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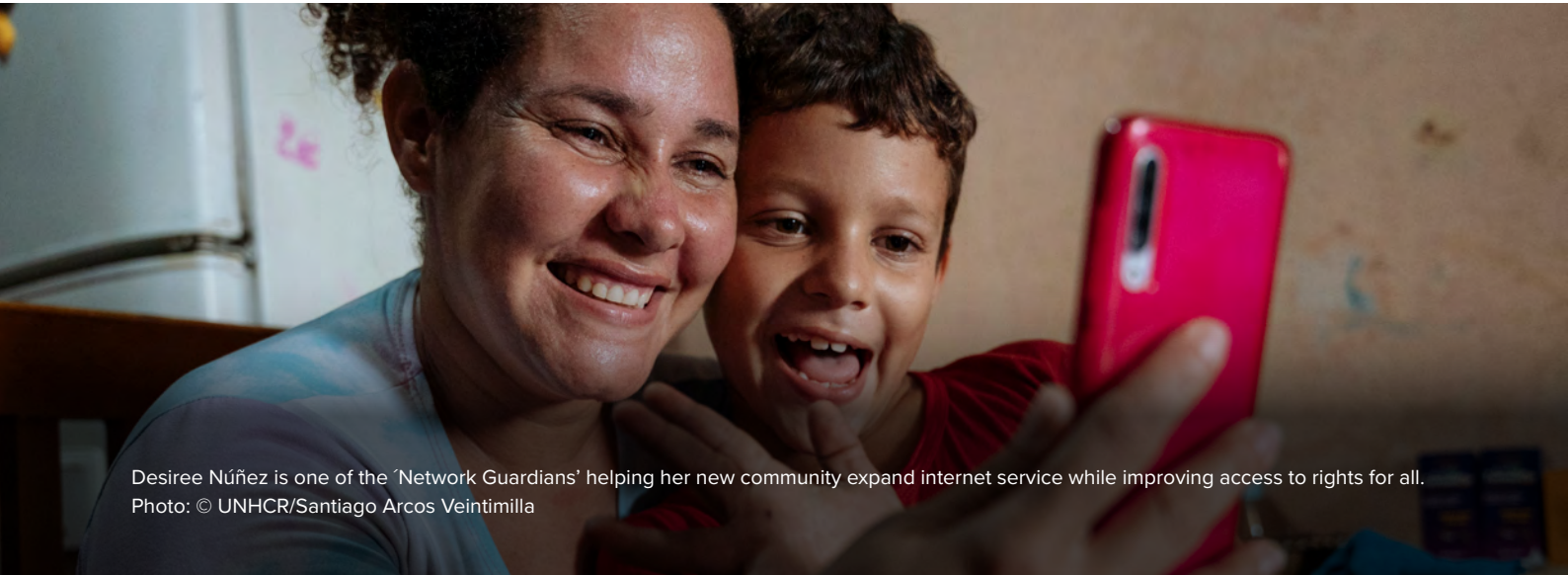
Digital Innovation Fund

Areas of Exploration

The Digital Innovation Fund is designed to pilot innovative digital tools and services, laying the groundwork for UNHCR's Digital Transformation Strategy. As such, we are looking to prioritize certain areas, which can be divided into the overarching thematics of **digital inclusion**, **digital protection**, and **digital services**. This document is designed to provide more information about these areas.

Please note, however, that the following list is not exhaustive and the Fund remains open to creative initiatives addressing other challenges identified by UNHCR colleagues and forcibly displaced and stateless people.

1. Digital Inclusion



Desiree Núñez is one of the 'Network Guardians' helping her new community expand internet service while improving access to rights for all.
Photo: © UNHCR/Santiago Arcos Veintimilla

- a) **Digital innovation through an age, gender, and diversity lens:** How might we creatively use digital solutions to foster inclusion of marginalized groups (women and girls, older persons, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+, Indigenous groups, and more) and empower them?

What it is: This area focuses on digital solutions that promote inclusion and access for marginalized groups through the lens of age, gender, and diversity (AGD). It focuses on creative uses of digital platforms, accessible technologies, AI, and community-driven approaches to empower forcibly displaced and stateless persons, especially women and girls, older persons, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups.

Why it matters: Digital exclusion reinforces existing inequalities and limits access to protection, services, and opportunities. Applying an AGD lens ensures that digital innovation is inclusive, intersectional, and rights-based, responding to diverse needs, identities, and experiences of forcibly displaced and stateless people. Inclusive digital ecosystems can strengthen resilience, amplify underrepresented voices, foster social inclusion, and respect dignity in displacement contexts.

Resources and examples:

- [Empower, Protect, Innovate: Bootcamps for Bridging the Gender Digital Divide](#)
- [Refugees with disabilities advancing inclusion and self-reliance](#)
- [Guidance Note on Digital Gender Equality](#)
- [Innovating with, and investing in, women forced to flee](#)

b) Digital and environmental solutions: How might we leverage digital technologies to address pressing environment and climate challenges and ensure digital access and inclusion for displaced and stateless people is expanded in environmentally responsible ways?

