus of the Innovation Fund. The implications of these design changes are explored during the remainder of this section.

Factors and tensions shaping the design of the Innovation Fund

The Innovation Service received funds from several major donors as well as through the core budget, and was balancing many competing demands. This meant **that although the Innovation Service benefited from significant support at senior levels, very few of these individuals had a clear understanding of the purpose, priorities and implementation details of the Fund**. There was a missed opportunity to engage senior stakeholders in designing the Fund's strategic focus or in championing exciting innovation projects across the organization.

Unclear objectives for the Innovation Fund coupled with a lack of coherent strategy or clear links with UNHCR's Strategic Objectives significantly hindered the team's ability to design and assess the achievements of the Innovation Fund. Without clear objectives, the changes described above were primarily shaped by other factors including the following:

- **Changes in management**. Since its inception in 2014, the Innovation Service has had three Directors and two Interim Directors who all brought a different emphasis to the Innovation Service's work. These shifts can be seen in the changing language and focus of the Innovation Service "Year in review" documents as well as the Innovation Service Strategy documents. The documents give different emphases to the position of technology, the role of persons of concern to UNHCR as innovators and users of innovation, and the importance of regionalization. Inevitably the Innovation Service provided a backdrop that informed the direction of the Innovation Fund.

- **Changes in other Innovation Service activities.** The Innovation Fund's original design involved sourcing projects from the UN IDEAS platform and aligning projects with the Innovation Service's five Labs.[15] During the early years of the Innovation Service, a number of flagship projects had been launched from the UN IDEAS platform, including the help.unhcr.org website and a series of solutions addressing gender-based violence (GBV).[16] Similarly, the Labs were the primary mechanism for funding and supporting innovation initiatives. However, by 2016 use of the UN IDEAS platform was relatively ad hoc and the Labs were being absorbed into other departments or closed. Therefore a new design was needed.
- **Learning from other initiatives.** The team also drew inspiration from a wide array of research and learning. For example, there are examples of learning from the Labs on engaging senior management, embedding innovation projects within field strategies, engaging communities in design, and needing to provide more opportunities for refugees themselves to engage in new and innovative approaches. There are examples of learning on selection and support of innovators being shared with the Innovation Fellowship and vice versa. However, without clear objectives for the Innovation Fund, this learning was gained and applied in ad hoc and organic ways. There was also limited time or resource for the Innovation Fund to learn from innovation initiatives already arising in country operations. The two missions conducted for learning in Tindouf, Algeria[17] and Ampain, Ghana in 2017[18] proved the value of investing in learning, by generating information on early outcomes of the Innovation Fund projects being implemented in those locations as well as learning on implementation periods, mentoring and technical support, and opportunities for engaging refugees.

Project applicants and selection

The design changes to the application and selection processes described above led to some notable changes in the composition of projects between Round 1 and Round 2. There was a move away from field-based projects and refugee involvement, and an increase in the proportion of projects that were located and implemented in Europe and the Americas.

Rounds 1 and 2 of the Innovation Fund were open to all UNHCR staff and a broad cross-section of individuals applied. In response to all three Calls for Proposals, the Innovation Fund received applications from UNHCR staff working in Headquarters and across a wide range of offices in countries from around the globe. The mix of applicants was broadly gender-balanced and of mixed seniority within the organization ranging from Representatives and Heads of Offices to General Service staff. Project applications covered diverse sectors of work, and the majority of projects cross-cut different sectors, particularly in Round 2 as a result of the introduction of a team component for projects. A detailed breakdown of project composition of both rounds of the Innovation Fund is included in Annex 2.

The selection process in Round 2 focused on identifying promising innovations from teams whose capacities could be built. For example, in recognition of the challenge of early-stage innovation, the weighting

[15] IKEA Foundation grant agreement, 24 April 2014
[16] UNHCR (no date) "Beyond technology: Innovation at UNHCR. Year 2015"
[17] UNHCR (2017) "Tindouf mission report: Mission objectives, lessons learned and recommendations"
[18] UNHCR (2017) "Ampain, Ghana mission report: Mission objectives, lessons learned and recommendations"

given to the "feasibility" criteria was reduced, more flexibility was given to teams when it came to predicting project budgets, and a team interview was introduced and given greater importance by moving it to an earlier point in the selection process. These decisions were consultative and collaborative within the Innovation Service and built upon a deep engagement with latest relevant research in the area of early-stage innovation, and on shared learning with other innovation initiatives within UNHCR (in particular the Innovation Fellowship).

Less focus was given to understanding how Calls for Proposals and all-staff broadcasts were received and understood across the organization due to already stretched resources. After the first Call for Proposals of Round 2, the Innovation Service conducted data analysis of the applications received and identified that some applicants had not fully understood the areas of work. For example, some people applied under work areas not aligned to the project. Beyond this the Innovation Service has not been able to conduct in-depth analysis of how Calls for Proposals were received more broadly across the organization, especially how they were received by people who chose not to apply. The evaluators were unable to locate any data on how many people had opened, forwarded or clicked on links within the broadcast emails.

The design changes described above resulted in fewer field-based projects and less refugee involvement in Round 2. At the time of Round 1 the Innovation Service had been working with a number of partners on refugee-driven innovation. By Round 2, this focus had reduced and they instead sought to encourage innovations that focused on the way the organization was functioning in line with the direction of the Service at the time. This was predominantly achieved by removing the requirement of refugee participation for projects (although this was still encouraged) and introducing the four themed work areas . In Round 1, 65 per cent of projects placed persons of concern to UNHCR solely as the end-user; by Round 2 this proportion had dropped to 18 per cent with the majority of projects placing UNHCR staff members as the end-user. In line with this shift towards internally focused innovation, fewer projects in Round 2 were field-based: more applications were received from Headquarters and from regional and country offices, while fewer applications were received from field or sub-offices. There was also a dramatic reduction in the number of projects being implemented in refugee camps or settlements. With fewer projects being designed and implemented in offices with direct engagement with persons of concern to UNHCR, refugee involvement in projects also decreased significantly. This moved the Innovation Fund away from its initial focus on refugee participation that had been closely aligned with the Strategic Directions of the organization (see Section 3).

FIGURE 2: SELECTED APPLICANTS, SHORTLISTED APPLICANTS AND SELECTED PROJECTS

KEY SELECTION FIGURES

Legend:
- Applications received
- Number of countries
- Projects selected
- Projects selected outside CFP*
- Projects funded

Round 1: 102, 47, 14, 3, 17
Round 2 first Call for Proposals: 79, 42, 15, 13
Round 2 second Call for Proposals: 30, 18, 4, 4

*CFP - Call for Proposals
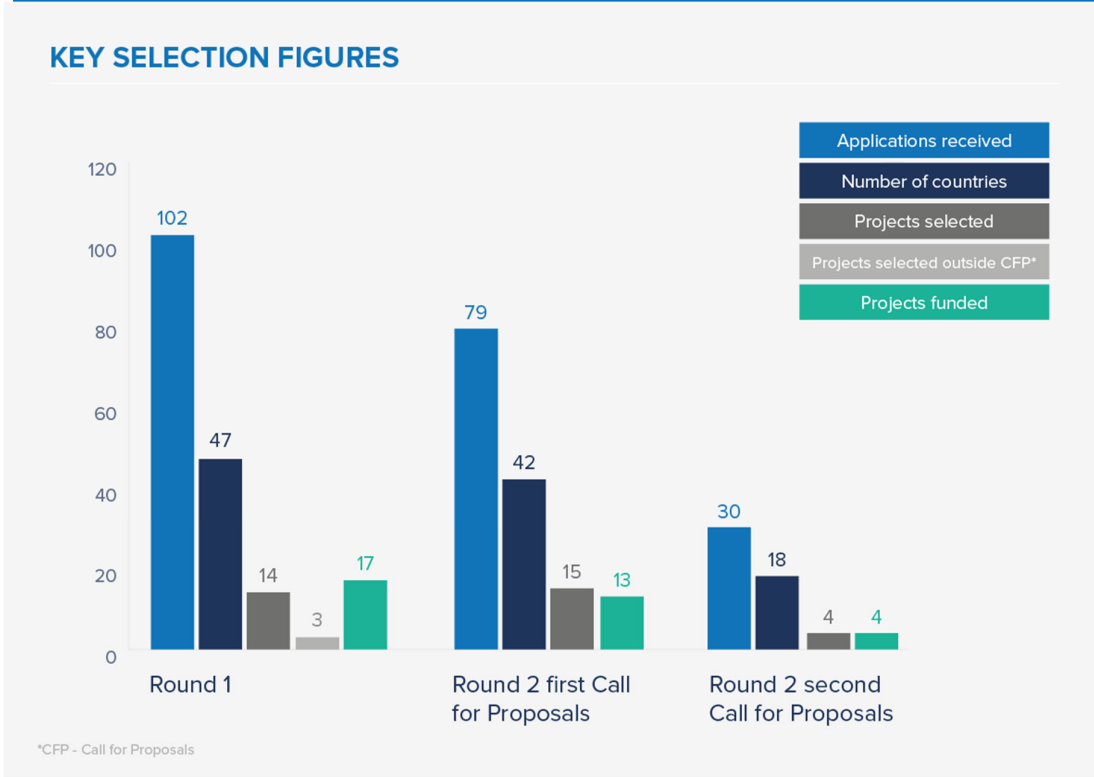
FIGURE 3: LOCATIONS OF APPLICANTS AND SELECTED PROJECTS

REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF PROJECT APPLICATIONS AND SELECTED PROJECT LOCATIONS

EUROPE: 13% 6% 26% 35%

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: 7% 17% 15% 18%

AMERICAS: 9% 12% 9% 23%

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: 9% 6% 13% 6%

AFRICA: 61% 59% 37% 18%

Round 1 2
% of applications
% of selected projects

One application in Round 1 did not specify the planned location

GENDER OF PROJECT TEAM

FEMALE ● MALE ●

Gender of project team members
Round 2

51% 49%

Gender of project focal point
Round 1*

36% 57%

7% Female-Male joint focal points

*This excludes one project for which the data was not available

Gender of project focal point
Round 2

59% 41%

FUNDING

Total amount of funding requested by, and granted to, selected projects

Requested Granted

Round 2
Total amount requested: $1,026,014
Total amount of renewal granted: $248,248
Total amount granted: $978,465

Round 1*
Total amount requested: $648,247
Total amount granted: $762,614

*This excludes one project for which the data was not available

MARKETING

How the project team heard about the Fund
Round 2

■ UNHCR Broadcast email
■ Supervisor/ manager
■ Previous Fund engagement
■ UNHCR Intranet
■ Colleague
■ Direct contact from the Innovation Service

The shift towards internally focused innovation also led to changes in the geographic spread of projects in Round 2. In Round 1, the majority of project applications were received from Africa, the region that hosts the majority of populations of concern to UNHCR.[19] The speed with which applications were submitted highlighted that many applicants already had ideas but had previously had no avenue for realizing them. By having a broad fund in Round 1, it appears that the Innovation Fund had instantly succeeded in capturing the imagination of many staff in harder-to-reach, remote locations, especially those on the African continent, including those with more limited operational funding. From Round 1 to Round 2 the number of applications received from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and Asia and the Pacific increased, and applications from Africa decreased. More selected projects were from Europe and the Americas while there were fewer selected projects from Africa in Round 2. The shift towards internal innovation has led some project team members to express concern that the themed work areas introduced in Round 2 were not meaningful to all operations and were not directly informed by the needs of persons of concern to UNHCR.

Time for implementation

The Innovation Fund is novel within UNHCR and operates outside the organization's regular resource allocation process. Although the Innovation Service built skills and experience in implementing a fund, implementation challenges remained persistent across both rounds and led to short timelines.

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[19] See: https://reporting.unhcr.org/population

INNOVATION FUND TIMELINE

JANUARY — IKEA Foundation grant start date

MAY — Proposal submitted for Innovation Fund 2.0 to Government of Belgium

DECEMBER — Innovation Fund 2.0 launched, call for proposals (CFP1)

JANUARY — Funding released (CFP2)
4 projects selected in CFP1 received a funding renewal until the end of June 2020

JUNE — Government of Belgium grant ends (CFP 1+2)

2014 2015 **2016** 2017 **2018** **2019** **2020**

JUNE — Innovation Fund launched, call for proposals

JULY — Reminder sent to all staff Deadline for applications

AUG/SEPT — Project selection

SEPT — Project start dates

DECEMBER — Deadline for funds to be expended, IKEA Foundation grant ends

JANUARY — Reminder sent to all staff Final deadline for applications

MARCH — Project selection

APRIL — Project start dates, funding available

SEPTEMBER — Second call for proposals

OCTOBER — Final deadline for applications

NOVEMBER — Project selection

DECEMBER — Project start dates Deadline for all funds to be expended

CFP1
CFP2
CFP1

Funding periods were determined by donor reporting deadlines and UNHCR's operational management cycle which dictates fiscal year and programme and procurement deadlines. There were also delays in launching both rounds of the Innovation Fund and late action to address underspends. These problems were exacerbated by limited staffing. For example, until 2016 there were no dedicated staff working on the Innovation Fund. The Fund was therefore designed in the final year of the IKEA grant during a one-month secondment and was launched in June 2016, with just five months between the launch of the Call for Proposals, project selection and planned disbursement of funds. The Innovation Fund was then implemented by a small team consisting of one staff member with support from a Senior Admin Programme Associate. Project timelines were similarly pressured during Round 2 with teams having between four and nine months to implement their grants. Procurement challenges meant that only 43 per cent of funds had been spent by the end of 2019 and the Innovation Fund was extended into 2020.

The short length of financial support was a significant challenge and affected project achievements. Project team members noted that, coupled with the challenges of grappling with programmatic requirements for the project – for example, procurement and contracting of partners – it was challenging to achieve much in these time periods. The time periods limited activities that could be implemented, added an element of stress to the process and reduced the opportunity for reflection and learning by project teams. The time constraints also made it hard to pivot or adapt projects along the way. One project gave the example of having to contract one partner for all phases of

the project, as there was insufficient time to process separate Terms of Reference (TORs) for each phase of the project. Some projects were unable to complete all planned phases of their project because of the time constraints. With the shift towards a focus on early-stage innovation in Round 2, sufficient time and flexibility was particularly important because teams were not starting with concrete proposals.

> "The main problem we encountered was lack of time. In fact, we did not make use of all the funds, we returned the majority of them, the reason being it was impossible for us to follow the public procurement methods and the guidelines and also implement the project by December. That was the main issue which was a pity because we wanted to take the project further." – UNHCR team member, Refugee and asylum-seeker social integration narratives project, Malta

Financial support to projects

Overall the Innovation Service struggled to apply UNHCR procurement processes to innovation. In a 2017 article, Salvatore Vassallo notes the challenges to innovation posed by bureaucracy: "Even if someone within the organization has a brilliant idea, the long processes of reviewing, selecting, testing, authorizing, clearing, and signing off of this solution can kill it before it even has had a chance to impact refugees". He particularly highlights the challenges of: (a) authorization levels; (b) partitioning of administrative tasks; and (c) communication between Headquarters and teams in the field.[20]

Building the knowledge and processes for awarding dozens of small grants from Geneva to multiple operations took time. In 2015, most staff working within the Innovation Service had limited experience of UNHCR finance and procurement processes. It took time to build knowledge of the processes and practical expectations around how to access and distribute funds.[21]

These challenges led to adjustments to the intended design. In particular, **Round 1 included ad hoc spending made outside formal Calls for Proposals.** The Innovation Fund was seen as a flexible resource for fostering innovative projects and several initiatives were supported outside the formal Call for Proposals. In total $426,412 was spent on the Innovation Fund itself with an additional $38,171 on projects from the IDEAS platform, $271,148 on 13 grants for innovation fellows and $202,271 on four projects that were awarded before the Fund Request for Proposals.

