



ACCELERATING INCLUSION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED
AND WHAT IT TAKES



Cover photo: Twins Musa and Fatuma, 7, at their first day of the Accelerated School Readiness programme at Aysaita Refugee Primary School, Afar Regional State, Ethiopia. © UNICEF/UN0309459/Tadesse

Photo: Aged 10, Hussein has few memories of a life outside a refugee camp. He is one of 500,000 Rohingya refugee children in Bangladesh. "I can't go to school because we need the money I make to cover our costs at home," he explained. Having given up on his studies, he now works full time inside the camps mending umbrellas and repairing shoes to help support his family in Unchiprang camp in Cox's Bazar district.

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Between 2020 and 2022, UNICEF and UNHCR implemented the 'Blueprint for Joint Action' – a bold new joint approach to refugee inclusion – in 10 countries. This paper sets out what we learned about refugee inclusion, what we achieved, and what's next.

Refugee children: at risk of being left behind

At the end of 2022, the number of people forced to flee their homes crossed the staggering milestone of 108.4 million – equivalent to the 14th most populous country in the world. Between 2018 and 2022, over one million children were born as refugees.

Displacement disproportionately affects children: while children account for 30 per cent of the world's population, 41 per cent of all forcibly displaced people are children, including 12 million refugee children.¹

Displaced children are uniquely vulnerable due to the disruption and trauma of the displacement itself, the family's reduced access to services and the loss of community networks and livelihood opportunities. They are more likely to live in poverty, lack food security, have limited access to education and learning, suffer from ill health, and experience violence, exploitation, and abuse.

Many live in marginalized areas or in communities themselves afflicted by crises, where infrastructure is threadbare, development investment is minimal and access to essential support and basic services is falling short.

But it does not have to be like this. By including refugees and asylum seekers in national systems and offering better services for refugee and host community children alike, we can unlock a triple win: for refugees, for host communities and for governments.

¹ UNICEF Child Displacement data, last updated: June 2023.

Why inclusion makes sense

INCLUSION PAYS, EXCLUSION COSTS

Evidence² shows that the right refugee inclusion policies and development support can bring economic benefits. In Kenya, the World Bank documented that the presence of refugees in Kakuma boosts Turkana's Gross Regional Product by over three per cent and increases total employment by about three per cent.³

Keeping refugees in camps and dependent on under-resourced humanitarian systems is costly and both socially and economically unsustainable. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has put it: "Inclusion pays, exclusion costs". But for refugees to be able to contribute to the local economy, they must be included in the education system and granted access to decent work.

EVERYONE BENEFITS FROM STRENGTHENED AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES

Investing in strengthened national systems that reach refugees alongside host communities is not only more efficient and sustainable than maintaining parallel systems, it also strengthens social cohesion, makes communities more resilient and contributes to shared prosperity.

In Zimbabwe, the African Development Bank⁴ has helped transform the refugee hosting district of Chipinge by investing in public lighting, potable water, and an irrigation scheme, raising income levels for all refugee and host community women in the community, improving health outcomes for all children, and increasing public safety.

NOBODY IS PROTECTED UNLESS WE ARE ALL PROTECTED

Inclusion also offers public health benefits. During the COVID-19 pandemic many governments embraced progressive and inclusive policies to protect societies. Many countries, including Indonesia or Jordan, included refugees in COVID-19 vaccination.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be achieved whilst refugees are excluded. Refugees represent significant unrealised human capital to accelerate progress towards their achievement. We urgently need policy reforms and investments that allow refugees to work, earn a living, open bank accounts, connect digitally, access schools and hospitals, and contribute to the host country's society and economy.

2 Verme, Paolo; Schuettler, Kirsten, *The Impact of Forced Displacement on Host Communities. A Review of the Empirical Literature in Economics*, Global Labor Organization (GLO), 2020.

3 International Finance Corporation, *Kakuma as a Marketplace - A consumer and market study of a refugee camp and town in northwest Kenya*, April 2018.

4 UNHCR, *Better access to water improves lives for refugees and their hosts in Zimbabwe camp*, March 2021.



Photo: A girl plays with toys in an inclusive kindergarten Maslacak in Belgrade, Serbia.

