



UNHCR Innovation Fellowship

Innovative solutions explored by 2023–2024 Fellows

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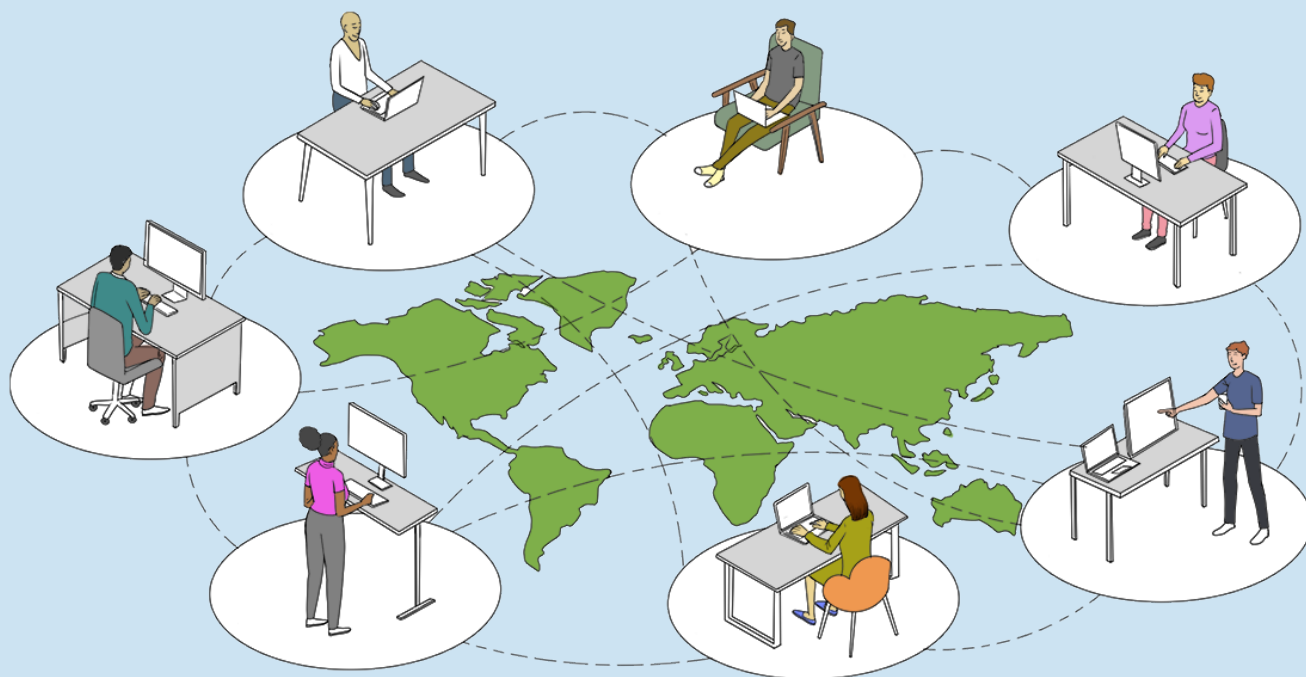
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About the Fellowship



The UNHCR Innovation Fellowship is our annual innovation learning programme for UNHCR's workforce and members of select partner organizations.

The Innovation Fellowship focuses on **building the innovation skills and competencies of participants**, in addition to **supporting them to engage with colleagues, partners, and refugees to bring innovative approaches** into their operations or divisions.

Over the course of the programme, Innovation Fellows learn and practice innovation methods and tools, embedding these new approaches into their everyday work. They focus on problem solving, ideation, and experimentation to develop innovative solutions to real-life challenges in the field or at headquarters.

Fellows are UNHCR's ambassadors for innovation and lasting positive change both within and outside the organization. If you want innovation you need to focus on people – and that's the very basis of the Innovation Fellowship.

About this booklet

This booklet presents a collection of the challenges identified and the solutions explored by participants in the 2023–24 Innovation Fellowship. Organized by thematic focus areas, it highlights the practical ways Fellows applied innovation to address real-world problems in their contexts. The entries reflect the diversity of issues tackled—from protection and shelter to food security and cultural heritage—and the creative approaches Fellows took to drive meaningful change.