What it is: The intersection between digital and environmental solutions looks at how such tools can optimize or develop new solutions while considering the environmental impacts of increased digital use. This area aims to enhance digital access in humanitarian and displacement settings in ways that are environmentally responsible, sustainable, and restorative – for example, through initiatives that reduce waste and increase device lifespans like loan models, reuse and repair of ICT equipment and mobile devices, etc. At the same time, it looks to leverage the benefits and tools of digital access to develop new solutions to mitigate the impacts of the climate and environmental crises.

Why it matters: Digital technologies are already helping to address environmental challenges. Tools like environmental monitoring help us understand how climate factors influence human mobility and enable faster, more informed responses. They can also be essential lifelines for refugees, such as improving access to early warning systems, information to enhance sustainable agriculture and optimizing energy use. However, digitalization also brings environmental risks, such as the high energy consumption of data centers. To minimize these risks, it is essential to find ways for digital and environmental initiatives to sustainably co-exist. By using digital tools responsibly, we can strengthen safety and resilience, while enhancing protection for displaced people.

Resources and examples:

- [Quantifying digital innovation for the twin transition: Historical trends, current landscape and links with environmental innovation](#)
- [Environmental Change and Human Mobility in the Digital Age](#)
- [Digitalization for Sustainability](#)

c) Digital leisure and creativity: How might we harness digital leisure and creativity tools and platforms to support emotional well-being, strengthen community ties, and unlock new opportunities for learning and earning in displacement settings?

What it is: The use of digital tools and platforms for entertainment, recreation, acquiring knowledge, communication, socialization, and escaping from a negative mood during free time. For example, social media, video games, streaming services, virtual art, storytelling, or music.

Why it matters: Leisure and creative activities are essential for emotional resilience, community bonding, and healing. They can also foster digital literacy and skills, integration with host communities, and build pathways for opportunities in the digital economy.

Resources and examples:

- [The Digital Leisure Divide and the Forcibly Displaced](#)
- [What can Video Games Offer to Forcibly Displaced People](#)
- [Gaming builds connections and skills among refugees and locals in North Macedonia.](#)
- [Digital arts for youth and community wellbeing](#)

d) Digital livelihoods: How might we responsibly explore the opportunities offered by digital technologies to safely secure decent work for displaced and stateless populations?

What it is: Digital livelihoods refer to income-generating opportunities made possible through digital technologies and platforms. These include online freelancing, platform-based work, remote jobs, e-commerce, and digital entrepreneurship.

Why it matters: In displacement contexts, traditional employment pathways are often limited or inaccessible due to legal restrictions on constrained mobility, limited access to financial services, discrimination in local labour markets and more. Digital livelihoods provide forcibly displaced people with new ways to earn an income – improving their well-being, fostering economic independence, and strengthening self-reliance. When designed inclusively, they can also advance social and economic inclusion, especially for women, youth, and people with disabilities.

Resources and examples:

- [Addressing the digital learning-to-earning gap](#)
- [Taking a participatory approach to enhancing online opportunities](#)
- [The perfect recipe for a refugee-inclusive digital economy? Gathering lessons to support learning to earning](#)
- [PROSPECTS – Toward a fairer digital economy project](#)
- [Gebeya and UNHCR launch new platform making it easy for businesses to discover refugee talent in Ethiopia](#)

2. Digital Protection



Venezuelan refugee, Laillet Chávez, using the UNHCR WhatsApp channel during a workshop in Quito, Ecuador. Photo: © UNHCR/Jaime Giménez

a) Digital Accountability to Affected People (AAP): How might we strengthen AAP through digital means, enhancing participation, communication, feedback and adaptation in humanitarian response?

What it is: This area supports digital innovations that strengthen accountability to forcibly displaced and stateless people by improving how they engage, receive information, share feedback and influence decisions. It includes tools that support meaningful participation in decisions that affect their lives, enable clear and transparent communication about services and rights, strengthen feedback and complaint mechanisms, and help organizations adapt based on communities' inputs.

Why it matters: Accountability is more than collecting feedback, it is about listening, responding and building trust. Digital tools, when designed inclusively and ethically, can make AAP more accessible, timely and responsive, helping ensure that humanitarian services are shaped by the people they aim to support.

Resources and examples:

- [UNHCR's AAP Operational Guidance](#)
- [Taking innovation global with two-way communications with refugees](#)
- [The Digital Lives of Refugees: how displaced populations use mobile phones and what gets in the way](#)
- [Voice-First Generative AI for Impact](#)

b) Digital public health, mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS): How might we leverage digital tools to expand access to public health and MHPSS, reduce stigma, and improve well-being in displacement contexts?

What it is: The use of digital technologies such as mobile apps, messaging platforms, telemedicine tools, or digital content to improve physical and mental health outcomes, promote psychosocial well-being, and enhance access to health-related services in displacement contexts.