The Blueprint for Joint Action

REIMAGINING HOW WE WORK TOGETHER

In 2020, UNICEF and UNHCR joined forces to explore new ways of working together to better serve refugee and host community children. Our objective was simple: to accelerate the inclusion of refugee children and to shift from parallel humanitarian service delivery to sustainable, nationally grounded solutions, to the benefit of all children.

Under the Blueprint, we set ourselves the bold and ambitious target to support host governments and communities to transform the lives of 2.24 million refugee children in ten countries,⁵ covering one in five refugee children in 2020.

To be more effective, we established more predictable ways of working together that leveraged our comparative strengths. To keep track of progress, we jointly reported against a set of joint results and targets embedded in each agency's institutional monitoring systems.

At country level, we achieved operational efficiencies by sharing human resources, using joint premises, and merging procurement and distribution pipelines. In Lebanon, UNICEF and UNHCR teams shared common assessment and capacity building mechanisms for partners on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). In Bangladesh, our teams shared office space to cut costs and in Indonesia, we shared staff to collect assessment information, saving on travel costs and increasing the speed of response.

We also edged forward on delivering better together through improved programmatic alignment. In education, we leveraged our complementary expertise and agreed on respective roles to support the inclusion of refugee children in national education systems and increase access to quality education for all children in refugee-hosting areas. In water and sanitation, we identified five priorities for focused collaboration to deliver at-scale solutions for refugee and host communities – from data to policy and advocacy, joined-up programming, and innovation. In child protection, we strengthened the interoperability of our child protection information management systems (proGres and PRIMERO) to enable referrals between each agency's system, resulting in more effective case management for refugee children with specific protection needs.

To share data more effectively, efficiently, and ethically, we embarked on developing a Data Sharing Framework and joint action to strengthen national data and budget systems and include refugees in national surveys such as the UNICEF-supported Multi Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS).

We also joined forces at country, regional and global level to drive positive change through joint advocacy focused on key accelerators for refugee inclusion and harnessing the commitments of the Global Refugee Compact to push for change.

5 Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Rwanda.

WHAT WE ACHIEVED

The past three years were not easy for refugees and the countries hosting them. The effects of the global pandemic, the economic downturn, and worsening food insecurity threatened to undermine the provision of inclusive services.

Progress in leaving no one behind has been hard won, but the combination of progressive policies from governments and joint UNHCR-UNICEF support has resulted in strategic shifts towards inclusion and strengthened service provision for both refugee and host community children. Confirming that smart investments to extend and strengthen national systems to include refugees can raise the quality of services for all children.

In 9 of the 10 Blueprint countries, joint engagement with governments led to progress on the inclusion of refugee children in national systems.

In countries like Rwanda, Cameroon or Ecuador – where progressive and inclusive policies were already in place – progress rapidly accelerated. In Indonesia, Iraq and Ethiopia, important steps were also taken to remove specific barriers to translate provisions in law into practice.

In some countries where the policy environment is more constrained, such as Bangladesh, refugees' inclusion in national systems has not been possible. However, the collaboration did contribute to improving refugees' access to education thanks to the Government's approval and gradual roll out of the Myanmar curriculum in schools in the camps.



Photo: Burundian refugee children in one of Mahama Camp's child-friendly spaces play with educational apps as part of UNICEF's innovative tablet-based learning project.

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EDUCATION

Over one million children in protracted displacement situations were enrolled in education in Blueprint countries in 2021: an increase of more than 100,000 in about one year.

In Iraq, joint advocacy efforts and technical assistance from UNICEF and UNHCR led to the adoption of the new Refugee Education Integration Policy for grades one to four by the Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan Regional Government – paving the way for inclusive and quality education for refugee children. As of November 2022, 75,330 refugee school-aged children (48 per cent girls) and around 46,000 Syrian refugee children were registered in the education management information system in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This new inclusive education policy brings Iraq closer to achieving the SDG education goals, minimizes costly temporary education measures and addresses child protection concerns.

In Libya, joint advocacy with school administrations resulted in the enrolment of more refugee children in national schools. In May 2022, Indonesia's Ministry of Education issued a circular note clarifying that 'graduation letters' issued by a school upon a refugee child's education completion are sufficient to enroll in higher level education. In Ethiopia, UNICEF's accelerated learning programmes have been adapted and extended to also include refugee children.