The budget for Round 2 was comparatively restricted. The Government of Belgium awarded a total of $1,000,000 to the Innovation Fund. Round 2 also suffered from a low implementation rate: $730,165 was awarded to 13 projects in 2019 but only $426,205 was spent. A second tranche of $496,548 was therefore made available to four grantees in 2020.

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[20] UNHCR Innovation Service. "Essays from the edge of humanitarian innovation: 2017 Year in review"
[21] Three different modalities were used: (a) transferring funds to Country Operations for direct expenditure; (b) enabling Country Operations to expense costs to Innovation Service expense codes; and (c) creating three-way partnership agreements with external partners, with funds transferred directly from the Innovation Service. These processes were used by the Innovation Service's Connectivity Fund, Humanitarian Education Accelerator (HEA) and the Innovation Fund, all of which experienced significant challenges. All require a large time investment from the Service and grantees, meaning that Innovation Service's relationship with grantees involves a substantial focus on financial accountability.

In Round 2, the average funding awarded to grantees was $57,556 and the average funding spent was $32,785. While the second figure does not include the four projects from the second Call for Proposals, it still highlights the fact that some projects had significant underspends and that three projects dropped out part-way through the process. The average funding renewal amount in Round 2 was $62,062 but information is not yet available about how much of the renewal was spent by project teams. (Further details can be seen in Annex 2.) **In addition to the challenges in implementing the Innovation Fund outlined above, underspends also arose from two problems at the grantee level** (see Table 3). The first was that several projects had to be dropped because of staff rotations or changes in circumstance. The second was that several grantees reduced expenditure plans between their initial proposals and the final project design.

TABLE 3: ROUND 1 AND ROUND 2 FUNDING

Round 1	Round 2
Total project budget: €2,160,000 ($3 million) Funds used 2016: €1,370,002	Total project budget: $1,000,000 Funds used 2019: $426,205 Funds granted 2020: $496,548
Average funding received by 14 selected and funded projects: $46,303. (this excludes three pre-selected projects that did not go through the formal selection process). **(€226,340 unspent and €563,658 channelled to Operational Solutions and Transition Section (OSTS))**	Average funding received by the 17 funded projects: $57,556. Average funding spent: $32,785.

While technical support was part of the support package provided by the Innovation Service (see below), many projects in Round 2 required additional expertise that was not met by the Innovation Service and this consumed large proportions of project budgets. The increased focus on internal UNHCR processes and the introduction of work areas including artificial intelligence affected the planned use of funds by projects as outlined in project budgets submitted at the time of application. In Round 1 projects planned to spend the majority of funding on purchasing equipment, mainly ICT equipment including laptops, projectors, generators, servers, but also agricultural equipment. Some Round 1 projects also involved construction so labour, materials and furniture took up large sections of these project budgets. The majority of Round 2 projects planned to spend a large proportion of their budgets on external consultants, with one project planning to spend its entire budget on one consultant. The types of consultants hired ranged from research, monitoring and evaluation, and project management consultants, to technical consultants such as data scientists and software engineer consultants, among others. **Due to the additional expertise required by project teams in Round 2 to implement projects within the four work areas, a large proportion of funding in Round 2 was spent on external experts and consultants. In both rounds, many projects were hampered by short project timelines.**

Most early-stage innovation projects required additional funding at the end of the initial funding period. Post-project financial support from the Innovation Fund was dependent on the availability of excess funding, but has potential to be used more strategically. Almost all the teams interviewed during the course of this evaluation expressed an interest in an extension of financial support. For some project teams, not knowing where the funding might come from after the initial funding period was a source of concern. Those who had not considered external funding had a short-term mentality and were less willing to engage in the project or adapt when things did not go to plan because they saw the end of the funding as the end of the project.

Four of 17 projects received funding renewals during Round 2 because of underspends. Project renewals were granted to projects that had received initial funding during the first Call for Proposals of Round 2. The decision to renew funding for some projects was determined by assessing what the teams had already achieved, their general level of commitment to continuing to learn and apply the innovation process to their work, and whether it was possible for them to continue to work on the project for a longer time period.

Non-financial support to projects

Non-financial support contributed to the success of projects, and to the long-term sustainability and growth of innovations within UNHCR. The internal mentoring element and support with UNHCR Programme procedures was particularly useful and was valued by the majority of project teams.

In Round 1, non-financial support was not a major focus of the Innovation Fund but was provided organically to project teams, as and when needed or asked for. When designing Round 2 of the Fund, the Innovation Service noted consistent feedback from the majority of Round 1 projects that they had found the non-financial support extremely helpful. Based on the strength of the feedback, the Innovation Service placed additional emphasis on non-financial support in Round 2 and categorized it in the following areas:

- **Innovation learning** – Round 2 saw the introduction of a build, test and learn approach. Project teams received remote support to develop a roadmap and milestones for the project, along with support to conduct assumptions-storming, and to develop terms of use and a value proposition canvas and statement. Towards the end of the project teams engaged in usability testing and validating assumptions.
- **Mentoring** – in both rounds, projects were assigned focal points from within the Innovation Service. In Round 2 the informal mentoring element of support was built upon. For both rounds the majority of mentoring was conducted by the Associate Innovation Officer (Operations) who was the primary focal point for all teams. Secondary focal points were also assigned to most teams in Round 2.
- **Technical support** – with the introduction of the four work areas in Round 2, many teams were engaging in areas they had not worked in before, such as artificial intelligence. Teams that required specific expertise were connected with appropriate staff members in the Innovation Service where possible, who guided them on technical elements of the design and implementation of their projects.

Overall the Innovation Fund took a grantee-led approach in terms of support. Mentoring support was flexible depending on the specific needs of teams and ranged from providing guidance on the direction of projects and

problem-solving, supporting teams in managing expectations in their operations with managers and relevant stakeholders, regular check-in meetings on project progress and timelines, providing programme support, connecting teams with relevant experts (both internal and external) where needed for implementing the project, and providing business insight and long-term strategy to projects.

Project teams expressed high levels of appreciation and satisfaction with the mentoring support they received from the Innovation Fund team. The Innovation Fund team tailored the support depending on the context, the individuals and their level of knowledge. Many of the focal points focused on the emotional support they received, including the ability to be able to call the team at any time to ask questions, discuss ideas and get feedback on planned directions. Among the UNHCR project team members interviewed who were in direct contact with the Innovation Service, 91 per cent stated that the mentoring support they received was "very positive". Of these, some project team members specifically mentioned that the Innovation Service team were always available and responded quickly to their requests.

> "We got a lot of help, emotional support, sometimes we need emotional support when we're doing this kind of project." – UNHCR project focal point, Energy-efficient construction project, Algeria

> "Honestly, they were there, I mean I could call them. I was texting and they would answer in less than five minutes. And I think this goes beyond just the fact that people are colleagues. I think I see a lot of goodwill and support, also from the side that they also want to see us being able to achieve fully so I really found it positive." – UNHCR project focal point, RefuGIS II project, Jordan

In some instances, grantees noted that in-person support would have been beneficial**.** This was due to the challenges intrinsic to remote communication. In the few instances where in-person support was given (including missions in Round 1, and face-to-face meetings for teams based in Europe), it was extremely well received, memorable, and provided more guidance and encouragement to teams than remote support had enabled.

The priority given to internal mentoring of project teams has been an essential element of the success of Innovation Fund projects. The strength of the mentoring was both the responsiveness and flexibility to understand and meet the varying individual needs of project teams throughout the funding period. A significant number of the challenges that team members faced related to a UNHCR-specific issue such as programme requirements, bureaucratic organizational processes, and engagement with other parts of the organization – for which it is difficult to source support from elsewhere. For example, in one team the project focal point's contract with UNHCR ended and was not renewed. The Innovation Service was in close communication with the remaining team members to understand the situation, alleviate their concerns, and work within the UNHCR bureaucracy to identify a way for the project focal point to continue her work to successfully implement the project in the remaining two months of funding. In this and in many other ways, the mentoring support contributed significantly to the completion and successes of individual projects. However, the flexibility and organic nature of the support meant that it was both time-intensive and difficult to codify.

Project teams required support with UNHCR Programme procedures in both planning and implementing projects. Specifically, procedures for procurement and contracting partners were highlighted as major challenges for project teams and limited the possibilities of what could be achieved within project timelines. Teams that did not include a programme staff member tended to be unfamiliar with the required processes and at the outset underestimated the time required to learn and undertake these processes. This caused delays to the timelines for a number of projects. Programme units in country operations were also not always fully supportive of project teams. However, a number of teams identified this as a key area of individual learning and appreciated the opportunity to gain understanding and experience of UNHCR programme management.

> "Sometimes it's very difficult to deal with all of this admin burden [...] if I do another innovation project I will be sure to have someone from Programme or Admin in the team directly that can deal with all of this." – UNHCR project focal point, Qualminer project, Ecuador

> "One of the biggest situations that we had a problem with at the beginning was the fact that there was the requirement to finish and commit the funds at a certain time. This is a programme issue that really worried us and the Innovation Service really did provide a lot of solutions and worked with our programme team to commit the funds and give us an idea about what we can do." – UNHCR team member, project anonymous[22]

Post-project mentoring contributed to the long-term sustainability and growth of innovations within UNHCR. For most projects, mentoring ended when the funding ended. However, a small number of projects remained in contact with the Innovation Fund and continued to access mentoring support as their projects developed. For example, the Refugee Food Festival focal point remained in contact with the Innovation Service to support the project's growth since the first round of funding in 2017. Continued access to mentoring support was particularly useful in developing a strategy and direction for the project and convening and building connections with other parts of the organization. The unique ability to utilize the Innovation Fund team's position in Geneva to convene and connect with other parts of UNHCR and build the necessary internal support and connections to grow and expand projects after the initial funding period is a relatively untapped resource of the Fund. There are relatively few examples of this and due to limited resources, it has not been a focus of the Fund.

The availability of technical support was dependent on having the required expertise within the Innovation Service. Some teams benefited from strong technical support for their projects because there were people in the Innovation Service with that specific area of expertise, for example, machine learning. For projects focused on other areas, there was less of a focus on technical support but many projects in Round 2 used large parts of their budget to hire experts. Projects that did receive technical expertise benefited from it. The need for provision of

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[22] The interviewee preferred that the project referred to in this quotation remains anonymous.

technical support to projects offers an opportunity for the Innovation Fund to convene projects more intentionally with other internal or external experts.

Monitoring and evaluation

The rhetoric of the Innovation Fund has always included an emphasis on measurement, as a "huge piece of the puzzle".[23] The original design required that each project defined performance indicators that would be complemented by "overall data on the effectiveness of the fund" collected from the Innovation Service. In a widely referenced article on impact (dated 2017),[24] Dina Zyadeh noted that the metrics had encouraged selection of many small projects that focused on incremental change and distorted day-to-day management of the Innovation Fund. Goals and metrics were misaligned and goals were ambitious and underspecified. During Round 2, the aim was to develop and articulate clear goals and metrics aligned with the innovation process.

CASE STUDY 2: ENERGY-EFFICIENT CONSTRUCTION PROJECT, ALGERIA

"For this innovation everything was coordinated by the persons of concern... I didn't want us to be the one having the funds and coordinating, no. We involved them from day one for thinking about and looking at the possibility of finding an innovation project. I had a team of refugees and I said to them: 'please tell me: if you had money, what innovative thing could you do for your people?'" – UNHCR project focal point, Energy-efficient construction project, Algeria

Project overview: This project developed and built 25 durable, environmentally friendly and cost-effective shelters for people with a disability, using discarded plastic bottles. The shelters remain habitable and can withstand the extreme weather conditions in Tindouf, Algeria in both the summer and winter months.

Problem identification and development of the solution: When the Calls for Proposals for Round 1 of the Innovation Fund was received, the Senior Field Coordinator informed refugees within the Tindouf camps of the opportunity and asked them to share ideas from which she selected one that seemed both innovative and promising. The Tindouf camps in Algeria are affected by extreme heat reaching 50 degrees Celsius during the summer and extreme cold falling below 10 degrees Celsius during the winter, which affects both the well-being and overall health conditions of the population. Shelter in the Sahrawi camps must therefore resist extreme temperatures. Efforts to improve existing housing had only limited success due to ventilation issues. Refugee families tended to move temporarily to the traditional tents for some level of comfort during the hot months while moving back to the mud-brick shelters to sleep on cold nights. This project was designed to address the challenge of providing refugees with shelters that would withstand the extreme weather conditions in Tindouf and remain habitable throughout the year. It also addressed a number of other problems within the camp by helping

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[23] UNHCR Innovation Service (no date) "Year in Review 2016: Essay Edition"
[24] Zyadeh, D. (2017) "Developing humanitarian innovation impact metrics: where do we start?" UNHCR Innovation Service Blog, https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/developing-humanitarian-innovation-impact-metrics-start/

to clean the environment as well as providing livelihood opportunities and income generation for refugees to collect the plastic bottles that had been discarded in the camps to be used in the construction process. The solution was developed and implemented by the refugee designer who received support and guidance from the UNHCR project team. The project overcame a number of challenges, including around sensitization of the community, many of whose members were reluctant to accept the idea of building houses with bottles, transportation of construction materials from Tindouf to the camp, and finding and training workers to construct the houses. With the support of the leadership of the Sahrawi refugee community, the project was completed.

Project team: The direct project team was composed of refugees and was led by the designer of the shelters. The designer was a young Sahrawi man who was a refugee and had graduated with a degree in Energy Efficiency from the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria before returning to the camps. The project team was overseen and supported by the UNHCR Senior Field Coordinator, Senior Programme Officer, Field Associate, and Shelter Expert among others. The UNHCR team helped the designer to meet specific UNHCR requirements, such as proposal drafting, reporting and financial management. The designer identified the problem, designed the project, led the community sensitization with the team, worked on the budget, expenditure, monitoring in the field, recruiting casual labourers, collecting bottles and procuring some construction materials. He was supported in this role by the UNHCR team. This project placed a strong emphasis on empowerment of refugees: the problem and solution were identified by a refugee and he led the project together with a team of refugees.

Further funding and scaling: The project did not receive any additional funding once the funding ended from the Innovation Fund. As a result, structured development or growth of the project has been limited. The project ended at the end of the Innovation Fund funding period and in 2018 the UNHCR project focal point moved to a new operation. She notes that with a larger amount of funding the project could have constructed more shelters or other structures such as schools. Now three years on, UNHCR staff still working in Tindouf note that construction with plastic bottles is taking place in the camps and refugees appear to be slowly starting to accept the concept and copy the idea as a new method of shelter construction, but this is limited. While ownership of the project clearly lay with the refugee, he has not received any support from UNHCR to scale the project.