Why it matters: Access to public health, including mental health services, is often limited in displacement contexts due to lack of infrastructure, staff, and stigma. Digital solutions can bridge gaps in service delivery, reduce stigma, and provide timely support.

Resources and examples:

- [Designing Safe Digital Mental Health and Psycho–Social Support \(MHPSS\) for Displaced and Stateless Adolescents](#)
- [Digital lifelines for communities in crisis - Reimagining mental health and psychosocial support for forcibly displaced people in Sudan and beyond.](#)
- [Innovating to support refugees' mental health](#)
- [Young, displaced, anxious, and online](#)

c) Digital safety, cybersecurity, and resilience: How might we ensure digital safety and protection of forcibly displaced and stateless persons and strengthen their digital resilience in the face of cyber threats, misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and technology-facilitated abuse?

What it is: This area supports innovative approaches to protect and safeguard forcibly displaced communities from online threats and digital risks – ranging from data breaches, misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech, to cyber bullying, online harassment and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

Why it matters: As digital tools become essential for everyday life, forcibly displaced people are increasingly exposed to online risks and harm. Without adequate safeguards, digital engagement can lead to harm, exploitation, or exclusion. It is more critical than ever to uphold protection principles in the digital space and ensure that digital inclusion and innovation do not come at the cost of safety or dignity.

Resources and examples:

- [Wise Browsing, Safe Posting: Protecting Displaced Communities Against Digital Threats – A Community-based Approach \(UNHCR Hungary\)](#)
- [How can we protect refugees from growing digital threats?](#)
- [Technology-facilitated gender-based violence in displacement contexts](#)
- [UNHCR Information Integrity toolkit](#)

3. Digital Services



User testing of an interpretation app to improve healthcare access for Indigenous communities in Belém. Photo: UNHCR Brazil

a) Expanding remote legal services: How might we use digital technologies to expand access to legal services for marginalized and forcibly displaced communities, especially in hard-to-reach areas?

What it is: The use of digital technologies, such as mobile apps, online platforms, chatbots, secure messaging for virtual consultations, remote document review, and digital case management, to provide remote access to legal information, advice, representation, and support.

Why it matters: Remote legal services enable forcibly displaced people to access legal assistance regardless of their location, overcoming barriers like distance, mobility restrictions, and shortages of legal professionals or bureaucratic challenges. This approach helps bridge critical gaps, ensuring individuals understand their rights, receive timely support, and effectively navigate legal systems and complex asylum procedures.

Resources and examples:

- [Ukraine Advice Project UK - The UK lawyers giving valuable advice to Ukrainians fleeing conflict](#)
- [KOBILI: a digital pathway to legal aid | NRC](#)
- [Migrantlife.bg: a digital platform supporting refugees and migrants in Bulgaria](#)

b) Digital financial services: How might we expand access to safe, inclusive and empowering digital financial services for stateless and displaced people?

What it is: This area supports innovative digital solutions that improve access to and use of financial services – such as digital payments, mobile money, savings, credit, insurance and remittances – for forcibly displaced and stateless people. It includes tools that enhance financial inclusion, literacy, and resilience through digital channels, while ensuring safety, accessibility, and user control.

Why it matters: Access to financial services is a critical enabler of protection, dignity, and self-reliance. Yet forcibly displaced people often face barriers such as lack of documentation, exclusion from formal banking, and digital illiteracy. Digital financial services can help bridge these gaps, supporting livelihoods, enabling safe aid delivery, and fostering economic inclusion. But they must be designed with trust, accessibility, and user agency at their core.

Resources and examples:

- [UNHCR's Financial Inclusion for Refugees Guidance](#)
- [Mobile Money for Cash Assistance in Uganda](#)
- [Blockchain-Based Remittances for Displaced Venezuelans](#)
- [Refugee-Led Fintech Pilots in East Africa](#)

c) Mobile-enabled and offline-first solutions: How might we design digital tools and services that remain accessible and functional in low-connectivity or no-connectivity environments?

What it is: This area focuses on digital solutions that are designed to work reliably in places where internet access is limited, unreliable, or completely unavailable. It prioritizes two complementary design principles:

- **Mobile-first:** Designing for mobile devices from the outset, particularly low-end smartphones that are often the only digital tool available to displaced and stateless people. This means lightweight interfaces, minimal data usage, compatibility with older devices, and an intuitive user experience tailored to small screens and touch navigation.
- **Offline-first:** Ensuring digital tools can function without a constant internet connection. Key features and content should be accessible offline, with data stored locally on the device and synced automatically once connectivity is restored.

Why it matters: Connectivity barriers should not be barriers to inclusion. Many forcibly displaced people rely on basic phones, live in areas with poor infrastructure, or face affordability challenges. Designing digital services that are resilient to these realities ensures broader access, strengthens accountability, and empowers users to engage with humanitarian services on their own terms.

Resources and examples:

- [UNHCR Digital Gateway](#)
- [UNHCR GeoServices Portal](#)



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