Such policy and administrative measures removed key barriers for refugee children to continue education. What may seem a small step opens a world of opportunities for a refugee child.



WATER AND SANITATION

The number of Blueprint countries where refugees are included in national water and sanitation policies, plans or budgets increased from one to five.

Five countries – Honduras, Ecuador, Iraq, Lebanon and Indonesia – reported that at least one national water and sanitation policy, plan or budget now includes refugees and host communities, compared with 2020 when only one country reported this.

In Ethiopia, UNICEF and UNHCR developed a joint regional WASH programme with a pipeline funding facility. Feasibility, environmental and social impact studies have been completed, and two water utilities for sustainable water management have been established.

There has also been progress in including refugees in emergency preparedness. In Ecuador, migration has now been included as a scenario in the National Education Risk Reduction and Emergency Response Plan, while in Indonesia, the water and sanitation roadmap now includes refugees in the provisions for emergency preparedness and response.



CHILD PROTECTION

Across the ten Blueprint countries, governments made real strides in strengthening inclusive child protection systems to be better able to prevent and respond to exploitation, abuse, neglect, harmful practices, and violence.

By late 2021, nearly 520,000 children, adolescents and caregivers received community-based child protection services and mental health and psychosocial support, compared to a baseline of 300,000 at the start of the Blueprint.

In Honduras, UNHCR and UNICEF jointly advocated for the creation of multifunctional protection units and supported the deployment of national child protection staff at border points. This more integrated response led by the government of Honduras has supported more than 32,000 children and youth since 2020.

Similarly in Ecuador, joint advocacy led to the establishment of a new, government-wide procedure to improve the protection for all children on the move, including care arrangements and family tracing. Since its adoption in 2018, both agencies have supported its implementation, trained over 130 government staff and ensured national child protection staff are present at borders. As a result, nearly 14,000 children have directly benefited from services provided by the child protection sector.

In early 2022, in Cameroon, UNHCR and UNICEF have joined forces to train social workers on psychological first aid targeting the municipalities affected by the Central African refugee crisis in the northeast of the country.



Photo: Sabirin Nur, 18, Grade 8 Somali refugee student captain for volleyball teams, in charge of 10 girls practices with her teammates at the UNICEF supported Melkadida primary school for host community and refugee children in Ethiopia.



BIRTH REGISTRATION

Access to birth registration for refugee children increased in most Blueprint countries – reaching 77 per cent of our target in 2020 and 81 per cent in 2021.

The increase in birth registration was due in part to innovations such as ‘*cahiers des villages*’ in Cameroon that resulted in the registration of 6,000 refugee births through the national system in 2021.

In Lebanon, around 17,000 refugee children were assisted for birth registration during the implementation of the Joint Blueprint for Action, and UNHCR and UNICEF delivered joint trainings on birth registration and civil documentation to build capacity to identify and refer cases in need of legal support.

In Ethiopia, UNICEF and UNHCR continued to support the government to expand access to civil registration for refugees. As a result, civil registration services are now available to refugees in 21 refugee camps, two zonal offices and in the capital, significantly reducing the backlog and improving access to birth and other vital events registration services in refugee settings.

In Iraq, the two agencies are now jointly advocating for the use of Best Interests Procedures to facilitate access to civil documentation, improve protection and safeguard family unity for a complex caseload of returning unaccompanied and separated children with missing or unknown fathers from Syria.



Photo: Soumaïne, a 27-year-old woman, with her children, in a refugee camp in Karwei, a few kilometers from Ndjamena. Soumaïne is cuddling her 9 days old baby Mohammed, who was born here in the camp.

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Leaving no refugee child behind: what does it take?

Our shared journey with refugee communities and governments in the ten focus countries under the Blueprint provided us with important insights on what it takes to leave no refugee child behind.