Visibility: The protracted situation of the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria is often considered to be a forgotten crisis. This project successfully generated significant visibility for the Tindouf operation and increased global awareness of the situation of Sahrawi refugees. This was predominantly achieved through international media coverage of the project. The project was covered by the BBC, Al Jazeera and other news agencies in Tanzania, South Africa, and Mexico, among others. The media coverage was initiated by the refugee designer who was previously a reporter himself and had worked with various media outlets.

Professional development: Another significant success of this project is the professional development and exposure that the refugee designer gained through the process. As a result of the wide awareness of the project that was generated by the media coverage, the refugee designer was invited to travel to France, Belgium and other countries to talk about this project. He has since been offered a contract with an NGO in Mauritania to

manage a similar project there. He has grown in confidence, become a role model within the camp, developed other projects, and learnt to speak French.

Previous engagement with the Innovation Service: Both the Senior Field Coordinator and Senior Programme Officer who played key roles in overseeing this project and supporting the refugee designer, had previous involvement with the Innovation Service (one of them through a Shelter project with the IKEA Foundation in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, and the other in a Microsoft-funded innovation project). These past experiences contributed to their enthusiasm for the project, understanding and acceptance of the way that the Innovation Fund worked, and the potential that innovation held within the operation.

5. Achievements and results

The Innovation Fund supported 34 projects across two rounds with funds of between $20,000 and $80,000 per project (a breakdown of funding per project is included in Annex 2). This section explores grantee perspectives on the achievements of projects, examples of learning, the extent to which the Innovation Fund met its objectives, and what happened to grantee projects when funding ended.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The Innovation Fund was efficiently delivered, with almost all funds transferred directly to grantees and with limited spending on marketing, management or facilitation (from either donor or core costs).
- Projects enabled team members to form new partnerships, develop professionally and contribute to their operations in a number of unique ways. However, project teams were not aware of the objectives of the Innovation Fund or of the experience and learning of other grantees.
- The objectives of the Fund were broadly met, but changes to the objectives of the Fund between Round 1 and Round 2 created confusion across interview participants about what the Fund was trying to achieve and why.
- While most projects continued after the initial funding cycle, this depended on specific contexts and on the project teams' own initiative and connections to access further funding and identify pathways to scale. This was due to a lack of funding and staff capacity in the Innovation Service to support projects to expand or be replicated.
- The collaborative nature of projects contributed to high levels of learning for team members but UNHCR staff lacked sufficient time to capture project learning systematically and there was no shared learning between projects.

Project achievements

Most project focal points felt there was a lack of clarity about the overall objectives of the Innovation Fund and as a result, they tended to gauge success in short-term, context-specific ways based on the individual achievements of their project. For example, most project focal points considered implementation of the project, tangible deliverables and end-user satisfaction as major project achievements and indicators of success of the project.

By gauging project success in these ways, of the 19 project team members who were interviewed for this evaluation, the majority finished their project with a positive perspective and an overall feeling of success. However, **there was lack of connectedness between individual project achievements and a lack of long-term thinking about how to sustain or replicate projects.** For example, in relation to the focus on decision-making in Round 2 there was no clear connection between improvements made to decision-making processes in the different project locations, and a limited ability to assess these different achievements.

Beyond tangible deliverables, interviews with grantees highlighted a number of common perspectives around success and provided examples of these from their individual projects that fell broadly within the areas of: awareness-raising, partnership, professional development of individuals, the role of persons of concern to UNHCR, and accessing additional funding.

Projects enabled team members to form new partnerships and develop professionally. Fund recipients gave examples of collaborating closely with a wide range of actors with whom they would not normally engage or work including other team members, external partners such as universities and the private sector, persons of concern to UNHCR, other parts of UNHCR, staff working in the Innovation Service, and UNHCR staff in their country operations. Project team members pointed to high levels of individual learning and development through their engagement in projects, including through increased knowledge, experience and connections. This included learning among persons of concern to UNHCR and host community members who were involved in projects.

> "For me, the most important thing is that this guy, like one refugee who made his idea come true. And then everybody heard his idea, he had lots of offers. I remember last year he got the offer to work with an NGO in Mauritania and has a contract for many months." – UNHCR team member, Energy-efficient construction project, Algeria

Projects contributed to the relevance of country operations in unique ways. Examples of the unique contributions of projects to country operations can be seen in the areas of winning prizes and generating media interest, responding to COVID-19, and involving persons of concern to UNHCR in projects.

- Four of the Round 1 and 2 teams interviewed reported that their projects had aided their country operations in responding to COVID-19 within the first month of the outbreak. This information was not directly requested from project teams but was provided spontaneously; the number of projects involved in COVID-19 responses may be much higher. It was clear that the flexibility of these projects contributed notably to the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of their operations, allowing projects to adapt to meet specific needs within their operations during an unforeseen global pandemic.

> "During the COVID situation they've received funding from a foundation in order to cook meals for homeless people being hosted in accommodation centres, because that was a big issue. There was really a need to set up the help for people, so the restaurant has been cooking meals every day, through funding by a foundation." – UNHCR project focal point, Refugee Food Festival project, France

> "For the COVID response, using the GIS team we were able to map how we will do the community shielding for vulnerable groups, and also to come up with the maps that show in each shelter, if there is a vulnerable person. We already know that we have an extra shelter within the household that can be used as a first defence line. So, you see all this, we were able to do with the refugee

team themselves without any other person." – UNHCR project focal point, RefuGIS II project, Jordan

- **Winning prizes and generating international media coverage.** Wider recognition generated visibility for some operations, and increased support within and outside UNHCR for other projects. Types of wider recognition mentioned by project team members included: international media coverage, and prizes awarded to projects including from both within UNHCR, and external to UNHCR. Projects that have received these forms of wider recognition appreciated the increased visibility for their country operations, and the additional support from other parts of UNHCR, government partners and the private sector that it brought.

  "It was very popular and media from the entire world covered the festival in Paris and elsewhere, including Al Jazeera, and the *New York Times*." – UNHCR project focal point, Refugee Food Festival project, France

  "The success of the project put the spotlight on our operation and gave us a lot of goodwill within the organization as well as with government partners and private sector." – UNHCR project focal point, Smart Wi-Fi kiosk project, Ghana

- **Active participation of persons of concern to UNHCR in the innovation process.** Projects that considered persons of concern to UNHCR as the "end-users" tended to place a high importance on their active participation throughout the innovation process and saw this as a key way in which projects could develop in the future. Different ways in which projects innovating at field level considered the participation of persons of concern to UNHCR to be a sign of success included: positive feedback from persons of concern to UNHCR as end-users, capacity-building for them through the project, and ownership of the project by persons of concern to UNHCR**.** Most projects for whom the participation of persons of concern to UNHCR was a sign of success saw this as a continuum, with their ownership of the project an ultimate aim. This supported country operations in their ongoing work to align and contribute to the Strategic Directions of UNHCR, particularly by promoting self-reliance and empowerment of the people UNHCR serves.

  "We now have five refugee-led organization partners in Kakuma, actually one is host community-led. So that was possible because of the original grant […] I think about 7,000 people have gone through those courses now, again all led by the refugee-led organizations." – Edmund Page, Xavier Project CEO, team member, Community Enterprise Cycle project, Kenya

  "I saw people who were refugees…who are producing maps at the same level as I was producing them. And these are people who are engaged with the community, are using geospatial activities to inform and help with their community and make their own decisions. They were helping other organizations and helping UNHCR itself." – UNHCR team member, RefuGIS II project, Jordan

Did the Innovation Fund meet its objectives?

The objectives of the Innovation Fund changed over time, and for each of the two funding rounds. The IKEA Foundation grant agreement (dated 24 April 2014), the IKEA Foundation final report (dated 28 March 2017) and the Government of Belgium grant proposal (dated May 2018) emphasize the support and adoption of innovations, while the Government of Belgium donor report (dated June 2019) notes the need to create budgetary and experimental "space" to stimulate and nurture innovation in UNHCR by supporting teams.

There was a lack of clarity regarding the objectives of the Innovation Fund. For some, the Innovation Fund was primarily a mechanism for fostering "innovative thinking" among UNHCR staff at all levels. These individuals emphasized the role of the Fund in providing "experimental space" to help staff to learn and develop skills that will enable them to "build, test and learn" in future projects and operations. For others, the Fund was primarily a way of developing new products or processes within UNHCR that could then be mainstreamed into country operations and replicated elsewhere.

The lack of clarity about the objectives of the Innovation Fund affected the way that project teams defined success of projects and engaged with the innovation process. Grantees were unclear about the objectives of the Fund and as a result tended to define success of projects on the basis of completing the project within the allocated timeline and budget. Project teams saw the process as a time-bound project, not as an innovation process. As highlighted above, this lack of clarity and time-bound mindset is likely to have had a significant impact on the longevity of projects.[25]

TABLE 4: ACHIEVEMENTS AGAINST ROUND 1 OBJECTIVES

	ROUND 1 OUTCOMES	RESULTS
SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	Operations worldwide have access to an additional and complementary source of funding	• Interviewees frequently stated that the Innovation Fund has resourced projects that would not otherwise be funded. • The relatively small grant sizes of $20,000 to $80,000 also meant that senior staff were more likely to support projects that were higher risk or outside normal activities. Several interviewees noted that bespoke funds were particularly useful for staff in country operations with limited resourcing.
	UNHCR has improved understanding of the impact of projects achieved	• The team has given considerable thought as to how to monitor individual innovation projects and the wider portfolio of projects. The "Year in review" documents the development of approaches to monitoring projects in Labs, through the Fellowship, and at the

[25] As a result, during the analysis phase of this evaluation, the Innovation Service articulated explicit theories of change for both Round 1 and Round 2. The evaluation analysis was reassessed in light of the long- and short-term objectives articulated for Round 1, and the short-term objectives articulated for Round 2 (some projects are ongoing and it was too early to assess longer-term outcomes).

	through development of an M&E framework	Fund. Dina Zyadeh's widely referenced 2017 article explores how metrics incentivize different types of innovation portfolio.
		• At least one grantee had an impact evaluation conducted and several others documented their innovation in case studies or other formats. A small number of project teams that involved academics from various institutions were able to build a much stronger evidence base as these team members had more of a focus on learning and documenting it. Overall, however, tight timelines limited the extent to which an evidence base for other projects was established.
	UNHCR supports and facilitates the development of innovative projects and solutions	• Financial and non-financial support was provided to 19 innovative projects. Projects were awarded to teams on the basis of criteria described in Section 4. These criteria were designed to identify teams working on novel solutions that fell outside the regular budget of the operation.
LONG TERM OUTCOMES	Create a healthier enabling environment for innovation to flourish within UNHCR	• The Innovation Fund is very small relative to the number of operations and staff at UNHCR, and there are no agreed definitions of "an enabling environment". However, grantees reported the funding had allowed them to implement ideas in a flexible way that allowed a whole-of-society approach.
		• Beyond the projects there were also examples of individuals involved in funded projects who were going on to start new innovative projects in the same or different locations.
	Promote and support the adoption of innovations by UNHCR field operations and the broader humanitarian sector	• During Round 1, the Fund had a strong focus on supporting adoption of funded innovations.
		• The majority of projects that sourced additional funding beyond the end of their engagement with the Fund did so through the UNHCR budget of their operation. There were few examples of projects being adopted by other UNHCR field operations.
		• There were several examples of individual projects being encouraged or supported to apply to other innovation funds or initiatives to scale their innovation. There were few examples of successful applications or of projects being adopted by the broader humanitarian sector.

The Round 1 objectives emphasize access to funds, development of innovative solutions, and adoption of these solutions by UNHCR operations and in the broader sector.[26] **Table 4 illustrates that key short-term objectives**

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[26] For example, the UNHCR Innovation Assessment describes how the Innovation Fund intended to support the scaling/ mainstreaming of Innovation Service projects by providing a bridge for financing between the pilot and scale stages and as a mechanism for donors to directly support scaling up of projects. The Round 1 proposal included an objective to "promote and support the adoption of innovations by UNHCR field operations, by the broader humanitarian sector, and by the non-humanitarian sector" and three KPIs to assess adoption rates. UNHCR Innovation assessment (Oct 2014) Chris Coldewey, Grey Area.

were met, including access to funding, an understanding of impact and development of innovative solutions. However, limited progress was made towards the longer-term outcome of supporting the adoption of projects within UNHCR and beyond.

In Round 2, the Innovation Fund focused on identifying projects at proof of concept stage and removed reference to scaling from its objectives.[27] Seventeen grantees were awarded funds to address the methodologies identified under the decision-making thesis. Many of these projects are still under way and it is therefore early to draw conclusions about the extent to which projects have contributed to improved decision-making processes. Comparison or generalization across results is also challenging: the decision-making thesis and the four areas identified within it are extremely broad, and successful projects would support improved decision-making in very different ways. **However, there was a lack of clarity around the purpose of the decision-making focus and interviewees found the language of the thesis and its four areas confusing.**

Overall the objectives in Round 2 were met,[28] and the evaluation highlights a strong emphasis on support for learning and experimental space for testing new ideas. However, there was limited evidence regarding how collective understanding of the problems being addressed has evolved through the innovation process.

TABLE 5: ACHIEVEMENTS AGAINST ROUND 2 OBJECTIVES

	ROUND 2 OUTCOMES	RESULTS
SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	Increased capacity of staff to incorporate innovative approaches in the development of solutions	• The Innovation Fund's application process, reporting and support were all designed to support staff in implementing innovation processes. • Focal points emphasized the support received including the ability to call the team at any time to ask questions, discuss ideas and get feedback on planned directions.
	Proof of concepts for novel solutions designed and prototyped	• There was an explicit focus on early-stage innovations in Round 2. Funds were awarded to support projects' operational costs allowing them to test their ideas and generate learning. • A small number of project teams that involved academics from various institutions were able to build a stronger evidence base for their prototypes.
	Collaboration with internal and external partners is enhanced, and	• The Innovation Fund recipients worked closely with a wide range of new collaborators including other team members, external partners such as universities and the private sector, persons of

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[27]The IDIA scaling stages developed and used by international development and humanitarian innovation donors, describes funding stages of: "proof of concept" stage followed by "readiness to scale" when innovations that have demonstrated small-scale success develop their model and attract partners to help fill gaps in their capacity to scale. See for example: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b156e3bf2e6b10bb0788609/t/5b1717eb8a922da5042cd0bc/1528240110897/Insights+on+Scaling+Innovation.pdf

[28] These objectives emphasize collaboration, learning and increased staff capacity.

	diverse and inclusive partnerships are fostered	concern to UNHCR, other parts of UNHCR, staff working in the Innovation Service, and UNHCR staff in their country operations.
	Collective understanding of pressing problems evolves through experimentation	• There was limited documentation or evidence from interviews regarding how collective understanding of the problems being addressed has evolved through the innovation process.
	Projects are designed to incorporate innovation approaches (methods, research, technology, etc.) in a build-test-learn cycle	• Round 2 of the Fund saw the introduction of a build, test and learn approach, which was implemented by most teams. • Despite increased information on the Innovation Fund's expectations of selected teams on the application form and website, some teams were not on board with the process and lacked commitment to the learning element of the Fund and to the innovation process more broadly. Due to the short time frame for implementation and required financial procedures, Fund staff were not empowered to withdraw funding from teams that did not commit to the process.