Focus Area:

Capacity building



Anisa Abeytia

Organization: **The Global Research Network**

Location: **USA**

Problem identified

The persistence of the digital divide in Africa is compounded by developmental challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, electricity, and education.

Solution explored

Creating a working group for practitioners, researchers, policy makers and academics to collaborate and increase awareness of local, regional, and global digital inclusion challenges, supported by an accompanying digital equity and innovation project.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Thailand**

Problem identified

The scaling of community-based initiatives is hindered by constraints in partner staff capacity and challenges in accessing implementation sites due to escalating conflicts and frequent fighting.

Solution explored

Empowering IDP leaders or representatives to assume leadership and facilitation roles, instead of relying solely on partners or UNHCR colleagues to facilitate community workshops and projects.



Vipawan (Winny)
Pongtranggoon



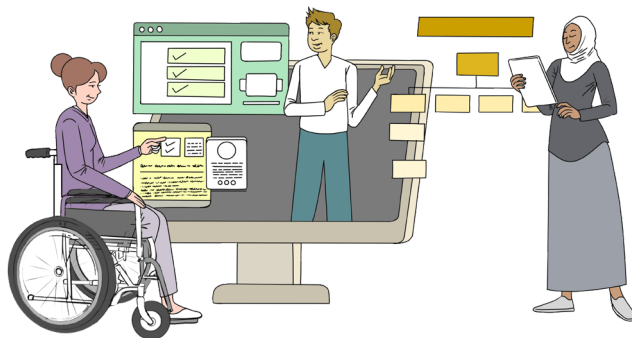
Silvanus
Justice

Organization: **International Rescue Committee**

Location: **Nigeria**

Problem identified

In northeast Nigeria, the digital divide creates persistent barriers for youth, particularly young women and persons with disabilities.



Solution explored

Hosting digital literacy workshops for youth and establishing community engagement initiatives to promote participation of young women and persons with disabilities. Collaborating with local partners to facilitate digital literacy classes and mentorship. Creating a platform to showcase the talents and skills participants gain, building confidence and preparing them to enter job markets or pursue entrepreneurship.

Focus Area:

Communications



Reena Mary
George

Organization: **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

Location: **Austria**

Problem identified

UNODC personnel lack a centralized portal to access timely and relevant information essential for informed decision-making and efficient, effective collaboration on field operations.

Solution explored

Developing and launching an online platform to ensure UNODC field offices can access essential information and share best practices, enhancing coordination and fostering knowledge sharing.

Organization: **Austrian Red Cross**

Location: **Austria**

Problem identified

The Austrian Red Cross relies on blood donations to deliver life-saving assistance, but blood donations can be insufficient, particularly during the summer months.

Solution explored

Enhancing blood donation marketing and increasing engagement through clear, engaging content, with an emphasis on transparency, addressing community concerns, and providing medical information. Performance analytics will provide actionable insights.



Magdalena
Aschauer-Tomc



Cristina
Maldonado

Organization: **ILO**

Country: **Switzerland**

Problem identified

A lack of knowledge sharing between departments, teams, and projects leads to frequent task duplication, overlap between initiatives, and failure to capitalize on lessons learned from past initiatives to prevent and eliminate child and forced labour.

Solution explored

Creating an internal newsletter, dedicated time and incentives for knowledge sharing, an onboarding package and peer-to-peer mentoring for new staff, SOPs for repositories, an internal podcast, and an integrated AI-powered knowledge management platform.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Country: **Ireland**

Problem identified

Arrivals to Ireland have increased over the past two years. Meanwhile, negative narrative around asylum seekers have increased, threatening the well-being of new arrivals, advocates with a refugee background, policy makers, and local communities.

Solution explored

Creating Ireland's leading refugee-led creative storytelling network and platform, which will allow refugees to safely represent themselves and communicate who they are, addressing negative stereotypes and improving integration.



Aoife Harte



Mat Smith

Organization: **Canadian Red Cross**

Location: **Canada**

Problem identified:

The Canadian Red Cross lacks a systematized process for receiving, scheduling, and tracking social media content highlighting its frequent international initiatives to create visibility for the organization and its government partners.