We jointly identified the following five key accelerators for sustainable refugee inclusion that are also anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals, the Global Refugee Compact and country experiences:

FIVE ACCELERATORS FOR SUSTAINABLE INCLUSION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

- 1 Inclusion starts with refugee children being counted and included in national datasets, sector and development plans, and budgets.
- 2 Strengthening inclusive national systems that benefit all children takes time and sustained development financing.
- 3 Inclusive approaches that reach all vulnerable children are the most effective.
- 4 For refugee inclusion to succeed, everyone with a stake needs to have a say.
- 5 To leave no refugee child behind, we need to innovate.

1. INCLUSION STARTS WITH REFUGEE CHILDREN BEING COUNTED AND INCLUDED IN NATIONAL DATASETS, SECTOR AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS, AND BUDGETS

What you measure matters. For refugee children and their families to be budgeted and planned for, they need to be included in national and subnational datasets, plans and budgets, with ethical and responsible data disaggregation by legal or international protection status. Timely, accessible, and reliable data on refugees and their needs and vulnerabilities is key – as is data and evidence on what works to achieve inclusion.

In many refugee hosting countries, patchy or exclusionary legal and policy frameworks hinder access to basic services for displaced children and families. But even in countries with inclusive laws and policies in place, these are often not fully implemented in practice.

Data can play a key role in identifying the real and often practical barriers to inclusion – from documentation to discriminatory practices or context-specific vulnerabilities. Removing legal and practical barriers to inclusion takes progressive policy changes and targeted investments to expand services that consider the specific needs of displaced children and deliver benefits for the host community.

As an example, in Ethiopia, UNHCR has supported the Ministry of Education to develop a system that includes refugees in the Government's Education Management Information System, thereby generating refugee education data for planning and lobbying purposes.

Closing the gap on refugee education

While international laws and policies guarantee access to education for all children, including refugees, many refugee children continue to face barriers to education. Globally, only 68 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in primary school.⁶

Ecuador, for example, guarantees the inclusion of refugee and migrant children within the national education system. However, in practice, there are real barriers to inclusion, resulting in an ongoing out-of-school caseload.

In Libya, many refugee families face challenges in enrolling their children in school, as they often lack the documents required, including a child's birth certificates or passport. Recognizing UNHCR-issued documentation and asylum-seeker certificates for enrolment of children in the national school system would help overcome this issue.

In Indonesia, a 2019 circular note issued by the Ministry of Education ensured that refugee children could benefit from the national education system. However, in practice, refugee children still faced many challenges. UNICEF and UNHCR supported the Ministry of Education to issue a revised circular note in May 2022, which clarifies the role of the local Education office in the provision of education for refugee children and provides guidance on the issuance of school completion certificates to continue education at a higher level.

6 All inclusive - The campaign for refugee education, UNHCR, September 2022.

2. STRENGTHENING INCLUSIVE NATIONAL SYSTEMS THAT BENEFIT ALL CHILDREN TAKES TIME AND SUSTAINED DEVELOPMENT FINANCING

Parallel systems designed for a short-term humanitarian response cannot deliver the transformative shifts in policies and practices that refugee children need. Managing refugee situations exclusively through emergency and humanitarian programs is ineffective.⁷

Extending and strengthening inclusive education, child protection and water and sanitation services and expanding social safety nets for refugee children and families requires innovative and long-term financing strategies through domestic budget allocation, or the expansion of existing financing commitments by the international community.

To sustainably strengthen national systems, and ensure they are both adequate for and accessible to refugees, cooperation with development partners is of the essence. Development financing for refugee-hosting countries needs to keep pace with record levels of displacement.



Photo: "In kindergarten, they teach us the letters and the numbers, and we play together," says Mohammad, 6, in his kindergarten class in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan.

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7 World Bank, *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*, 2023.

Sharing the cost for inclusion is an investment

In Uganda refugee children attend school alongside Ugandan children, health facilities serve both refugee and host communities, and several district-level water services have been transitioned to national systems. Yet, 46 per cent of refugees lived in poverty in 2018, compared with 17 per cent of the host population.⁸ A surge in refugee needs, fresh displacement into the country, and drastic humanitarian funding cuts in 2022,⁹ have threatened to undermine Uganda's efforts to effectively include refugees.

Uganda's experience is an urgent reminder that sustaining inclusive policies requires not only a shift from humanitarian towards development-financed delivery approaches, it also requires predictable financing.