What happened to grantee projects after funding?

For most projects, financial and non-financial support from the Innovation Fund ended when the initial funding period finished. From the outset of projects, there was limited support from the Innovation Fund to consider or plan for what should happen to projects when the initial funding period ended. As a result, most project teams did not maintain regular contact or connections with the Innovation Service once the funding finished. **Whether the project continued, expanded or was replicated, depended on both the specific context and the project teams' own initiative and their connections to access further funding and identify pathways to scale.**

It is too early to draw conclusions on the outcomes of projects implemented during Round 2. However, data collected through interviews and surveys from 10 of the 17 Round 1 teams indicate that of those projects we were in contact with, 90 per cent are still operational after three years; 50 per cent expanded in their original location; and 50 per cent expanded to another location. Further details on what happened to projects when the initial funding ended can be seen in Figures 6 and 7.

WHAT HAPPENED TO PROJECTS WHEN THE INITIAL FUNDING ENDED?

ROUND 1

Of a total of **17** projects,

17 reached the end of the funding period

5 encountered significant delays

Of the **10** projects we were able to speak to or collect data from:

10 continued after the end of the initial funding period
100%

05 are known to have expanded in their original location
50%

09 are still running
90%

05 are known to have replicated in different locations
50%

2 in other parts of the same country
2 in different countries in the same region
1 was replicated in another region
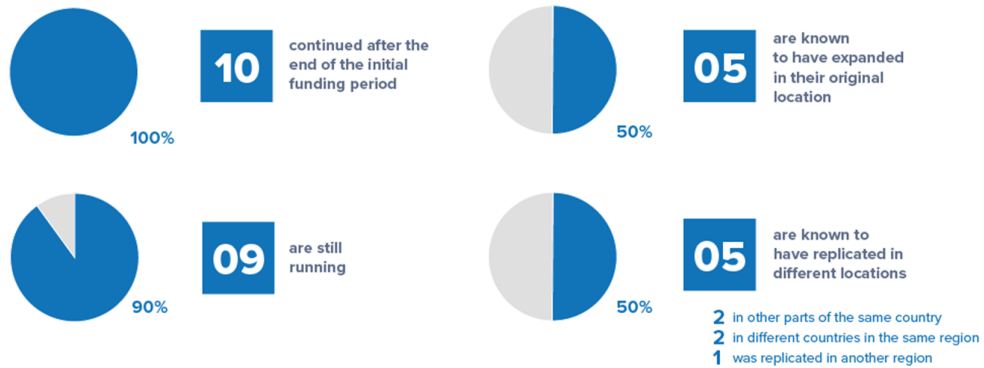
ROUND 2

Of a total of **17** projects,

reached the end of the funding period **14**   **3** dropped out

Seven projects ended during the course of this evaluation; due to the very recent end of the initial funding period for these projects, they are not included in our analysis for this section.

Of the four projects we were able to speak to or collect data from:

04 continued after the end of the initial funding period

04 are still running

0 are known to have expanded in their original location

0 are known to have replicated in different locations

Sustainability of projects

Many of the projects continued to operate. Of those we spoke to or surveyed, all of the Round 1 projects continued beyond the initial funding period and 90 per cent are still operational three years later. So far, all of the projects from Round 2 have also continued after the initial funding period (this does not include projects that finished during the course of this evaluation, or those that dropped out during the initial funding period). The main challenges that affected the sustainability of projects were access to further funding and staff turnover.

Early-stage innovations were more likely to require further funding. In Round 1 the Innovation Fund supported projects at various stages including design, testing and scaling up. Some of these projects did not require additional funding and were able to continue without further input of funds after the initial funding period. In Round 2, the Innovation Fund refined its focus to support early-stage innovations through a proof of concept process. Most innovations require multi-year funding and ongoing support; literature indicates that donors anticipate that humanitarian innovations will require additional funding after the proof of concept stage.[29] At the end of this stage few innovations are considered to be ready for wider replication or scaling. In line with this, slightly more projects in Round 2 required additional funding to continue the project beyond the initial funding period.

The 10 projects that continued to access additional funding did so in a number of ways, including through their country operations, other parts of UNHCR, and partner organizations (see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: FUNDING SOURCES

FURTHER FUNDING SOURCES

ROUND 1

- Other parts of UNHCR (inclusive of the Innovation Service)
- Not required
- Partner/ NGO/ other humanitarian or development actor
- Operation budget

ROUND 2

- Other parts of UNHCR
- Not required
- Innovation Fund renewed funding
- No further funding secured

In Round 1, projects that were more closely connected to operational priorities, or included high-level senior members of staff from the operation in the project team, found it easier to maintain agreement across the operation beyond the initial funding period and to have the project absorbed into regular programme budgets. Post-project funding opportunities for projects in Round 2 that have recently reached the

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[29] IDIA (2017) *Insights on Scaling Innovation*. IDIA. www.idiainnovation.org/idia-insights

end of the initial funding period are not yet confirmed. Interview data suggest that identifying and securing additional funding will require significant time and resources for most projects.

Some projects received ad hoc additional support from the Innovation Fund, but the support was limited due to staff availability and time. Based on the positive feedback from the small number of projects that were supported with post-project financial support, accessing additional funding is an area where project focal points would benefit from additional support, including through brokering connections and helping innovators to prepare for and access additional financial support.

> "The Innovation Unit [...] helped in mobilizing support from other sections. They put funding from the innovation unit but also they mobilized funding from our private sector fundraising section [...] And then because it was mainly in Europe, our Europe division decided the year after to fund the project." – UNHCR project focal point, Refugee Food Festival project, France

In line with the shift towards internally focused innovation for UNHCR, Round 2 saw a reduction in projects that received further funding from partner organizations, or that were continued by them. From Round 1 to Round 2 there was a notable change in who continued the projects beyond the initial funding period. In Round 1, 40 per cent of the projects were continued by partner organizations, others were continued jointly by UNHCR and a partner organization, and one was continued by a refugee. By contrast, the majority of projects that continued beyond the initial funding period in Round 2 were continued by UNHCR staff members, with the exception of the inclusive communities project in Ecuador. By focusing on supporting internally driven innovation in Round 2, the relevance of some projects outside the organization reduced, and therefore the possibility of projects being continued or funded outside UNHCR has also decreased. Reducing this key source of further funding places a stronger emphasis on the need to provide additional support to projects to access funding from other relevant stakeholders, whether internal or external to UNHCR.

Project sustainability was also affected significantly by staff turnover. Many of the focal points we contacted were unable to comment on what had happened to the projects after the initial funding period as they had already moved on to work in other UNHCR offices in line with the UNHCR staff rotation policy for international staff, or they had left the organization completely. Interviews with other team members highlighted that the departure of the focal point from the operation had a significant impact on what happened to the project afterwards, with some projects struggling to maintain momentum once the original focal point had left. Projects with more national staff members or refugee-led projects were less affected by the turnover of international staff members and their involvement contributed to the sustainability of projects after the end of the initial funding cycle.

Scaling of projects

While many projects continued to operate, few scaled. Among Round 1 projects, 29 per cent expanded in their original location and 29 per cent were replicated in other locations (including in parts of the same country, and in other countries). To date there has been no expansion or replication of projects from Round 2 due to the recent end of the majority of projects in this round, as well as the design of some Round 2 projects, which were highly

context-specific and largely inappropriate for replication or expansion (for example, several of the storytelling and culture projects).

A number of projects "scaled deep" – i.e. they expanded within the same location by working with different partners or end-users or addressing a different but related problem. However, very few projects scaled wide – i.e. replicated the project in other locations, countries or offices. Of the projects in Round 1, two were replicated in different locations but within the same country, another two were replicated in other countries within the same region, and one was replicated in another region of the world. It is common among innovations at a proof of concept stage to require further "transition to scale" support and funding before being ready to scale. However, the potential of Innovation Fund projects to scale has emerged through this evaluation as a particular area of interest within UNHCR, especially among some members of the senior management.

Across the organization, it was unclear how projects could scale within UNHCR. Ideas and projects were largely spread organically through individuals, shared learning (specifically by academics on the teams) or through staff moving on to positions in other locations. Interviews with the project focal points highlighted a lack of clarity around how their project would be expected to scale within UNHCR. Interviews with the Innovation Service team similarly highlighted that senior staff members of the organization were unclear about how successful projects from the Innovation Fund could or should be replicated across multiple locations. There is therefore a need for the Innovation Service to clarify and propose pathways to scale.

Most project teams had limited expectations about scaling their project and did not see it as their responsibility. In contrast to the expressed interest in scaling from the senior management of the organization, many project teams were focused on their own operations and had not spent a lot of time considering the scalability of their project beyond these operations. Of those who did express ambitions to seek to scale the project further, the majority expressed plans for scaling within the same country as the original project location.

> "If you have a very successful project to disseminate that should be done by the Innovation team in Geneva." – UNHCR project focal point, Qualminer project, Ecuador

The Innovation Service did not have the funding or staff capacity necessary to support scaling or widespread adoption of innovations. Some interviewees expressed an expectation of exposure generated by their connection with the Innovation Fund. Project team members felt "seen" and "known" beyond their country operation and this introduced the possibility of increased opportunities for the expansion/ replication of projects beyond the country. However, due to limited resources and staffing of the Innovation Service, project teams received minimal support from the Innovation Service about how to consider or plan for scaling from the outset of projects. The literature on humanitarian innovation suggests that access to longer and more flexible funding is a condition necessary for successful innovations. Projects at proof of concept stage require sustained funding and support over a number of years to be able to reach scaling stage.[30] Despite the focus on scaling, replication and

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[30] Elrha (2018) *Too Tough to Scale? Challenges to Scaling Innovation in the Humanitarian Sector*. Elrha: London.

adoption of new ideas that emerged strongly from interviews with senior management within UNHCR, longer and more flexible funding was not in place to support most Innovation Fund projects beyond the initial funding period.

Despite limitations of finance and resourcing in the Innovation Service, replication, adoption and scaling of innovations was the focus of discussion among the majority of senior interviewees. This suggests that there needs to be greater clarity on the objectives of the Innovation Fund and on the resourcing and support needed to take innovations to scale.

Generating learning

The collaborative nature of projects contributed to high levels of learning for team members. The majority of projects were cross-sectoral, and teams consisted of a mixture of staff from different sections or units within UNHCR. Some teams included UNHCR staff in different locations, and many teams included persons external to UNHCR such as academics, collaborators in the private sector, technical specialists, persons of concern to UNHCR and/or host community members. Most teams also relied on support from other parts of their country operations, as well as support from the Innovation Service. The unique mix of individuals involved in most projects was a significant source of learning for project team members who were exposed to different perspectives, priorities and ideas.

UNHCR staff lacked sufficient time to capture project learning systematically. The intention of the Innovation Service was that project teams would test and experiment at each milestone and then briefly record what they learned about the project, its viability, feasibility and desirability, and also what they learned as a team. However, many project team members lacked sufficient time to be able to systematically capture learning in narrative form. This was particularly due to the short timeframe available for projects and team members' existing workload.

Within UNHCR, project learning was shared by the Innovation Service on a Medium blog and informally through individuals**.** The Innovation Service did not have the capacity to follow up with the teams on documenting their learning on a regular basis. However, they sought to capture learning from individual projects through Skype interviews which were written up and published on the Medium blog. Additionally, project learning was shared with and used in other operations informally through staff rotation, including fast-track positions, and through external collaborations and connections. This type of sharing (and the ways in which project learning may be being used) is difficult to track.

The increased focus on research in Round 2 led to findings that were used within some country operations. The introduction of the build, test and learn cycle in Round 2 included a stronger emphasis on research**.** A small number of projects commissioned research which was then used to inform the work of other units within their country operations. For example, the project in Malta commissioned research on the perception of refugees by the host community, which helped them to understand why a previous public information campaign had not been well received. This research was used to help inform their approach to World Refugee Day 2020.

External to UNHCR, project learning was captured and shared more widely by academic team members. Teams with members from academic institutions had a greater focus on capturing and sharing learning. Within

these teams, members from academic institutions tended to take responsibility for documenting and sharing learning through the project. They used channels external to UNHCR including academic papers, online news articles, proposals for other projects they may be working on, and with their students.

> "RefuGIS was published in IEEE journal, which is a huge journal in the US, in computer science it is the greatest channel. I'm continuing to receive several emails from academics about this project four years after [...] it was published as well in different journals. So the dissemination of the project was huge, but it was more for academics, for instance, I'm not sure that UNHCR colleagues are aware of this kind of project." – UNHCR project focal point, RefuGIS project, Jordan

Learning was not shared directly between projects. A number of project focal points highlighted the fact that they were not connected with other projects that were being funded by the Innovation Fund, and did not have access to information about other projects. Some projects were aware of similar projects working on related issues. This was an area which project team members felt they could have learnt from, if they had been given the opportunity to connect.

CASE STUDY 3: REFUGIS II PROJECT, JORDAN

"Our problem understanding changed via the realization that numerous other refugees and local community members can take advantage of GeoICT and that our expert RefuGIS team members are best positioned to enable other refugees to utilize maps for decision-making." – UNHCR team member, RefuGIS II project, Jordan

Project overview: The RefuGIS II (urban) project builds on the initial RefuGIS project that received funding from the Innovation Fund in Round 1. The original RefuGIS project aimed to enable refugees to use geospatial technology for problem-solving and livelihood development. The project created and furnished a GIS (geographic information system) Lab in Za'atari refugee camp where 13 refugees were trained by the University of Jordan, Al Balqa Applied University and the Rochester Institute of Technology in spatial data collection and map design. The refugees were deployed in the 12 districts of the camp to collect spatial data using mobile devices using a cash-for-work model while a long-term livelihood approach was being further refined. The Round 2 project planned to expand the original project to the urban setting outside the camp, establish RefuGIS urban locations in Mafraq, provide GIS training and transfer of skills from Za'atari camp to the urban community and test various methods for using maps/ mapping (spatial data) to enhance decision-making by the different stakeholders (refugees, host community members and service providers).

Problem identification and development of the solution (RefuGIS II): At the team interview stage of the selection process the team received feedback on their proposal. The proposal had been focused on replication of the original project in the urban areas. In the feedback the Innovation Service encouraged them to refocus the proposal on the use of maps by refugees to help them to make decisions. The team successfully reworked the proposal and were awarded funding in Round 2. Members of the team highlighted the guidance they received

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from the Innovation Service at this time as extremely helpful, particularly the vision and the business perspective that they provided for the project.

In line with the focus on decision-making, the team identified the following goals:
- Establish urban RefuGIS locations in Mafraq (Mafraq al Qasaba and Dafyaneh municipalities);
- Provide GIS training and transfer of skills from Za'atari Camp to the urban community; and
- Test various methods for using maps/ mapping (spatial data) to enhance decision-making by the different stakeholders (refugees, host community members and service providers).