Solution explored:

Using Trello, a digital work management tool, for Canadian Red Cross communications staff to ideate, submit, and track content submissions pertaining to international initiatives.

Organization: **UNICEF**

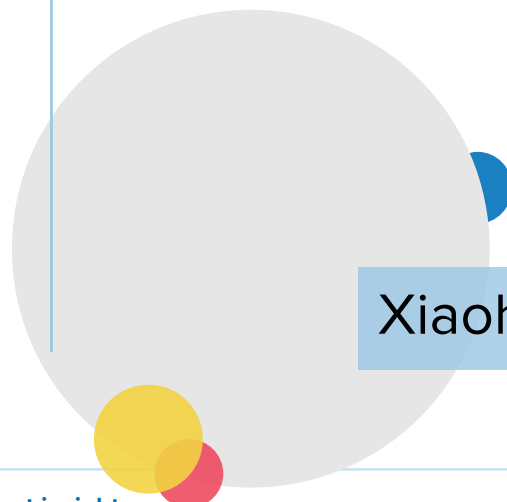
Location: **Nepal**

Problem identified

The Meena Communication Initiative was introduced to South Asia in the 1990s as an edutainment tool to empower young girls. Now, UNICEF is challenged with adapting and reintroducing Meena's character to resonate with contemporary audiences.

Solution explored

Reworking this initiative with a strong understanding of current technological trends and sociocultural dynamics, enhanced by partnerships with public and private sectors to help Meena reach a new generation in meaningful, engaging ways, such as telecommunications companies that can promote Meena's stories through mobile services.



Xiaohan Ma

Focus Area:

Community engagement



Marcelo
Rodrigues

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Panama**

Problem identified

Meaningful and consistent inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in UNHCR's strategy development processes needs to be streamlined to ensure that humanitarian responses remain relevant and effective.

Solution explored

Developing a multi-pronged approach to including refugee insights in strategy planning processes, including internal engagement, a toolkit of best practices for operations to engage refugees, and a fellowship programme to build the capacity of refugees to participate.

Organization: **UNISFA**

Location: **USA**

Problem identified

It is not always easy for young people – particularly those from minority backgrounds – to get involved in UN processes and forums. The international community would benefit from more representative youth inclusion.

Solution explored

Addressing youth inclusion issues by hosting regional youth summits and developing targeted recruitment programmes to address underrepresentation.



Cathleen
Jeanty

Cultural heritage



Susana
Garrido

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Colombia**

Problem identified

In Colombia, Indigenous Wounaan-Nonam people forcibly displaced from their homelands struggle to preserve their language and cultural traditions.

Solution explored

Creating an oral history compilation to document and preserve the traditional stories, myths, and legends passed down orally by Wounaan-Nonam elders for younger generations.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Colombia**

Problem identified

In Colombia, Indigenous Wayuu people from Venezuela are facing loss of family and community connections due to fragmentation in Wayuu leadership, thereby restricting their access to family ties and territorial rights.

Solution explored


Developing an application that facilitates the reconstruction, validation, and visibility of Wayuu ancestral relationships. Increasing transparency in decision making will reduce the fragmentation and rupture of matrilineality in Wayuu communities.



Alejandra
Castellanos

Focus Area:

Education and information



Noemi
Cueva

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Peru**

Problem identified

In many cases, UNHCR's partners can be disoriented by financial verification reporting requirements, affecting their project management and confidence.

Solution explored

Exploring whether co-writing reports during UNHCR's visits with partners, and using the online tool PROMS to do so (potentially using AI for better project management), could increase the clarity of reporting requirements and efficiency of delivery.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Chad**

Problem identified

In Gore, a town in Southern Chad, owing to illiteracy rates and language barriers, many refugees and members of the host community struggle to secure scholarships, which could enhance their access to vocational training.

Solution explored

Raising awareness that applicants need not speak French, English, or Arabic before accessing vocational training and advocating to encourage decision makers to make scholarships available to speakers of other languages. Additionally, opening vocational training centres using local languages to train refugees.