In Cameroon, for example, the IDA-18 loan from the World Bank allowed the Government to plan development projects in refugee-hosting areas, benefiting the entire community, and freeing up funds for the government to cover 30 per cent of refugee's health bills.

In Jordan and Lebanon, the World Bank's Multi-Year Resilience Program (MYRP), which includes education and child protection components, benefits both refugees and host communities. The Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods (GEWEL) programme in Bangladesh and Uganda provides skills training and microfinance support for refugee and host community women and adolescent girls.

Funded by the Government of the Netherlands, the PROSPECTS Partnership is another example of a multi-year programme focused on refugee inclusion, protection and self-reliance. Bringing together the International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Labour Organization (ILO), UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Bank, it leverages synergies and complementarities in mandates to test and scale new approaches to transform the way governments, development partners and the private sector respond to the displacement crises in Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda.

These initiatives provide compelling examples that sharing the financial responsibility for the inclusion of refugee children and families is not a cost, it is an investment in a better future for all.

8 World Bank (2019) – quoted in World Development Report 2023

9 UNHCR, *Uganda's refugee response confronted by dire funding gap*, briefing note, November 2022.

3. INCLUSIVE APPROACHES THAT REACH ALL VULNERABLE CHILDREN ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE

Achieving sustained change requires investments in the inclusion of displaced children and families as part of a broader strategy to promote universal access to quality services for every child – everywhere.

Whether in formal settlements, rural areas or cities, refugees often live in under-resourced and under-served areas. Financing and support need to extend into the poorest communities where refugees are hosted – to reach the most vulnerable children and families. To strengthen local systems for everyone, local authorities, municipalities, and local service providers need access to resources and financing.

Inclusive approaches which benefit not just refugees but all those excluded from services in host communities have proven critical to prevent host communities from feeling neglected and to sustain community support.

The most effective interventions and investments are those guided by the needs and rights of all children in the community, delivering quality services and access to opportunities to all children regardless of their age, gender, disability, or nationality.

Lebanon's new Five-Year Plan on General Education in 2021 sets an example for inclusive education giving all children a fair chance. Following years of school interruptions, learning recovery has been an important priority in Lebanon. In 2022, UNICEF and UNHCR jointly supported a six-week inclusive Summer School programme for Lebanese, refugee children, and children with disabilities. Implemented in 455 schools, mobilizing around 8,850 teachers and educational staff, the Summer School reached 98,400 students in total, including 25,600 refugees (26 per cent). The experience of learning together in a safe, shared, and protective learning environment encouraged many students to enrol in the 2022-23 school year.