Within the first two months of 2020 the team successfully initiated the project including: commissioning three research studies which were completed before COVID-19. The studies included a number of focus group discussions and community discussions. High-level mapping was also conducted with the community on two different experiments to help develop maps that would be understandable and used by the community, and to improve knowledge around community decision-making. Other tasks that were completed before COVID-19 included procurement, identifying the urban location, developing the application process, and reaching out to CBOs, universities and the community through UNHCR communication channels and through partners, including on the radio and other areas to advertise the project. The project aimed to provide training to 20 participants (15 in the Mafraq area and 5 in a different area), but they received more than 400 applications, which demonstrated that the community was extremely interested in the project. The applications were filtered and the and the tests prepared for the selection process, however the project could not proceed further due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

Project team: The project team at time of application consisted of four people – three from UNHCR: Head of Sub-Office, Community-based Protection Officer, Senior Protection Associate (Community-based) and one external team member: Associate Professor at Rochester Institute of Technology. There was overlap from the original project team and this helped a lot with continuity. However, the original project faced challenges related to staff turnover and passing on ownership of the project when staff members left.

Refugee involvement: The initial problem identification and concept of using GIS emerged through consultations with refugees and their engagement in asset- and capacity-mapping of the community. A key aim of the project was to empower refugees through capacity-building in the area of GIS mapping. The ultimate aim of the project was refugee ownership.
"**At some point, we as UNHCR are going to have to take a step back, the community's going to rely on itself at the same time, the planned long-term impact of RefuGIS is that we see these becoming independent businesses run by the community itself.**" – UNHCR team member, RefuGIS II project, Jordan.

Further funding: Following the end of the initial project, it was transferred from Information Management to Community-based Protection and absorbed into the regular budget of the operation, and has continued running since then. This was seen as a significant success by team members and by the Innovation Service. It is yet to be seen whether RefuGIS II (urban) will be able to access further funding, and how it will rejuvenate and continue once movement restrictions are lifted within the community.

Contributions to the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the country operation: The initial project had a dual purpose and benefited two groups of end-users: both the UNHCR country operation and persons of concern to UNHCR. As a result, the project has not only been able to increase the capacity of refugees in the area of mapping, but has also been a useful resource for the country operation to improve service delivery within Mafraq camp. Examples of this include the use of mapping by the technical unit in the camp (comprising of Shelter, WASH and Electricity sections), which has found the need to add GIS codes to the locations of households. Linking this to the ProGres registration database and updating the addressing system for the camp are other identified areas that the operation is looking to use. Having the Head of Sub-Office of Mafraq as the focal point of the project has been particularly instrumental in ensuring that ways for the project to contribute to the operation are both identified and put into action.

During the COVID-19 lockdown within the camp when staff were not able to enter or move within the camp, they were able to rely solely on the refugee GIS team to map out an approach to community-shielding for vulnerable groups across the camp, by creating maps showing which shelters contain a vulnerable person. By visualizing which households contained extra shelters, this played a key role in aiding the protection of persons of concern to UNHCR at this critical time. **"So, you see all this, we were able to do with the refugee team themselves without any other person."** – UNHCR team member, RefuGIS II project, Jordan.

6. Comparison with other initiatives

The evaluation includes an analysis of seven initiatives as well as a literature review on innovation within large organizations and a shorter review of initiatives focused on fostering innovation within similar institutions. Within UNHCR there are three initiatives that warrant consideration: the Connectivity Fund,[31] the Innovation Fellowship and the Humanitarian Education Accelerator. More widely, initiatives from UNDP, the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA) and the Grand Challenges Canada (GCC) provide interesting comparators in specific areas. Table 6 provides an overview of these initiatives.

KEY FINDINGS:

- UNHCR is unusual among humanitarian innovation services and funds in its objective to provide experimental space for staff within its own organization, rather than identifying and supporting the development of new solutions, wherever they arise.
- Like the UNHCR Innovation Fund, many humanitarian innovation initiatives struggle to define a strategic focus and objectives for their funding. This results in donor uncertainty about what constitutes success, vague definitions of value for money, and M&E frameworks with perverse incentives.
- The majority of initiatives are top-down and aim to identify and support projects to progress one stage along the innovation pipeline (from early-stage ideas through to scale). The emphasis on top-down innovation has been critiqued in the literature and UNHCR interviewees emphasized the value of innovation initiatives that include persons of concern to UNHCR in defining priorities and delivering projects.
- All the comparator innovation initiatives provided for longer implementation periods of between one and three years. There is widespread consensus that innovation benefits from predictable and flexible funding. In particular, interviewees noted that sustainability and replication of innovation projects often relies on multiple funding rounds over years or decades.
- Interviewees emphasized the importance of accompanying financial support with other types of support such as training, mentoring and technical support. Brokering partnerships and identifying senior "champions" for innovation projects were seen to be particularly vital in enabling projects to achieve sustainability or to replicate in other locations. The UNHCR Innovation Fund has prioritized supporting innovations with "social capital" but there are opportunities to build on the experience of other initiatives to codify, systematize and expand these forms of support.

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[31] Since renamed the Digital Inclusion and Connectivity for Refugees Programme.

FIGURE 8: COMPARISON WITH OTHER INNOVATION FUNDS

INITIATIVES

UNHCR

- Connectivity Fund (UNHCR)
- Innovation Fellowship (UNHCR)

OTHER

- Innovation Facility (UNDP)
- Humanitarian Innovation Fund (Elrha)
- Mobile 4 Humanitarian (M4H) Innovation Fund (GSMA)
- Humanitarian Grand Challenge (GCC)

Potential innovators

- UNHCR initiatives engage UNHCR staff
- Other initiatives engage NGOs, start-ups and other organizations

Focus

- Generally sector-specific

Phase of the innovation

- 3 x seed funds
- 2 x pilot funds
- 2 x scaling funds

Funding amounts

- £20k–80k seed funding
- £30k–300k pilot funding
- £250k–600k scale funding

COMPONENTS

Key selection criteria

- "Innovative-ness"
- Feasibility and due diligence
- Participation of affected populations
- Scale strategy

Types of support

- Technical support
- Strategy development
- Training in ethics, inclusion and humanitarian principles
- Mentoring
- Organisational development Research and evidence

M&E approaches

- Project reports
- Assessing progress through the innovation cycle
- Leading indicators
- Flexible funding to support innovators to create evidence and learning

Time for implementation

- 1 to 3 years

Strategies and objectives

Innovation is a broad term used to capture a wide variety of initiatives. The term is often used to describe vehicles for changing the humanitarian sector but in general, innovation lacks a theory of change and it is often hard to know exactly what it is expected to deliver. Recent research has documented how the language of innovation has changed in recent years. It describes a "general hypothesis of change" emphasizing the role of the private sector and of technological innovation.[32] Across many innovation initiatives, this leads to difficulties in defining a strategic focus and objectives for their funding, resulting in donor uncertainty about what constitutes success and vague definitions of value for money. This is a particularly common challenge for innovation funds within large international humanitarian organizations.

In general, most innovation processes view successful scaling of (at least some) ideas as a measure of success. Scaling might mean meeting increased humanitarian need, fundamentally changing how the sector works, or developing technical fixes to improve aid delivery at large.[33] In line with this (and with the exception of the Innovation Fellowship), the comparator initiatives all describe objectives to provide financial and technical support for ideas at different stages of an innovation cycle, with the aim of helping these ideas to progress to the next stage of the process.

Most of the humanitarian innovation initiatives were relatively "top-down" processes. Several of the examples (such as the GCC) noted that they proactively select for projects that include people from the affected community. However, in all of the examples there was a focus on innovation processes and practices specific to humanitarian agencies. The literature agrees that a significant proportion of humanitarian innovation remains focused on improving organizational response.[34] Some have argued (and several senior UNHCR staff agreed) that these innovation activities are a "stand-in" for organizations that have not modernized or undergone other digital transformation processes.

A small number of different and complementary approaches have been proposed that are grounded in community participation. However, understanding of what drives "user" or "indigenous" innovation is very weak and little research has been done to understand how local innovation naturally occurs or may be facilitated.[35] The Innovation Fund facilitated interesting refugee-led innovation processes during Round 1, and is well placed to put greater emphasis on this in its future work.

Identifying and selecting innovations

The initiatives tended to select innovators working within a particular thematic area and at a specific part of the innovation cycle. For example, the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) has become increasingly focused on innovations in WASH and GBV. GCC had four sector focuses and an emphasis on implementing innovation within conflict settings. UNDP focused on frontier technologies and new approaches while the GSMA M4H

[32] Sandvik, K.B. (2017) "Now is the time to deliver: looking for humanitarian innovation's theory of change". *Int J Humanitarian Action* 2, 8
[33] Ibid.
[34] Betts, A., Bloom, L. and Weaver, N. (2015) *Refugee innovation : humanitarian innovation that starts with communities.* Humanitarian Innovation Project: Oxford.
[35] Betts, A. and Bloom, L. (2013) "The two worlds of humanitarian innovation". Refugee Studies Centre working paper series No. 94

Programme's most recent round funded innovations based on partnerships between humanitarian agencies and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs). The Connectivity Fund aimed to support new initiatives providing refugees with access to connectivity in countries where UNHCR is operational. By contrast the UNHCR Innovation Fund did not initially focus on a particular part of the innovation cycle, but the relatively small amounts of funding available and the rapid implementation speeds made it well suited to testing early-stage ideas. The investment thesis on decision-making in Round 2 led to some commonalities between projects but as projects covered a relatively wide breadth of issues, sectors and locations, this was limited.

The comparator initiatives narrowed their focus in different ways: in several cases this related to the organization's mission statement, but in others (such as the HIF) it was a means for building momentum around specific problem spaces. The interviews suggest that a narrow focus has helped to facilitate learning, identify synergies that lead to improved solutions, and build supportive peer networks. On the other hand, one external interviewee noted that a sole sector focus may limit the possibility of identifying cross-sectoral transformational innovations.

Overall, the UNHCR Innovation Fund is unusual in comparison to other high-profile innovation initiatives in the humanitarian sector, in that it has an **exclusive focus on supporting innovators from all levels within the organization** to develop and test ideas across a wide range of sectors and country operations. This is distinct from the majority of other initiatives, which focus on identifying and fostering innovators and start-ups outside their organizations. However, there is a precedent for this type of internal initiative within the United Nations. A 2001 paper documented "innovative spaces" within UN organizations, noting that one element that sets innovation spaces apart from their non-innovation office counterparts was a deliberate and determined **prioritization of flexibility.**[36] The paper concluded that innovation spaces were able to "overcome the inertia that UN agencies can find difficult to erode". Within UNHCR, the Innovation Fund builds on this legacy as the Innovation Fellowship and Connectivity Fund.

It can be difficult to differentiate between truly innovative practices and what might be considered as small adaptations to standard, good programming. Several initiatives include a criterion for "innovative" projects, but they are relatively elusive about what this means. ALNAP's work on humanitarian innovation suggests the level of "uncertainty" in the results of the potential project is as a measure of innovation.[37] By this definition, the innovation initiatives (and donors) accept projects with different levels of uncertainty. For example, some initiatives such as the HIF Journey to Scale grants accepted uncertainty and allowed for funding to be assigned flexibly during the grant in response to changes that arose. Others (such as the GCC) allowed grantees to regularly make changes to their budgets and milestones. Staff across the Innovation Service (including in the Connectivity Fund) noted that constraints in procurement and funding processes limit the extent to which uncertainty can be embraced. On the other hand, senior staff felt that the relatively small sums and short funding timelines can lead UNHCR managers to accept higher risks of failure.

[36] Johnson, D. (2001) "What is innovation and entrepreneurship? Lessons for larger organisations." *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol 33 No 4, pp 135-140.
[37] Obrecht, A. and T. Warner, A. (2016) "Summary: More than just luck: Innovation in humanitarian action". HIF/ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

The processes for selecting grantees were variable. Most involve panel-based approaches that included scoring initiatives against agreed criteria and six of the initiatives also interviewed potential interviewees. Interestingly, the HIF has introduced a two-phase process for its scaling grants that involves: (a) training and mentoring to develop a scaling strategy; and then (b) selecting 50 per cent of grantees for funding to implement the scaling strategy. At UNHCR the selection processes were carried out by the Innovation Service in close collaboration with relevant supporting divisions. Projects were selected by a panel using a four-step selection process: eligibility checks, strategic assessment, feasibility assessment and interviews. The Innovation Fund's process borrowed from the Innovation Fellowship's approach to identifying people with innovative characteristics.

Risk, funding and monitoring projects

The funding amounts and timelines also varied widely. Seed funding initiatives provided funding of £20,000 to £80,000 over timelines of 12 months. Initiatives for piloting innovations involved funds of £30,000 to £300,000 over one to two years, and those for scaling involved funds of £250,000 to £600,000 over 18 months to three years. Relatively few innovations have successfully scaled in the humanitarian sector; however, there is consensus that scale-up requires multiple funding rounds over years or decades.

All the comparators included some type of due diligence process. The most rigorous included a field visit to each grantee, and included consultations with the grantee's potential partners and users. Others required grantees to provide details of the organization's registration, copies of safeguarding and data privacy policies, copies of any data collection or evaluation documents, and other documents regarding implementation locations. Interviewees noted that these tend to be time-consuming processes that lasted between 3 and 12 months, which can present challenges to implementing teams who often face significant cash shortages between grants.

There was increased concern about the ethics of innovation among at least half of the initiatives. Research has indicated a lack of ethical frameworks or principles for humanitarian innovation and that bringing new actors and new forms of experimentation into humanitarian settings risks exacerbating conflict, challenging local power dynamics, and confronting cultural sensitivities.[38] Three of the organizations were currently designing new frameworks for ethical innovation practices, including codifying expectations around ethics and inclusion for grantees. This was not a major theme within the interviews with UNHCR staff, although this may be because all staff already operate within a single clearly defined ethical framework.

Non-financial support

The Innovation Fund has been implemented by a very small team in comparison to other innovation initiatives. Across the GSMA, GCC and HIF for example, staff are recruited to provide technical support to projects, develop peer networks, engage in partnership brokering and identify mentors with experience of taking innovations to scale. Several of these initiatives also emphasize the value of bringing innovators together to

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[38] Betts, A. and Bloom, L. (2014) "Humanitarian innovation: the state of the art". OCHA Policy and study series. November 2014, 009. OCHA PDSB.

exchange ideas and learning, and of linking innovators to people or organizations in their networks with specific technical expertise to address challenges.

Larger teams allowed the other initiatives to include a strong emphasis on "non-financial" support. At least three initiatives saw mentoring and technical support as (at least as) important as the financial support they provided.[39] For example, GSMA has invested in supporting partnership brokering, particularly between humanitarian organizations and MNOs. The HIF invested in training and mentoring packages for their innovators and has also published a range of tools, templates and guidance via its online "Humanitarian Innovation Guide". UNDP found that Regional Innovation Leads acted as effective knowledge brokers between innovators and UNDP Country Offices as well as with external stakeholders.

Many of the initiatives are also exploring **how non-financial support can facilitate innovations to scale**. For example, the HIF Strategy Development phase is designed to provide training and mentoring to help innovators plan their approach to scaling and identify the types of support they need. The UNDP Innovation Facility evaluation[40] describes how it supported grantees by catalysing additional financial or in-kind support from a range of partners including the private sector. For example, for each dollar of seed-funding allocated by the project in 2017, Country Offices mobilized $2.13 in local resources.