Amne
Osee



Álvaro
Sáez

Organization: **Amazon
Web Services**

Location: **Spain**

Problem identified

When refugees arrive in a new location, they often find themselves lost, unsure of how to proceed, where to go, which documents to apply for, where to find information and assistance, and what their rights are, among other challenges.

Solution explored

Developing a prototype information kit, both in physical and digital formats, containing all the necessary information for refugees from their arrival to their integration in a new location, integrating existing resources and initiatives specific to that place.

Organization: **UNWTO**

Location: **Saudi Arabia**

Problem identified

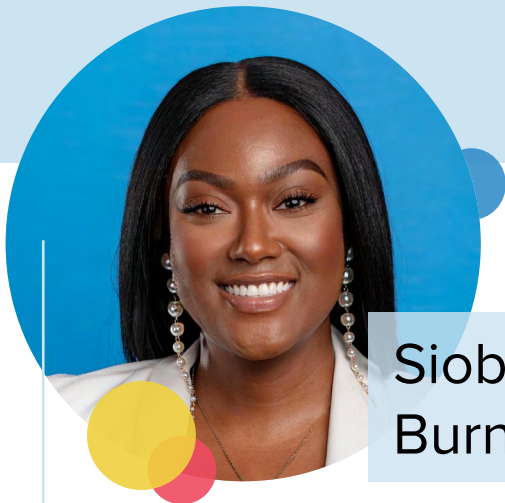
In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, home to the world's largest refugee camp, extensive deforestation for shelter and fuel has caused environmental degradation. Inadequate environmental education in the camp is a crucial barrier to sustainability.

Solution explored

Implementing a programme to educate and engage children in Cox's Bazar refugee camp to instill environmental appreciation and responsibility and promote sustainable practices, thereby mitigating further deforestation and fostering generations committed to restoring degraded forests.



Md. Khorshed
Alam



Siobhan
Burnette

Organization: **UNICEF**

Location: **Ghana**

Problem identified

In Ghana, adolescents, caregivers, and frontline workers lack access to timely information on health, education, entrepreneurship, sexual and gender-based violence, and other important topics.

Solution explored

Enhancing access to information by leveraging generative AI to improve the ability of an interactive voice response system in order to recognize various accents and speech patterns. The solution will involve testing the system's capacity and using the results to improve the interpretation of diverse user inputs.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Switzerland**

Problem identified

UNHCR faces funding constraints and must find a way to comprehensively understand protection challenges facing displaced people without relying on expensive, resource-heavy traditional data collection systems.

Solution explored

Piloting an update to UNHCR's protection monitoring system to align with a new framework based on 15 protection risks. Securing alignment and engagement from partners on this new framework, and expanding data collection, to understand its utility.



Francesco
Michele



Luis
Martinez

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Mexico**

Problem identified

At border crossings between Honduras and Guatemala, migrants receive dangerous misinformation on the asylum process in Guatemala.

Solution explored

Using UNHCR Workday learning tools to develop a training pathway for civil servants and community leaders to strengthen understanding of asylum processes and protections.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Hungary**

Problem identified

UNHCR operations could benefit from enhanced knowledge sharing on humanitarian supply chains, which could reduce shipping costs and maximize available funds.

Solution explored

Educating UNHCR operations on quoting shipments and consolidating requests, consolidating shipment data from other UN agencies for reference, preparing workshops with the Supply and Finance team on UNHCR freight costs, and growing savings to purchase new equipment for emergency operations.



Giovanni
Castellani



**Laura
Montserrat**

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Mexico**

Problem identified

Upon arrival in Mexico, not all refugees make use of the local integration programme, affecting the programme's success, hindering the integration of refugees, and negatively impacting UNHCR's protection mandate.

Solution explored

Collecting information on refugee integration and engagement in a more systematic way, to track how the programme is working and to ultimately improve how refugees understand and achieve their integration goals.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Poland**

Problem identified


UNHCR requires a comprehensive methodology and tools for effective monitoring of the challenges and needs of reception facilities and collective sites for refugees in Poland.

Solution explored

Experimenting with streamlining existing protection and technical standards into a consolidated monitoring survey to improve data collection and analysis for facility challenges and needs. Findings from initial testing will further enhance the usability of this survey.