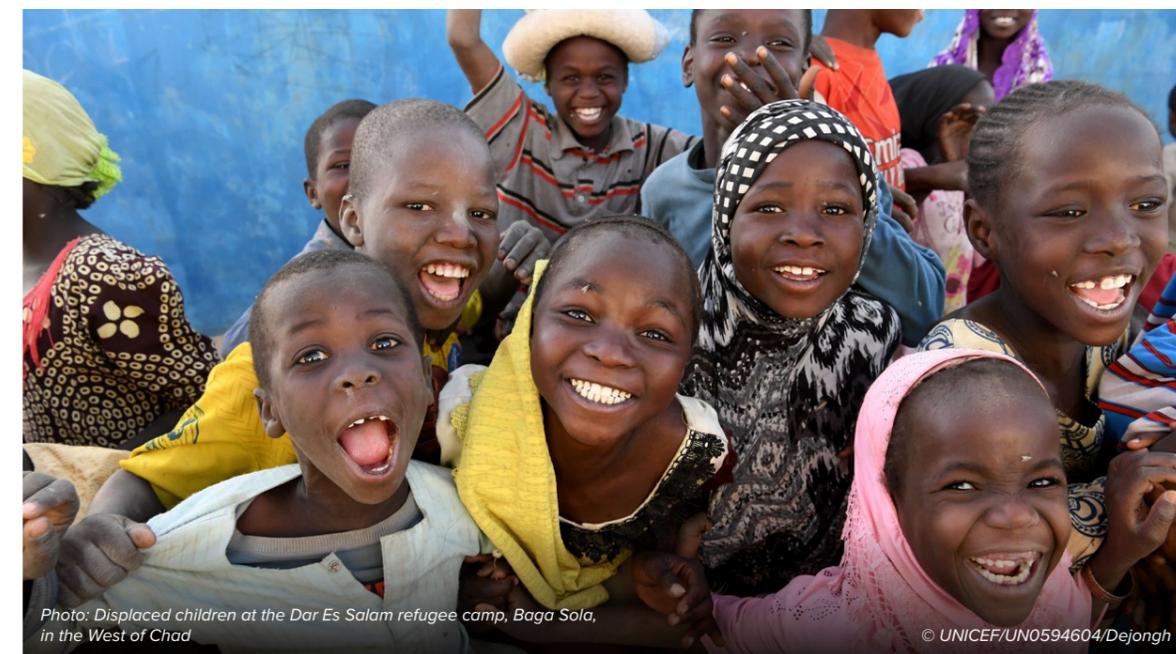


Photo: Displaced children at the Dar Es Salam refugee camp, Baga Sola, in the West of Chad

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4. FOR REFUGEE INCLUSION TO SUCCEED, EVERYONE WITH A STAKE NEEDS TO HAVE A SAY

It takes a community. Everyone with a stake also needs to have a say – including refugee children and young people themselves, teachers, and social workers.

Discrimination, xenophobia, and negative public attitudes towards refugees present key barriers to refugee inclusion and often contribute to national governments being reluctant to adopt inclusive refugee policies.

Refugee children, youth leaders, refugee- and community-based organizations have the knowledge and capacity to accelerate inclusion. When they participate meaningfully in all aspects of programming, from planning to evaluation, this makes for more effective solutions, real-time course correction, effective innovation, and greater accountability.

For refugees themselves to become net contributors and accelerators for inclusion – they need to be economically, socially, digitally, and culturally included. Dependence, insecurity about the future and grinding poverty often inhibit this from happening, but where refugee families have access to decent work, income, skills, or social protection, they can realize their own and their children's potential.

The real dividends of refugee inclusion come when the benefits of inclusion are shared in the community – and made visible. For this, we need to partner with children and young, popular culture, influencers, the arts, and the media to tackle xenophobia and replace it with positive narratives.



Photo: On 23 April 2019 in Cucuta in Colombia, Charlet Sogamoza video chats with her father, who is in Ecuador working to send them money.

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Meet the changemakers



Alejandro Daly is the co-founder and director of the Xenophobia Barometer, the first platform in Latin America to analyze narratives around migrants and refugees on social media with the objective of positively transforming them. The platform, originally focused on social media narratives in Colombia around Venezuelan migrants and refugees, is now being scaled up to other Latin American countries. Young refugees – like Alejandro – are key partners in strengthening social cohesion and combating xenophobia.

Nimo fled Somalia with her family after her father was killed in the war. Like many other refugee girls, she lost everything: access to education, a home and place to feel safe, protection, and a social safety net. Nimo is now 25. She lives in Nakivale settlement in Uganda, where she leads youth research as part of a UNICEF-supported programme to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in her community. Supported and empowered, young girls like Nimo can – and are – shaping solutions for their communities.



Young refugees like Alejandro and Nimo are not just driving the change. They are the change.

5. TO LEAVE NO REFUGEE CHILD BEHIND, WE NEED TO INNOVATE

Business as usual is not good enough. To move the needle on refugee inclusion, we need programme innovations to test and scale new approaches, new ways of working that truly leverage each partners' complementary strengths and integrated, multi-sectoral responses that keep pace with record levels of displacement.

Integrated and whole-of-government approaches are needed to bust silos and obstacles. To get a refugee child in school takes planning, budgeting, rule of law, civil documentation, freedom of movement, adequate sanitation facilities, an income for her parents – and more. Refugee inclusion requires all hands on deck – strengthening child-critical systems across sectors, at local and national level – to harness all service delivery platforms to reach the most vulnerable refugee and host community children.

In Rwanda, UNICEF and UNHCR collaborated under the GIGA initiative (a UNICEF and International Telecommunication Union collaboration that aims to connect every school to the internet) to connect rural schools hosting refugee children to broadband internet to maximize inclusive educational opportunities for children living in rural areas.