Evidence and learning

Three of the initiatives included an emphasis on monitoring, evaluation and learning, particularly at the project level. The learning report about the Connectivity Fund stresses the importance of measuring both the process and results of an innovation project.[41] Similarly, the GSMA M4H Programme has identified a learning agenda that is complemented by a (published) framework for analysing and learning from its portfolio. It has taken a grantee-led approach to generating evidence from its innovations, allowing grantees to access funding to conduct evaluations of their pilots or user research. However, many of the initiatives also noted the difficulty of developing good metrics at a fund or organizational level that allow a better collective understanding of the change that innovation can bring.

TABLE 6: SUMMARY OF OTHER INNOVATION INITIATIVES		
Initiative	Summary	Notable elements
Connectivity Fund (UNHCR)	A second fund run by the UNHCR Innovation Service, provides resources to	17 projects in 14 countries (over 2018 and 2019) Grants of $10,000 to $60,000 over six months

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[39] The literature on innovating within large organizations highlights that additional support is needed to counter its particular challenges. These include aligning the innovation with business strategies, handling change management, formal team formation, an emphasis on dissemination, and overcoming procedural delays. Systematic support structures are needed – disjointed and haphazard initiatives, however well-intentioned, will be ineffective and short-lived. See for example: Manimala, M. J., Jose, P. D., and Thomas, K. R. (2006) "Organizational constraints on innovation and intrapreneurship: Insights from public sector". *Vikalpa*, 31(1), 49-50.
[40] Breard, P. (2018) "UNDP Innovation facility project formative evaluation: Final report"
[41] UNHCR Innovation Service (no date) Community Connectivity Fund: Interim report.

	UNHCR's operations to test and strengthen Connectivity for Refugees initiatives.	Support in relationship brokering with MNOs, access to global partners, and guidance in design and implementation
Innovation Fellowship (UNHCR)	A year-long programme run by the UNHCR Innovation Service to build innovation skills and competencies among staff.	25 participants per year since 2013 No grants are provided Training in innovation tools and methods, including support to experiment with a real-life problem in operations
UNDP Innovation Facility Project	Fund for UNDP staff to test frontier technologies and new approaches to deliver better results. An evaluation of the UN Innovation Facility was published in 2018.[42] Since then, UNDP has launched 60 new Lab teams covering 78 countries.	140 projects in 87 countries Average level of seed funding unavailable Focus on partnership for scaling: 40 per cent are tripartite partnerships between the private sector, government and UNDP Non-financial support included technical support, connections to other parts of UNDP, showcasing, peer-to-peer exchange, events, funding for networking, and connections to other funders
The Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF)	The HIF aims to improve outcomes for people affected by humanitarian crises by identifying, nurturing and sharing more effective and scalable solutions.	Funded 160 innovations globally £30,000 to £70,000 for seed funding and approx. £580,000 for scale funding Increasing focus on GBV and WASH Non-financial support including training and partnership brokering Create, publish and share a wide range of resources for humanitarian innovators
The Mobile 4 Humanitarian (M4H) Innovation Fund (GSMA)	Aim to accelerate the delivery and impact of digital humanitarian assistance by reaching 7 million people with improved access to and use of life-enhancing mobile-enabled services by 2021.	Funding of up to £300,000 over one to two years Applicants must be partnerships between an MNO and humanitarian organization Dedicated support from GSMA, including in PR and networking Access to flexible funds for research, evaluation or monitoring Programme produces an array of research and learning products to inform its work and the wider sector
The Humanitarian Grand	Identify and support ground-breaking solutions that engage the private sector and	52 projects, including with 46 seed funding and 6 transition to scale funding

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[42] Breard, P. (2018) "UNDP Innovation facility project formative evaluation: Final report"

Challenge (HGC) Fund	draw from the experiences of affected communities in order to significantly improve – and in many cases, save – the lives of vulnerable people affected by conflict.	Seed funding of up to $250,000 over two years, transition to scale funding of up to $1 million over one year Research-based approach to identifying priorities for the HGC Fund was published in *Nature*. Also developed a model of the barriers to humanitarian assistance to assess its portfolio against priorities Criteria include existence of champions, ethical compliance and team members from affected populations Support emphasizes training in innovation and peer support

7. Recommendations

1. Increase staff resourcing for the Innovation Fund

The Innovation Fund was designed, implemented and overseen by a very small team, currently consisting of one Associate Innovation Officer with support from a Senior Admin Programme Officer and the Head of the Innovation Service. The evaluation highlights the remarkable achievements of the Innovation Fund given its small implementing team. However, it also identifies a range of opportunities to increase the non-financial support and post-project support to grantees.

Section 6 described the approach of other innovation funds in the sector, which include dedicated staff who provide support, peer support and post-project support to innovation teams. These funds are primarily supporting innovators from outside their organizations. Nevertheless, delivering a consistent package of support across a wide range of innovation teams would not be possible without significantly increasing resourcing.

The evaluation recommends increased staffing, in particular to allow the Innovation Fund to invest in communications, innovation support, in building peer networks among grantees, and in supporting grantees beyond the project lifecycle. This should also include clarifying the roles and expectations of Innovation Service staff situated in other offices globally in promoting the Innovation Fund.

2. Clarify the strategic objectives of the Innovation Fund

Respondents interviewed during this evaluation had different perspectives on the purpose and objectives of the Innovation Fund. Grantees, for example, were unclear about the objectives of the Innovation Fund and tended to define success on the basis of completing their projects within the allocated timeline and budget. Staff within the Innovation Service highlighted the Innovation Fund's role in supporting individual innovators within the organization, while senior staff emphasized the need to identify solutions with the potential to scale.

This lack of clarity is also reflected in Innovation Fund documents. The objectives of the Innovation Fund have changed over time and for each of the two funding rounds. The articulation of these objectives changes between the IKEA donor reports (Round 1), the Government of Belgium donor report (Round 2), internal documentation and the TOR for this evaluation. These changes demonstrate a tension between the desire to support "experimental space" and learning, and an emphasis on testing and building an evidence base for the grantee solutions.

In the short term, the evaluation recommends that the Innovation Service narrow and clarify the objectives for Round 3 of the Innovation Fund. This will include clarifying whether the primary purpose of the Innovation Fund is to invest in potentially scalable innovation projects with the aim of testing them and supporting them towards sustainability and diffusion, or whether the primary aim is to help a wider array of staff to learn about innovation by doing. There is also a need to build agreement on the rationale of the clarified objectives with stakeholders, including staff across the Innovation Service and with senior champions for the Innovation Fund.

In the longer term, the objectives of the Innovation Fund should be protected from frequent changes in the Innovation Service management, staff and other initiatives. The objectives should be defined within the Innovation Service's strategy and should complement other components of this strategy as well as UNHCR's strategic position on innovation.

This is critical, because if the Innovation Fund's goals are not linked strategically in this way, the Innovation Fund will lose sight of how it engages with other aspects of UNHCR's structure and culture.

3. Revisit the application criteria for the Innovation Fund

The evaluation also highlighted an important tension between innovations that include persons of concern to UNHCR as end-users versus innovations that focused on data analytics and performance. It is too early to assess the extent to which the Round 2 projects have influenced decision-making within UNHCR for the better but the data indicate that the inclusion of persons of concern to UNHCR in innovation initiatives is viewed as a strategic priority by senior interviewees and a vital component of developing innovations that will help UNHCR to improve in its core competencies. This is supported by the review of other innovation funds which highlighted a prevalence of top-down approaches to identifying priorities for humanitarian innovation that has been critiqued in the literature.

The evaluation recommends that the Innovation Service revises the application criteria, including reintroducing the criteria for team members to engage with persons of concern to UNHCR. At the same time, the Innovation Service should invest in its capacities to support stronger engagement of persons of concern to UNHCR in innovation processes.

Given the Strategic Directions of the organization, the Innovation Service should also consider launching a specific funding mechanism for persons of concern to UNHCR, which could build on and complement UNHCR's Division of International Protection Youth Initiative Fund.

4. Improve support for innovators in defining problems

The experiences of other innovation funds, as well as findings from the literature, suggest that defining clear and narrow problem areas for innovators can improve learning between grantees, help to identify synergies and promote peer support. At the same time, senior interviewees articulated opportunities for future iterations of the Innovation Fund to address challenges more closely aligned to UNHCR's strategic priorities, including in AAP.

The evaluation therefore recommends that the Innovation Service develop an approach to working with potential innovators (outside funding rounds) to formulate clear problem statements based on their operational priorities. To promote synergies and ensure a cohesive portfolio, the Innovation Service should also refocus its support on connecting projects with other parts of UNHCR, brokering partnerships, and generating and sharing learning.

5. Systematize technical and mentoring support for projects

Section 4 explored how the Innovation Fund provided non-financial support to innovators including mentoring teams through the innovation process and regular check-ins on project progress, connecting teams with relevant experts within UNHCR, and providing business insight, programme and technical support. This support was limited by resourcing within the Innovation Service but was very highly valued by grantees.

The review of comparator funds in Section 6 outlines alternative approaches to mentoring and technical support, which include training and mentoring relating to developing the innovation, testing the solution, developing financing models, building the team's capabilities as well as technical elements of the solution. The findings from other initiatives also highlighted the importance of support to the actual innovator.

The evaluation recommends building on the existing, highly valuable mentoring and technical support, including by codifying the approach and developing a way to resource it. The approach should include support for peer-learning, a mechanism for grantees to "graduate" from the Innovation Fund, and clarity on the support that innovators can expect afterwards. The Innovation Service should also incorporate provisions for face-to-face support where that is needed.

6. Identify potential pathways to scale by leveraging the Innovation Fund's position in UNHCR

Many of the projects supported by the Innovation Fund did not obtain ongoing funding after the first grant and very few projects have been implemented in a second location. Section 5 highlighted difficulties in scaling innovation initiatives into other locations, countries or offices, including limited capacity for support and a lack of clarity around whose responsibility it was to do this.

Resourcing and extending non-financial support beyond the lifetime of the implementation period is vital to help ensure that projects continue after the first year. An important first step is to map the opportunities for funding and support that currently exist for innovation projects and then to support innovators to apply to access these resources.

The Innovation Service should also explore ways of supporting scaling, including sharing successful project ideas through the divisions and other internal structures.

7. Extend the project implementation period

Section 4 highlighted that grantees struggled to implement their projects in short time periods of four to nine months. Long procurement processes and inflexible end-of-year deadlines exacerbated this problem and resulted in some underspends.

The review of comparator funds in Section 6 illustrates that the implementation periods for different initiatives are variable, but are generally one year or longer. Several funds have introduced phased approaches – for example, where innovators progress along a pipeline of: (a) piloting, (b) developing a diffusion strategy, and (c) diffusion. Different levels of financing and support are provided in each phase.

The evaluators recommend extending the implementation period to at least between 9 and 12 months. Given the administrative restrictions around spending cycles, this could be through a phased approach where projects are first supported to design their innovations and then provided with funding to implement their innovations in phase two. More flexible resourcing of grantees will require the Innovation Service to secure multi-year funding.

8. Clarify internal communications objectives and channels

Section 4 outlines several potential challenges in the approach to identifying potential innovators across UNHCR, including relatively short timelines and disseminating information about the Innovation Fund via Heads of Office and Heads of Sub-Office in Round 2. In addition, the language used in the Call for Proposals was relatively technical, particularly in Round 2, and the interviews suggest that this may have been a barrier to some innovators applying. The evaluation recommends reviewing the Innovation Fund's approach to communications with the aim of making the language as simple as possible and promoting access to the Fund across the organization.

9. Clarify administrative requirements at the outset

During interviews, project team members noted significant administrative challenges involved in implementing their projects within short timelines, particularly in the areas of procurement and contractual arrangements for collaborators and partners. While the Innovation Service made efforts to clarify administrative requirements at the beginning of projects, interviewees felt that greater clarity regarding administrative requirements and timelines at the Call for Proposals stage would help to prepare for implementation and engage programme administrators. The evaluation recommends updating the Terms of Use for the Innovation Fund to include information regarding procurement and contracting processes, as well as continuing to encourage teams to include staff with a programme background, where possible.

10. Invest in learning

There were many opportunities for grantees to learn during the project implementation. However, limited staff capacity at both the project and fund levels meant that there were few systematic approaches to documenting or sharing this learning, either at the grantee or the Fund level. Investment in learning might include developmental evaluation approaches, annual reviews of stakeholder relationships, fund management and impact, or other approaches to encourage reflection. It might include establishing and nourishing a community of practice.

Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation framework

Evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Methods
1. How was the Innovation Fund (IF) designed and implemented (at an operational level)?	• Why was the IF established and what was its intention? • How have the objectives for the IF informed its design and implementation? • How did these evolve over the two rounds? • What are the main operational challenges relating to the design and implementation of the IF? How were these resolved?	Review of management documents Interviews with Innovation Service and IF staff
2. How were IF projects selected, funded, and supported during Round 1 and Round 2?	• Who has the IF targeted and how has it been marketed and promoted to those groups? • What was the composition of the IF portfolio in IF1 and IF2? How were these selected? • What financial and non-financial support was given to the grantees? • How did selection, funding and support to the IF projects differ between country offices? Were there other contextual factors that appear important? • What post-project support was provided to grantees? • How have operational challenges affected projects?	Review of internal communications on IF Review of project proposals and IF panel documents Review of project documents Interviews with grantees Mapping of projects against portfolio framework
3. What have been the achievements and results of the innovation projects?	• What does "success" mean to grantees? Are they achieving these definitions of success? • What happened to innovation projects when funding ended? • Is there any evidence that case study projects contributed to the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of UNHCR country operations?	Case study documents and interviews (including milestones/KPIs) Case study analysis (including readiness to scale) Mapping of case study contributions against OECD evaluation criteria
4. To what extent has the design and	• How does the IF contribute to the strategic aims of the Innovation Service (IS)?	Review of project budgets and milestone reports Interviews with IS staff

implementation of the IF enabled it to meet its objectives?	• To what extent has the design and implementation of the IF enabled experimental space for grantees, allowed them to test ideas, and to build an evidence base? How has this varied between country offices? • How did the thematic focus and use of milestones contribute to the IF meeting its objectives (in Round 2)? • What types of financial support has the IF provided and how effective has this been?	Analysis of information collected in (evaluation questions 1–3)
5. How does the design and implementation of the IF compare to other initiatives and what can be learned given the IF objectives?	• How do the objectives, design and implementation of the IF complement and differ from other related initiatives to drive innovation within UNHCR (including the Connectivity Fund and Innovation Fellowship)? • How do the design and implementation of the IF compare to other similar humanitarian/ development innovation initiatives? • What is known about efficient models for fostering innovation within organizations? (including cost-sharing, incubators and accelerators)?	Comparative analysis of IF with other UNHCR initiatives Comparative analysis of IF with other humanitarian/ development initiatives
6. How are lessons generated by the IF captured and used in UNHCR?	• How are individual projects learning (including from failure)? To what extent are they supported to learn? • How has project-level learning been captured and used by country offices? • How has fund-level learning been captured and used by the IF? Over what time frames? • How is the IF connecting to and learning from other initiatives and organizations?	Case study interviews Interviews and document review for projects that failed (e.g. failed to meet objectives/ milestones) Case study analysis of "Critical turning points" within projects to identify learning (including from failure) Analysis of IF engagement with other initiatives
7. To what extent is the IF aligned with the broader strategic goals of the organization, including UNHCR's Strategic	• How does the IF contribute to (or interact with) the strategic aims of UNHCR and the needs of UNHCR operations, including in emergencies? • How has the investment thesis on decision-making supported or hindered the IF in meeting the strategic objectives of UNHCR? • To what extent does the IF contribute to UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity objectives? To what	Review of strategic documents Interviews with strategic leaders within UNHCR Interviews with Innovation Service staff

Directions and the Global Compact for Refugees?	extent does the portfolio of innovation projects reflect the Age, Gender and Diversity policy?	