**Marcin
Macenowicz**



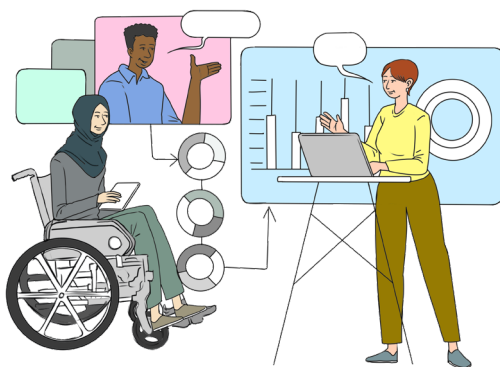
Diana
Elizabeth

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Mexico**

Problem identified

Migrants often lack trust in information provided by UNHCR and fall victim to misinformation from other sources.



Solution explored

Designing creative approaches, including music, dance, and painting, to build trust in UNHCR and strengthen communication with communities, sharing key information and listening to community voices.

Focus Area:

Food security



Don
Nshombo

Organization: **Jesuit Refugee Services**

Location: **Malawi**

Problem identified

Camp-based refugees face persistent food insecurity and limited economic opportunities, leading to challenges in sustaining livelihoods and fostering community resilience.

Solution explored

Launching a community-led sustainable farming initiative in which refugees cultivate crops to improve food security, generate income, and foster community cohesion through skills development and sustainable agricultural practices.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Kenya**

Problem identified

There appears to be an increase of child food-collectors at food distribution centers in Kakuma Refugee Camp, which is concerning for child protection actors, the refugee community, and UNHCR..

Solution explored

Liaising with the Data and Identity Management teams to gather data on persistent child food collectors, informing a more targeted approach by the Child Protection team and other relevant stakeholders.



Patience
Barasa

Focus Area:

Fundraising



Cristina
Gonzalez

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Mexico**

Problem identified

A more refined coordination system between UNHCR's Private Sector Partnerships division and External Communication-related teams in Mexico could enable the operation to more seamlessly fundraise.

Solution explored

Developing an online PSP content matrix for use by other teams, such as Public Information (PI) and External Engagement, to enable them to seamlessly integrate fundraising messages into their existing communications.

Organization: **UNHCR**

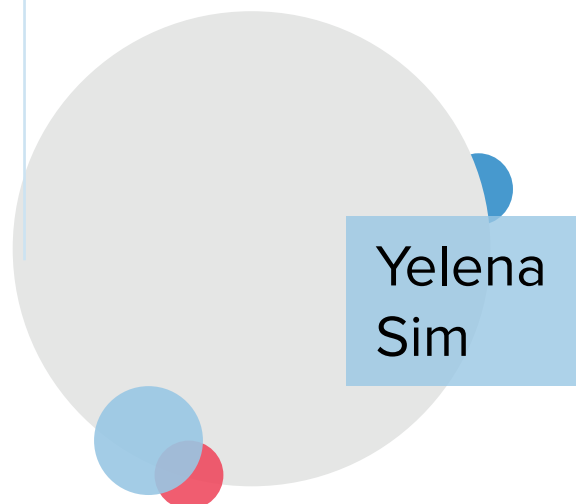
Location: **Jordan**

Problem identified

UNHCR is struggling to innovate approaches to donor visibility activities through digital channels.

Solution explored

Creating a matrix for social media content creation matching types of content and donor needs to help practitioners design new ideas for donor visibility.



Yelena
Sim

Protection and shelter



Anonymous

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Chad**

Problem identified

More than 700,000 refugees have fled to Chad since the outbreak of armed conflict in Sudan in 2023. Many live in makeshift shelters, which are vulnerable to climatic extremes and require urgent repairs.

Solution explored

Transforming makeshift, emergency shelters into semi-permanent shelters by training and employing refugees and refugee-hosting communities to construct shelters from mud bricks they create, introducing livelihoods opportunities and sustainable shelters.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Chad**

Problem identified

In Hadjer Hadid, Sudanese refugees lack access to emergency shelter, exposing them to protection risks. Women and girls are particularly at risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

Solution explored

Promoting a shelter manufacturing group and supporting it in market research, setting up youth groups to build sustainable shelters, developing incentives for groups to create innovative shelter construction initiatives, and building an eco-friendly model shelter in each refugee camp.