In Cameroon, joint efforts by UNICEF and UNHCR to establish solar-powered boreholes providing clean water to 300,000 refugees from Central African Republic provided a critical entry point with local government and health authorities to also secure the inclusion of refugees in the national protocol for COVID-19 healthcare.

In Ethiopia, UNHCR and UNICEF supported the government to digitize civil registration, ensuring interoperability with existing refugee registration systems. From August 2022, the system has been in use across the country to ensure refugee birth registration targets are met.

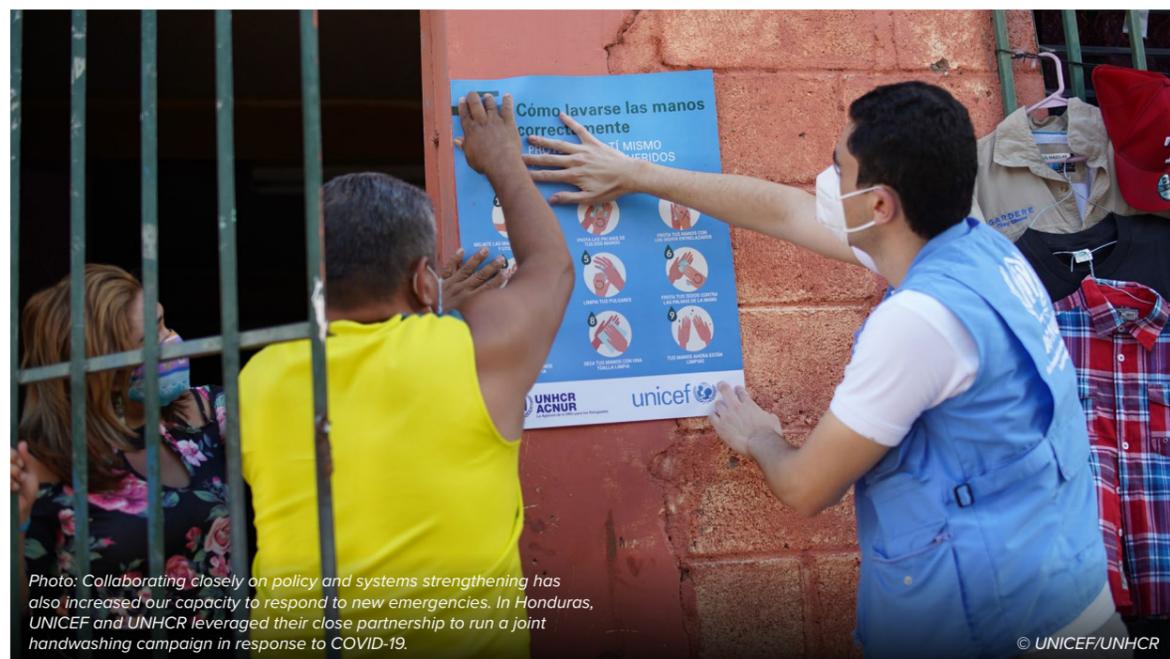


Photo: Collaborating closely on policy and systems strengthening has also increased our capacity to respond to new emergencies. In Honduras, UNICEF and UNHCR leveraged their close partnership to run a joint handwashing campaign in response to COVID-19.

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What next

OUR AMBITIOUS JOINT GOALS FOR THE INCLUSION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

Inspired by the Blueprint experience, in February 2023, UNICEF and UNHCR signed a new **Strategic Collaboration Framework** that sets out our common vision of a world where all children, including refugee and stateless children, are protected, included and able to learn and thrive.

Scaling globally, we will leverage our respective expertise and aligned programming approaches to strengthen the systems and services that all children depend on. Experience has shown that in doing this, we can raise the quality of services in the community and ensure refugees are included – as well as achieving efficiencies which pay off over the medium and long term.

Our new global **Strategic Collaboration Framework** includes bold 2030 targets focused on the inclusion of all refugee children and their families in education, water and sanitation, child protection, social protection and data systems, and the prevention of statelessness.

What you can do

We cannot do this on our own.
To protect the gains achieved and accelerate progress on refugee inclusion, we invite all partners to renew pledges, embrace progressive policies and scale up investments in inclusive systems, so that every refugee child can learn, participate and thrive.