Annex 2: Overview of projects

| No. | Location | | | | Project stage | Innovation Fund funding (USD) | | Focal point | | Longevity |
	Region of project focal point*	Country of project focal point*	Duty station of project focal point*	Project implementation location	Project stage*	Funding requested	Funding received	Position*	M/F	Did the project reach the end of the funding period?
1	MENA	Algeria	Tindouf	Tindouf refugee camps, Algeria	Testing	60,000	60,000	Senior Field Coordinator	F	Yes
2	Asia and the Pacific	Afghanistan	Kabul	Nationwide, Afghanistan	Testing	45,000	45,000	Assistant Representative	M	Yes
3	Europe	France	Paris	Strasbourg, France and other European cities	Scaling up	53,900	53,900	Senior Public Information Officer and Spokesperson	F	Yes
4	Africa	Senegal	Geneva and Dakar	Dakar, Senegal	Testing	24,500	24,000	Legal Officer (IDPs) and Senior Registration/ Information Management Officer	M/F	Yes but encountered delays
5	MENA	Jordan	Za'atari	Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan	Testing	45,200	60,000	Information Management Officer	M	Yes
6	Africa	Kenya	Nairobi	Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya	Testing	50,700	35,000	Public Health Officer/ Technical Coordinator	M	Yes but encountered delays
7	Africa	Ghana	Accra	Ampain refugee camp, Ghana	Design	39,900	39,900	Public Information Associate	M	Yes

8	Africa	Kenya	Nairobi	Nairobi, plus Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, Kenya	Scaling up	60,000	60,000	Representative	M	Yes
9	Americas	Dominican Republic	Haiti and Dominican Republic	Multiple locations along the Haitian-Dominican border	Testing	43,128	43,128	Chief of Mission and Head of National Office	M/M	Yes
10	Africa	Kenya	Kakuma	Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya	Scaling up	46,438	46,438	Head of Sub-Office	F	Yes
11	Africa	Zimbabwe	Harare	Tongogara refugee camp, Zimbabwe	Testing	60,000	60,000	Representative	M	Yes
12	Africa	Malawi	Lilongwe	Luwani refugee camp, Malawi	Design	30,624	30,624	Representative	F	Yes but encountered delays
13	Africa	Niger	Niamey	Refugee camps in Tillabery, Tahoua, Diffa regions, Niger	Testing	29,857	30,624	Associate External Relations Officer	F	Yes but encountered delays
14	Africa	Burundi	Bujumbura	Bujumbura, plus Kavumu, Kinama, Bwagiriza and Musasa	Scaling up	59,000	59,000	Deputy Representative	M	Yes but encountered delays

No.	Region	Country	Project implementation location	Thematic focus		Funding	Focal point	M/F	Marketing
				refugee camps, Burundi					
15**	Africa	Zambia	Not stated in project documentation	Mayukwayukwa and Meheba resettlement areas, Zambia	Design	N/A	65,000	Not stated in project documentation	Not known	Yes
16**	MENA	Jordan	Mafraq	Mafraq, Jordan	Testing	N/A	No information on this project in the budget	Not stated in project documentation	F	Yes
17**	Americas	Ecuador	Quito	Nationwide, Ecuador	Scaling up	N/A	50,000	External Relations Officer	F	Yes

*At the time of application

**This project was selected for funding prior to the launch of the Call for Proposals

ROUND 2 PROJECTS

	Location		Thematic focus	Innovation Fund funding (USD)				Team			Focal point		Marketing	Longevity	
No.	Region, country and duty station of focal point*	Project implement-tation location	Thematic focus of project	Funding requested	Funding received	Funding spent	Funding renewal received	Total team size	F	M	Position*	M/F	How did the team hear about the Fund?	Project completed	Project continued after funding
1	Europe Switzerland Geneva	Rabat, Morocco	Modelling and simulation	80,000	80,000	25,670	0	7	4	2	Senior Protection Advisor	F	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	Unknown

#														
2	Europe Switzerland Geneva	Geneva, Switzerland	Data and artificial intelligence	76,750	76,750	74,151	74,836	6	3	3	Project Coordinator Case Law Collection	F	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	Not yet known**
3	MENA Turkey Gaziantep	Turkey and Jordan (location not specified)	Data and artificial intelligence	70,000	70,000	0	0	6	1	5	Information Management Officer	M	UNHCR Broadcast email	Dropped out	No
4	Americas USA Washington, D.C.	Washington, D.C., USA	Data and artificial intelligence	80,000	80,000	80,000	0	5	2	3	Strategic Communic-ations and Outreach Officer	M	Supervisor/ manager	Yes	Yes
5	Europe Switzerland Geneva	Geneva, Switzerland	Data and artificial intelligence	62,000	47,891	47,556	93,090	4	2	2	Head of Information Management and Innovation (JIPS)	F	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	Not yet known**
6	Europe Hungary Budapest	Budapest, Hungary	Data and artificial intelligence	17,850	17,850	6,300	0	6	5	1	Administration Officer	F	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	Yes
7	Americas Ecuador Quito	Quito, Ecuador	Data and artificial intelligence	40,590	38,300	37,300	30,625	7	3	4	Information Management Officer	M	Application in 2016	Yes	Not yet known**
8	Europe Switzerland Geneva	Geneva, Switzerland	Data and artificial intelligence	79,500	48,350	55,328	0	3	1	2	Budget Associate	F	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	Yes

#	Location	City	Theme								Role	Gender	Source		
9	Africa South Africa Pretoria	Pretoria, South Africa	Data and artificial intelligence	80,000	80,000	0	0	3	2	1	Regional Programme Officer	F	UNHCR Broadcast email	Dropped out	No
10	Europe Switzerland Geneva	Geneva, Switzerland	Storytelling and culture	69,000	69,000	50,732	49,697	3	2	1	Associate HR/ Assignments Officer	F	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	Unknown
11	Europe Malta Valletta	Valletta, Malta	Storytelling and culture	80,000	80,000	11,009	0	7	2	4	Communic- ations/ Public Information Associate	M	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	No
12	Americas Ecuador Quito	Quito, Ecuador	Inclusive intelligence	21,276	21,276	20,065	0	4	2	2	Information Management Associate	M	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	Unknown
13	Americas Ecuador Quito	Baños de Agua Santa, Ecuador	Inclusive intelligence	20,748	20,748	18,094	0	6	4	2	Senior Field Assistant	M	Colleague	Yes	Yes
14	MENA Jordan Mafraq	Mafraq, Jordan	Inclusive intelligence	80,000	80,000	Ongoing	N/A	5	2	3	Head of Sub- Office	F	UNHCR Broadcast email	Yes	Not yet known**
15	Africa Uganda Mbarara	Nakivale and Oruchinga refugee camps, Uganda	Data and artificial intelligence	28,300	28,300	Ongoing	N/A	5	3	2	Information Management Associate	F	Supervisor/ Manager	Yes	Not yet known**
16	Africa Kenya Nairobi	Nairobi, Kenya	Data and artificial intelligence	80,000	80,000	Ongoing	N/A	4	1	3	Assistant Livelihoods Officer	M	Innovation Fellows network	Yes	Not yet known**

| 17 | Asia Thailand Bangkok | Bangkok, Thailand | Data and artificial intelligence | 60,000 | 60,000 | Ongoing | N/A | 5 | 4 | 1 | Deputy Represent-ative | F | Direct email from Innovation Service | Yes | Not yet known** |

*At time of application

**This project reached the end of the funding period during the course of this evaluation

Annex 3: Project summaries

	ROUND 1 PROJECTS	
No.	**Project title**	**Location**
1	Recycled plastic water bottles build energy-efficient housing to beat desert heat in Tindouf refugee camps	Tindouf, Algeria
2	Measuring changing popular perceptions regarding potential flight in Afghanistan through mobile phone surveys	Nationwide, Afghanistan
3	Refugee Food Festival	Strasbourg, France and other European cities
4	Using call data records (CDR) to estimate returning refugee populations in Senegal	Dakar, Senegal
5	RefuGIS project: Empowering Refugee Livelihood and Education with Geographic Information Systems (GIS)	Za'atari, Jordan
6	Customer Satisfaction Survey	Kakuma, Kenya
7	Smart WiFi Kiosks to improve access to services and protection among refugees	Ampain, Ghana
8	Artists for Refugees	Nairobi, Dadaab and Kakuma, Kenya
9	Verification and Registration of persons of concern to UNHCR on the Haiti-Dominican Republic border and Technical Support for Scheduling Registration Appointments	Multiple locations along the Haitian-Dominican border
10	Community Enterprise Cycle, with Xavier Project in Kakuma	Kakuma, Kenya
11	Piloting accelerated school readiness programme and the development of an infant school in Tongogara refugee camp, Zimbabwe	Tongogara, Zimbabwe
12	Luwani FM: A Community Radio Station for Refugees and the Host Community	Luwani, Malawi
13	Innovative off-line information and cultural solutions for youth refugees in Niger	Tillabery, Tahoua, Diffa regions, Niger
14	Complément nutritionnel à base de moringa (Moringa nutritional supplement)	Bujumbura, Kavumu, Kinama, Bwagiriza and Musasa, Burundi
15	Improving livelihoods through integrated vocational and entrepreneurship training and support of income-generating activities in Mayukwayukwa and Meheba Resettlement Areas	Mayukwayukwa and Meheba, Zambia
16	Bina building livelihoods: employment, self-employment and income generation in Jordan's host communities	Mafraq, Jordan
17	Graduation model	Nationwide, Ecuador

ROUND 2 PROJECTS

No.	Challenge	Solution	Location
1	How might we better understand mixed-movement population flows and use this information to apply the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) in North Africa?	Build and test a multi-agent system to simulate mixed-migration movement in North Africa and showcase potential for GCR to support operational responses to mixed flows.	Rabat, Morocco
2	How might we prepare refugee status determination (RSD) briefs in an expedient and compelling way to ensure the best possible status determination for refugees and asylum-seekers?	Build a machine learning tool to automatically extract citations from case law, and display similar cases, information on precedent and UNHCR's position on previous cases to build better legal briefs.	Geneva, Switzerland
3	How might we quickly analyse vast quantities of qualitative and unstructured data contained in mission reports, focus group transcripts and participatory assessments to guide our adaptive protection response?	Build a workflow that integrates semantic analysis tools, including sentiment analysis and natural language processing, to quickly analyse large qualitative data sets.	Turkey and Jordan (exact locations not known)
4	How might we identify and engage up-and-coming policymakers in Washington to champion the rights of refugees?	Conduct a nationwide survey using IVR and live calls to understand sentiment towards refugees. Using this data, apply machine learning to predict similar sentiment in other policymakers and develop profiles of policymakers who can be targeted with personalized messaging on refugee issues.	Washington, D.C., USA
5	How might we build trust and incentivize data-sharing between organizations in the humanitarian sector in order to build a stronger common situational understanding of displacement?	Implement OPAL in the humanitarian context to extract and securely share sensitive, individual-level data stored across humanitarian organizations in their own servers.	Geneva, Switzerland
6	How might we automate asset-tracking and office supply orders in order to optimize resource allocation decisions?	Test the use of "smart shelf" technology to manage and track inventory.	Budapest, Hungary
7	How might we better analyse and visualize qualitative indicators and results, so that they can be shared quickly with partners and reporting officers?	Apply text mining techniques to analyse and visualize data stored in ActivityInfo, and work with researchers from the University of Pennsylvania to assess whether these information products affect programmatic decisions.	Quito, Ecuador

8	How might we improve the resource allocation process so that the Budget Committee can make fast and informed decisions to reallocate funds to field operations?	Map and understand the current user-experience of the budget reallocation process and redesign the process using business process management tools that facilitate information-sharing and analysis of budget committee request data.	Geneva, Switzerland
9	How can we verify the accuracy and reliability of an asylum-seeker's testimony in refugee status determination (RSD) interviews in order to provide a fair assessment of their claim?	Research, review and test existing voice, language and dialect recognition software applications to determine their accuracy and reliability in the RSD context.	Pretoria, South Africa
10	How might we promote an inclusive workplace in UNHCR where everyone feels valued and empowered in their role?	Produce compelling stories by managers that highlight inclusive behaviours in the workplace and how this behaviour results in better work, personal outcomes and decisions.	Geneva, Switzerland
11	How might we eliminate toxic narratives about refugees and alleviate compassion fatigue towards them?	Work with local councils and refugees to develop a compelling narrative on the benefits of socially integrating refugees and asylum-seekers.	Valletta, Malta
12	How might we improve access to, and sharing of, information by LGBTI+ refugees to promote their inclusion and access to basic services?	Utilize social cartography methods to map services and safe spaces for LGBTI+ refugees, and produce an information product to share this information with the community.	Quito, Ecuador
13	How might we prevent discrimination against refugees and promote inclusive social spaces for them and members of the host community?	The team is working with Venezuelan refugees and host community members to design a community-led solution to inclusive intelligence.	Baños de Agua Santa, Ecuador
14	How might we understand how refugees use maps in their decision-making, and help them create maps of their environment to facilitate collective decisions about services that affect them?	Undertake primary research to understand how youth and women use maps to make decisions. Train refugees to create maps of their environment, and facilitate service provision exercises with these groups to design and refine services.	Mafraq, Jordan
15	How might we provide timely updates on services to refugees in the large settlements of Nakivale and Oruchinga, and provide them with the opportunity to give feedback on these services?	Install digital signage around the camp and work with refugee groups to establish feedback mechanisms using surveys that can be analysed rapidly with machine learning technology.	Mbarara, Uganda

16	How might we work with the private sector to identify work and skills development opportunities for refugees in Kenya?	Create a dedicated work placement and skills development platform for refugee job seekers and those looking to enhance their skills development. Build data privacy and protection protocols to ensure refugee data are protected.	Nairobi, Kenya
17	How might we rapidly and accurately translate Country of Origin information into the Thai language in order to support government authorities build a screening mechanism to carry out fair and efficient RSD processes?	Build an API and machine translation tool that extracts information from ECOI.net to translate available information from English to Thai.	Bangkok, Thailand

Annex 4: Selection criteria and selection process

Round 1

Eligibility criteria as stated in the Call for Proposals:
- Open for UNHCR country operations or Headquarters divisions, sections or units.
- Proposals must have their challenge adequately defined along with a viable, proposed solution in order to pass the initial screening stage.

Selection criteria as stated in the Call for Proposals:
- **Idea/ concept:** Creation of new tools, processes or techniques, or adaptation of existing ones in new ways or new contexts to accomplish new objectives.
- **Criticality/ priority:** Criticality and urgency to solve the challenge.
- **Refugee/ community engagement:** Participation by persons of concern to UNHCR and host communities in the design and implementation of the project.
- **Feasibility:** Probability of success in achieving the desired results, including potential risks.
- **Impact:** Effect on persons of concern to UNHCR or the organization, both immediate outcomes and future impact, taking into account increased scalability and transferability.
- **Sustainability/ ownership:** Potential for the project to be financially mainstreamed, owned/maintained and sustained or scaled up over time.