**Maher
Alakashi**

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Iraq**

Problem identified

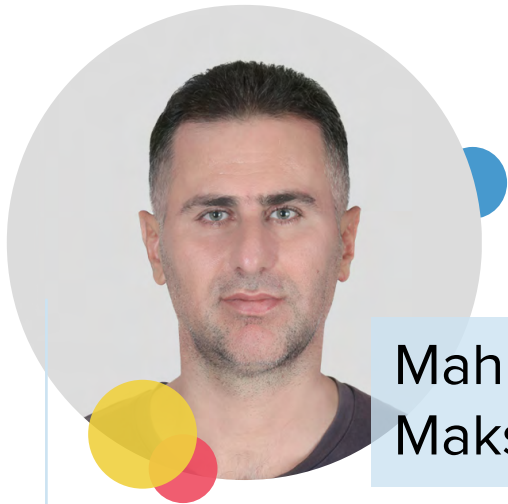
In Iraq, forcibly displaced and stateless people face significant barriers to inclusion in social protection systems, undermining access to essential services and hindering equitable social development. This is exacerbated by data collection processes which fail to adequately account for these marginalized groups, leading to an incomplete understanding of their needs and a lack of targeted interventions.

Solution explored

Promoting the equitable inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people in social protection mechanisms, in order to improve access to healthcare, education, livelihoods support, and other essential services, and data collection, in order to collect more accurate, disaggregated information to inform policy development, enhance resource allocation, and enable targeted interventions. This dual approach addresses immediate humanitarian needs in addition to fostering resilience, social cohesion, and pathways toward durable solutions.

Focus Area:

Resettlement



Mahmoud
Maksoud

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Syria**

Problem identified

The interview process for resettlement decisions can encounter challenges of language barriers, cultural insensitivity, and personal bias, disadvantaging refugees – particularly those with disabilities..

Solution explored

Exploring the development of an AI-supported interview system that addresses the unique linguistic, cultural, and accessibility needs of refugees while ensuring fairness and streamlining the interview process, ultimately leading to more informed, empathetic, and fair resettlement decisions.

Focus Area:

Socioeconomic integration



Vildan
Drpljanin

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **North Macedonia**

Problem identified

In North Macedonia, prevailing attitudes and opinions can negatively affect refugees' ability to achieve socioeconomic integration.

Solution explored

Using an innovative medium – gaming – as a pathway to greater integration. The Country Office is piloting this approach by making a gaming hub available to Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Colombia**

Problem identified

Many refugees struggle to obtain sustainable and lasting jobs over time.

Solution explored

Experimenting with a strategy of engaging with the private sector on the question of livelihoods, given the sector's needs and their potential provision of sustainable opportunities for refugees.



Yuliana
Vargas



Albashir
Ishaq

Organization: **ZOA International**

Location: **Nigeria**

Problem identified

Young people in northeastern Nigeria, particularly women and persons with disabilities, face significant barriers in accessing income-generating opportunities within the digital technology industry due to inadequate digital literacy skills.

Solution explored

Implementing a digital skills project targeting youth, particularly girls and persons with disabilities; collaborating with government, private sector, and agencies to provide support; connecting learners to livelihood opportunities.

Organization: **UNHCR**

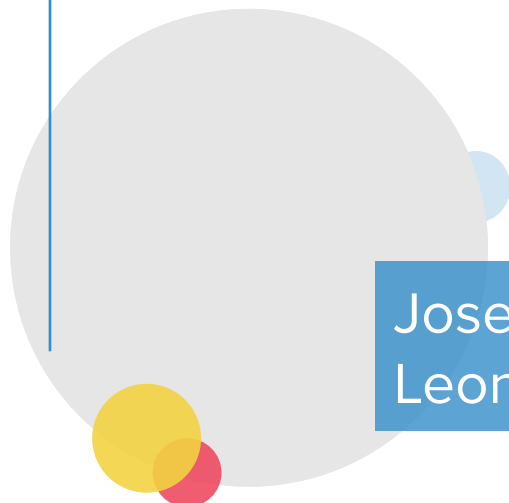
Location: **Colombia**

Problem identified

In Colombia, efforts to build sustainable livelihoods for refugees and migrants can flounder due to sociocultural barriers and poor visibility of inclusion programmes. Raising awareness of these programmes is crucial for better socioeconomic inclusion.

Solution explored

Creating community spaces to help SENA (National Learning Service) and UNHCR enhance the soft skills of young refugees, migrants, and host community members, in addition to promoting job offers and facilitating placements.



Jose
Leonardo



Seyyede
Fatemeh

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Iran**

Problem identified

In Iran, women refugees who are survivors of sexual and gender-based violence are economically marginalized, facing restricted access to social activities and employment opportunities.

Solution explored

Creating home-centric opportunities for income generation and skill development for women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Brazil**

Problem identified

Many women act as primary caregivers for their family members and struggle to access livelihoods, increasing protection risks. They require integrated solutions, which focus not only on livelihood access, but also how caregiving duties can be shared.

Solution explored

Assessing the professional capacities of refugee women who head single parent families; providing capacity-building courses in child/elderly care to promote income generating opportunities; developing social networks to facilitate mutual support and increase their influence in community decision making.



Nicole
Minvielle



Sonia
Fanous

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Pakistan**

Problem identified

UNHCR could enhance its culture of inclusivity to facilitate belonging and promote respect for all staff.

Solution explored

Engaging with the Inclusion and Diversity Advisory Group and the Division of Human Resources to design strategies for equality, addressing power imbalances, discrimination, racial inequities, and national inequities.

Organization: **UNHCR**

Location: **Mexico**

Problem identified

In UNHCR Mexico, communication failures between management and staff can generate tensions and affect staff well-being.

Solution explored

Reviewing communication channels to determine whether oral or written channels are more effective and in which circumstances.



Estefanía
Flores



Carina
Schlosser

Organization: **UNOV**

Location: **Global**

Problem identified

Within the UN Secretariat, colleagues perceive there to be a low level of recognition and rewards, as evidenced by a recent staff engagement survey.

Solution explored

Providing personalized thank-you notes to employees as a means to boost morale and motivation.



Organization: **United Nations Volunteers**

Location: **Germany**

Problem identified

UN Volunteers, including refugees, are often not formally recognized and their time spent volunteering is not recorded in a systematic manner. Billions of volunteers are needed but these conditions do not incentivize involvement.

Solution explored

Utilizing time tokens and recognition badges to mobilize volunteer skills and talent from refugee populations in an internal circular ecosystem with host communities.



Marc
Liberati

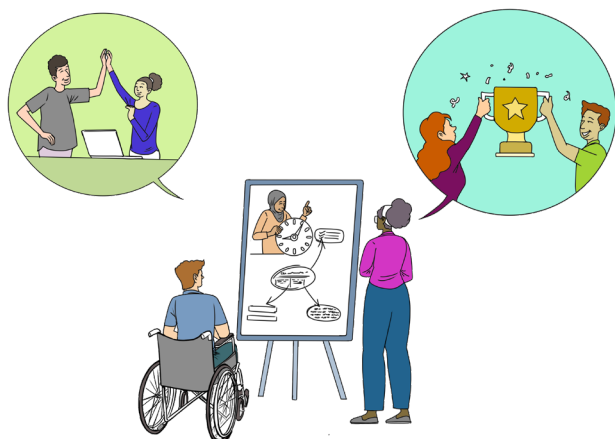
Dorika
Achachi

Organization: **UNODC**

Location: **Austria**

Problem identified

A lack of communication and coordination between UNODC programme support staff leads to duplication of tasks and inefficient operations.



Solution explored

Developing, launching, and promoting an Interactive Operations Manual on SharePoint to streamline tasks and boost collaboration among programme support staff. Encouraging ownership of and participation on this tool, and using feedback to enhance the user experience.

Please visit our page to learn more about the fellowship:

<https://www.unhcr.org/innovation>



For more information please contact

innovation@unhcr.org