Selection process:
1. Screening of proposals against eligibility requirements
2. Evaluation of proposals against selection criteria, scored by the Innovation Service team using a selection matrix
3. Consultation with staff from the relevant division, service, unit or regional bureau
4. Final decision by the Innovation Service team

Round 2

Eligibility criteria as stated in the Calls for Proposals:

- The proposed solution must fall within one of four areas of work: data and artificial intelligence, inclusive intelligence, simulation and modelling, storytelling and culture.
- You must apply as a team (three to seven people, including the project focal point), be a current UNHCR staff member or affiliate workforce.
- Have the drive and interest to find new ways to solve challenges facing the organization in its service to refugees.

Some of the eligibility criteria were amended for the second Call for Proposals: team size reduced to two to four people, including the project focal point, and the third point was made more specific: "have the drive and interest to develop a proof of concept, in line with the Innovation Fund milestones".

Selection criteria as stated in the Calls for Proposals:

- **The project team:** A diverse and multifunctional team.
- **The problem/ challenge:** A sharp, but evolving understanding of the problem the team would like to solve.
- **Impact:** Both immediate and future impact on affected populations and/or the organization, particularly on internal processes and decision-making.
- **Idea/ solution:** The creation of new tools, processes or techniques, or the adaptation of existing ones in new ways or new contexts.
- **Feasibility:** The probability of success in testing the solutions and achieving the desired results, including potential risks.

The online application stated that refugee/ community engagement was not one of the evaluation criteria, but was looked upon very favourably, especially for submission under the inclusive intelligence area of work.

Selection process:

1. Screening of applications against the eligibility criteria
2. Strategic assessment – applications reviewed by a team from the Innovation Service, each member of the team used a scoring tool that assessed six factors: problem-framing, problem evolution, novelty, end-user benefit, learning potential, improved decision-making potential
3. Feasibility assessment – two Innovation Service staff conducted an interview with the project focal point and graded the application on the following: technical capacity and expertise, organizational and user backing, activity timeline, budget, and partner reliance
4. Team interview to assess team dynamics, followed by revision and resubmission of the proposal by the team
5. Final decision by the Innovation Service team

Annex 5 Terms of Reference

Evaluation Terms of Reference

Key information at a glance	
Title	Independent Evaluation of the UNHCR Innovation Fund
Type	Decentralized; Process
Commissioned by	UNHCR Innovation Service
Time frame of assignment	January - May 2020
Evaluation manager's contact:	innovation@unhcr.org
Date	14 January 2020 (Amended 20 March)

1. Introduction

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) seeks a consultant to lead an independent evaluation of the UNHCR Innovation Fund. This evaluation is being commissioned by UNHCR's Innovation Service with financing from the Government of Belgium in order to understand how successful the Innovation Fund has been in stimulating and incentivizing innovative thinking and behaviour in UNHCR.

2. Background and Context

UNHCR is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. The Innovation Service, which sits within the Executive Office, strives to create an enabling culture for innovation to flourish by equipping staff with the knowledge, resources and skills needed to ensure that they can increasingly draw on innovation to solve the most pressing challenges.

The Service manages the Innovation Fund, which seeks to provide the necessary funding, support for experimentation and mentorship in order to nurture innovation and adaptability within UNHCR. The Fund does this by supporting early-stage, novel projects that fall outside the scope of normal UNHCR operations, through access to social and financial capital.

With support from the Government of Belgium, the Innovation Service launched the Fund in December 2018. A total of 109 applications were received from UNHCR teams worldwide, and 19 projects were selected for funding in 2019.

The immediate objectives of the Innovation Fund are:

     a) Create the budgetary and experimental 'space' to stimulate and nurture innovation in UNHCR by providing financial and non-financial support to teams solving difficult problems; and

     b) Support UNHCR teams working on early-stage innovations test their solutions and build an evidence base to support their work.

The scope of the Fund was defined to encourage innovations that can lead to improved decision making, since decisions made by UNHCR pertaining to international protection and humanitarian aid present profound implications for crisis-affected people for generations to come. Given the importance of decision making, the Innovation Service wants to encourage staff to develop novel solutions that corresponded with four underexplored and underutilized decision making methodologies. These are:

a) Data & Artificial Intelligence: The application of computer science techniques to help us transform large volumes of data into information, and to turn this information into action. Examples in these areas of work include data mining and natural language processing tools and techniques.

b) Inclusive Intelligence: Novel ways of engaging displaced people in decision making, particularly in framing the problems that affect them, defining priorities, and informing and overseeing the services we provide. Examples in these areas of work include service delivery monitoring, participatory budgeting and other non-traditional or underutilized methods to meaningfully engage affected populations in UNHCR's work.

c) Modelling & Simulation: Computer models and simulations to analyse the potential consequences of different policies prior to taking action, and to identify actions which perform adequately across a range of future scenarios. Examples in these areas of work include agent-based modelling and robust decision making.

d) Storytelling & Culture: The application of creative stories and anecdotes that harness the powerful role emotions play in driving decision making, and which can lead to sustained, positive behavioural change. Examples in these areas of work include public interest communications and storytelling campaigns to refine, strengthen or reimagine UNHCR's organisation's culture.

3. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the evaluation is to undertake the first assessment of the UNHCR Innovation Fund and provide key lessons for the Innovation Service that can be used to shape the future of UNHCR's innovation programming. Objectives of the evaluation include:
- To explore the extent to which the design and implementation of the Innovation Fund supported the successful realization of the project's overarching objectives;
- To assess which external and internal factors, including the Fund's design and input of resources, propel or hinder its success;
- To review the extent to which the Innovation Fund is aligned with UNHCR's Strategic Directions and policy; and
- To make recommendations about how the Innovation Fund's approach and design can be improved for the next iteration.

4. Evaluation Approach

Scope

The evaluation will focus on reviewing the first[43] and second iterations of the Innovation Fund, which were implemented from June 2016 to June 2017, and January 2019 to January 2020. Since the initial project documents did not contain an explicit theory of change, the evaluation should review the Fund's conceptual framework to determine whether the objectives and implicit theory of change were sufficiently put into action.

The target users for this evaluation include the UNHCR Innovation Service, UNHCR country operations and the Government of Belgium. In order to meet the needs of these users, the evaluation should provide key insights on successes, failures and lessons of the Innovation Fund. These insights, along with recommendations for improvements, will play a pivotal role in the design of other programmatic initiatives to stimulate innovative thinking and behaviour in the UN Refugee Agency.

While the evaluation should include an analysis of which internal and external factors propelled or hindered the Fund's success, it will not include an in-depth analysis of UNHCR's organisational culture and bureaucratic impediments, as these have been partially covered in recent organisational assessments and evaluations. Additionally, while the evaluation should compare the Fund's operating model to other similar actors, this comparison should be made with non-UN actors in the humanitarian sector, as a comparison of UN funding

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[43] The first iteration of the UNHCR Innovation Fund was supported by the IKEA Foundation.

mechanisms was recently carried out by the UN Innovation Network. Examples of similar and relevant actors includes government entities and not-for-profit organisations.

Key Evaluation Questions

The independent evaluation should consider the following lines of inquiry, which are expected to be further refined during the inception phase:

a) How effectively has the design and implementation of the Innovation Fund supported the realisation of its overarching objectives?

- How has the design of the Fund enabled worldwide, bottom-up experimentation in UNHCR?
- How appropriate was the selection of the project's financial and social incentives to achieve the intended objectives of the Fund?
- To what extent has the thematic focus and innovation milestones contributed to the realisation of the Fund's overarching objectives?
- How efficient and effective has the Innovation Fund been in its use of resources?
- What, if any, unanticipated opportunities or barriers to implementation emerged? If observed, how - and to what extent - were they capitalised on or overcome?
- What role does context play, if any, in contributing to or constraining the implementation of the Fund, including bottom-up experimentation by teams?

b) Considering the objectives of the Innovation Fund, how does the design and implementation of the project compare to other innovation initiatives?

- How does the design and implementation of the Fund interface with other similar initiatives in the Innovation Service, such as the Connectivity Fund and Innovation Fellowship, and within UNHCR as whole? Where do they complement and diverge from other efforts to drive innovative thinking and behaviour?
- Is a dedicated fund, as opposed to a cost-sharing project, incubator or accelerator, the most efficient vehicle?
- How does UNHCR's model for the Fund compare with other similar actors in terms of allocation of resources?

c) To what extent have the lessons generated by the Innovation Fund been captured and used to inform the design and implementation of innovation projects in UNHCR?

- To what extent has the learning and insight generated by Fund-supported projects contributed to shaping UNHCR's programmes in contexts where it has invested in innovation?
- Considering the experimental and iterative nature of the projects, how have results and experiences of the individual projects, positive and negative, been captured and analysed at the project and fund portfolio level?
- How effectively were the project teams supported to reflect and learn from their experiments?

d) To what extent is the Innovation Fund aligned with the broader strategic goals of the Organisation, including UNHCR's Strategic Directions and the Global Compact for Refugees?

- What evidence is there that the work of the Fund is relevant to the needs of UNHCR Operations, including in emergencies?
- How does the work of the Fund contribute to the realisation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy?
- How clearly is AGD reflected in the individual projects the Fund supports?

5. Methodology

The success and uptake of this evaluation depends on a highly collaborative process between UNHCR and the selected consultant. We welcome the use of diverse, participatory and novel methods that will enhance our learning about evaluation. While the sampling strategy, stakeholder analysis and final methods will be agreed on jointly by UNHCR and the consultant in a kick-off workshop, the evaluation methodology is expected to:

a) Employ a mixed-method approach incorporating primary and secondary qualitative data collection, and quantitative data where appropriate;

b) Gather and make use of a wide range of data sources including key-informant interviews with Innovation Fund teams, Innovation Service staff, jury panel members, and unsuccessful Fund applicants;

c) Utilize a case study approach to understand and capture the importance of context in explaining variations in results per country and regions. One country field mission to collect data might be possible if time permits;

d) Undertake a desk review of other innovation initiatives, complemented by interviews with external experts, to generate findings about the relevance and design of the Innovation Fund; and

e) Refer to and make use of relevant standards analytical frameworks, including relevant internationally agreed evaluation criteria such as those proposed by OECD-DAC and adapted by ALNAP for use in humanitarian evaluations[44].

The consultant is responsible for gathering, analysing and triangulating data, to demonstrate impartiality of the analysis, minimise bias, and ensure the credibility of findings and conclusions.

6. Quality Assurance

The consultant is required to sign the UNHCR Code of Conduct and respect UNHCR's confidentiality requirements.

In line with established standards for evaluation in the UN system, and the UN Ethical Guidelines for evaluations, evaluation in UNHCR is founded on the inter-connected principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility, which in practice, call for: protecting sources and data; systematically seeking informed consent; respecting dignity and diversity; minimising risk, harm and burden upon those who are the subject of, or participating in the evaluation, while at the same time not compromising the integrity of the exercise.

This evaluation is also expected to adhere with the 'Evaluation Quality Assurance' (EQA) guidance, which clarifies the quality requirements expected for UNHCR evaluation processes and products. The Evaluation Manager will share and provide an orientation to the EQA at the start of the evaluation. Adherence to the EQA will be overseen by the Evaluation Manager with support from the UNHCR Evaluation Service as needed.

7. Organisation and Management of the Evaluation

Evaluation Manager

UNHCR's Innovation Service will serve as the evaluation manager and will lead on hiring the evaluation consultant. The evaluation manager will be responsible for:
1. Managing the day to day aspects of the evaluation process;
2. Acting as the main interlocutor with the consultant;
3. Providing the consultant with required information and facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders; and

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[44] See for example: Cosgrave and Buchanan-Smith (2017) Guide de l'Evaluation de l'Action Humanitaire (London: ALNAP) and Beck, T. (2006) Evaluating Humanitarian Action using the OECD-DAC Criteria (London: ALNAP)

4. Reviewing the interim deliverables and final reports to ensure quality – with the support of UNHCR Evaluation Service.

The consultant conducting the evaluation is expected to produce written products of high standards, informed by evidence and triangulated data and analysis, copy-edited, and free from errors. The language of work of this evaluation and its deliverables is English.

Deliverables

The following deliverables will be required as part of this evaluation:

- Approach paper;

- Data collection, data analysis and Draft Report; and

- Final report, including a stand-alone executive summary (maximum 40 pages excluding annexes).

Indicative timeline

Activity	Deliverable	Indicative Timeline	*Minimum No. of estimated days
Publication of the offer	Tendering process	January 2020	n/a
Evaluation of submissions	Individual consultancy contract signed	January 2020	n/a
Inception phase including: -Initial briefing and two-day workshop in Geneva with the consultant -Initial desk review	Approach paper prepared, including methodology with sampling strategy and stakeholder mapping.	February 2020	10
Phase 1a: Data collection and data analysis	- Development of survey(s) - In-depth interviews and data collection - Data analysis - Desk review of other innovation initiatives - One-two country field visits (time permitting)	March 2020	20
		April 2020	20
Phase 1b: Presentation of preliminary findings and draft report	- Presentation of preliminary findings and key areas - Draft report written and submitted - Exchange of comments and recommendations for improvements	May 2020	20
Phase 2: Finalization of deliverables	- Second draft submitted for comments	June 2020	10

	- Exchange of comments and final recommendations for improvements - Final report is delivered		
Total of Minimum No. of estimated days		80	

*This is an estimate of minimum working days. The individual consultant will need to specify the expected level of effort and calculate the total number of days worked.

8. Consultant Profile

The individual consultant should meet the following functional profile:

- Advanced degree or equivalent in relevant areas of studies such as Public Administration, Public Policy, Social and Political Sciences, Statistics, Economics, Development Studies.

- At least 10 years of experience conducting or managing humanitarian evaluations engaging a range of modalities, including at strategic and policy levels;

- Demonstrable experience conducting or managing humanitarian innovation evaluations;

- Proven experience and understanding of humanitarian financing mechanisms;

- Strong knowledge of humanitarian policy, normative and legal frameworks;

- Proven experience working with donor governments, the Red Cross movement, UN agencies and NGOs at the international and field levels;

- Strong knowledge of participatory and novel evaluation methodologies;

- Extensive experience conveying complex evaluation analyses clearly and compellingly, including with quantitative and qualitative research;

- Experience in generating useful and action-oriented recommendations to management; and

- Excellent English drafting skills (to publication standard).

Application Process

Interested applicants should submit the following material for review to the Innovation Service at innovation@unhcr.org no later than midnight CET on 20 January 2020:

- A one-page concept note detailing the consultant's proposed approach and methodology to this evaluation;
- An indicative budget for the outlined deliverables. Travel estimates should not be included in the indicative budget. The estimate and payment of travel costs including tickets and per diem will be done by UNHCR and agreed upon between UNHCR and the individual consultant prior to travel; and
- A CV demonstrating the consultant's relevant experience and suitability to lead the evaluation.

Please contact innovation@unhcr.org with questions.