

UNHCR Grant Agreements

Briefing Note



Queerston Media, a refugee-led organization in Sweden, empowers TGNC refugees and asylum-seekers by strengthening advocacy efforts to influence public policy and enhance participation in decision-making processes. ©UNHCR/Nannie Sköld

Fostering Community-Led Solutions through UNHCR Grant Agreements

UNHCR has long recognized the critical importance of working closely with forcibly displaced and stateless communities. By supporting approaches that leverage the agency, capacity, and skills of community members – men, women, youth – UNHCR helps foster more sustainable responses.

Despite their vital role on the frontlines of humanitarian crises, grassroots organizations often face significant barriers in accessing the funding needed to carry out their work. Since 2021, UNHCR has been supporting the capacity of organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts through small grants, enabling them to partner directly with UNHCR via a funding mechanism that is adapted to the barriers that many such organizations face.

In line with the **Grand Bargain**, the **Global Compact on Refugees**, and broader UN system-wide commitments—including the **UN Gender Acceleration Plan**—UNHCR's Grant Agreement framework reflects a commitment to support grassroots organizations and groups that are led by people with lived experience of forced displacement or statelessness and facilitate their participation in humanitarian responses. By facilitating targeted financial resources that are flexible and more adapted to the capacity and the scope of work of these organizations, UNHCR promotes community-led initiatives, strengthens local capacities, and amplifies the voices of displaced and stateless populations in humanitarian efforts.

This mechanism departs from conventional partnership modalities by emphasizing flexibility, simplicity, and trust in grassroots leadership. Grant Agreements are designed to finance activities up to USD 12,000 per organization annually, enabling impactful, community-led action with reduced administrative burdens as compared to standard partnership agreements.

A Grant Agreement can be awarded to organizations or groups that were founded predominantly by individuals with direct lived experience of forced displacement or statelessness, or where such individuals hold primary leadership roles, and whose stated objectives are centered on responding to the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless people, as well as the communities hosting them. A Grant Agreement can also be awarded to a community-based organization from host communities, provided their stated objectives and activities focus on supporting forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Impact and Vision

UNHCR's Grant Agreements exemplify a critical shift toward inclusive and sustainable responses. By investing in grassroots organizations, UNHCR is driving change in the following ways:

- Enhancing resilience and agency of communities: specifically the forcibly displaced and stateless.

- Leveraging local expertise: tapping into the skills, knowledge, and networks of local actors to address challenges effectively and innovatively.
- Promoting sustainability: encouraging long-term community ownership of humanitarian interventions.
- Contributing to strengthened capacities: providing flexible funding to community-based organizations to thrive and contribute meaningfully to humanitarian efforts.
- Addressing marginalization: tackling barriers faced by at-risk organizations, particularly those led by women, youth, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+.
- UNHCR views these grants as a step toward: fostering equal and meaningful partnerships with communities most affected by displacement and statelessness, ensuring that their insights and leadership are central to achieving durable solutions.

Key Features of Grant Agreements

Grassroots Engagement:

- Grants are open to organizations or groups led by forcibly displaced and stateless individuals, regardless of formal legal registration, provided they align with local legislation frameworks.
- Host community organizations directly supporting displaced populations and sharing aligned objectives are also eligible.

Simplified Financial Management:

- Grants are expensed upon disbursement, adhering to UNHCR financial rules and International Public Sector Accounting Standards.
- Funding can be flexibly used for priority needs, including organizational capacity strengthening.
- This approach reduces administrative overhead, fosters trust and encourages grassroots initiatives.

Capacity Strengthening:

- In addition to funding, UNHCR offers advisory support in areas such as community-based approaches and activities, project and financial management and governance.
- Partner organizations receive mandatory training to strengthen safeguards, including:
 - Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA).
 - Fraud prevention.
 - Human rights of forcibly displaced and stateless individuals.

- Partners' PSEA focal points are trained to:
 - Address SEA allegations with a victim-centered approach.
 - Refer victims to appropriate support (e.g., gender-based violence or child protection).
 - Promote awareness and capacity-building activities within organizations and communities.

Transparency and Accountability:

- While administrative requirements are reduced, all partners undergo a due diligence process to meet eligibility criteria, including safeguarding and governance standards.

Eligibility and Selection Process

Grant Agreement partnership selection may occur through a competitive Call for Expressions of Interest (CfEol) or spontaneous proposals from the grass-root organizations or groups. Key steps include:

- Submission of a simple concept note to a UNHCR operation via UNPP or directly.
- Review by a UNHCR Multi-Functional Team (MFT) using an eligibility checklist.
- Due diligence and selection or rejection.

Organizations are encouraged but not required to register on the [UN Partner Portal \(UNPP\)](#).

Monitoring and Reporting

Through its MFT, UNHCR supports and monitors grant-funded activities with the partner throughout the duration of the Grant Agreement. Monitoring focuses on activity completion, community impact, and partner capacity strengthening, fostering a collaborative and trust-based relationship. A single final narrative report is required, including joint monitoring findings, feedback and capacity strengthening and support provided by UNHCR, and the partner's narrative report on completed activities, challenges and lessons learned. No financial report is required, further minimizing administrative burdens on partners.

Feedback and Lessons Learned

In 2023, a survey was carried out with previous recipient organizations of Grant Agreements and their UNHCR counterparts, indicating broad appreciation of the new instrument, which enabled the tripling of the budget ceiling (previously set at USD 4,000 per grant). Overall, feedback from UNHCR field teams and partners produced several useful lessons learned since 2021, to ensure that Grant Agreements continue playing a key role in advancing **localization** and **community engagement**:

- 1) Implementing tailored **risk mitigation strategies** including due diligence and providing ongoing capacity-strengthening support to address potential financial and safeguarding risks.
- 2) Leveraging Grant Agreements as **potential pathways to wider partnership engagement opportunities** for grassroots organizations over time, both with UNHCR and other donors.
- 3) The importance of keeping grants accessible and manageable for grass-roots organizations, through adequate **resources**, simplified processes as well as the provision of practical support and financial and operational training, which helps remove barriers to accessing funding.
- 4) Proactively identifying and supporting grassroots organizations that work with **at-risk groups**, such as women, persons with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ individuals, using an **age, gender, and diversity (AGD) lens**, ensures that these marginalized groups are included, and their voices are amplified within displaced communities.
- 5) Recognizing that partners operate at varying levels of capacity, and some may require more **intensive support**, particularly those in **fragile** or **under-resourced** settings. Providing **flexible** and **context-specific** approaches ensures that all partners can thrive and contribute meaningfully to the response.

Success Stories

UNHCR's Grant Agreements have led to tangible results in various countries. Below are some documented examples:



Peru

Peru: The Grant Agreement allowed community-based organizations to increase their capacity, enabling them to access additional funding opportunities.

For more details, visit [Localization Strategy Strengthening Organizational and Protection Capacities in Peru](#).

Mauritania: In Mauritania, the Grant Agreement empowered women community leaders, expanding their participation and access to emergency assistance.

Learn more in [Empowering Women Community Leaders in Mauritania](#).



Mauritania



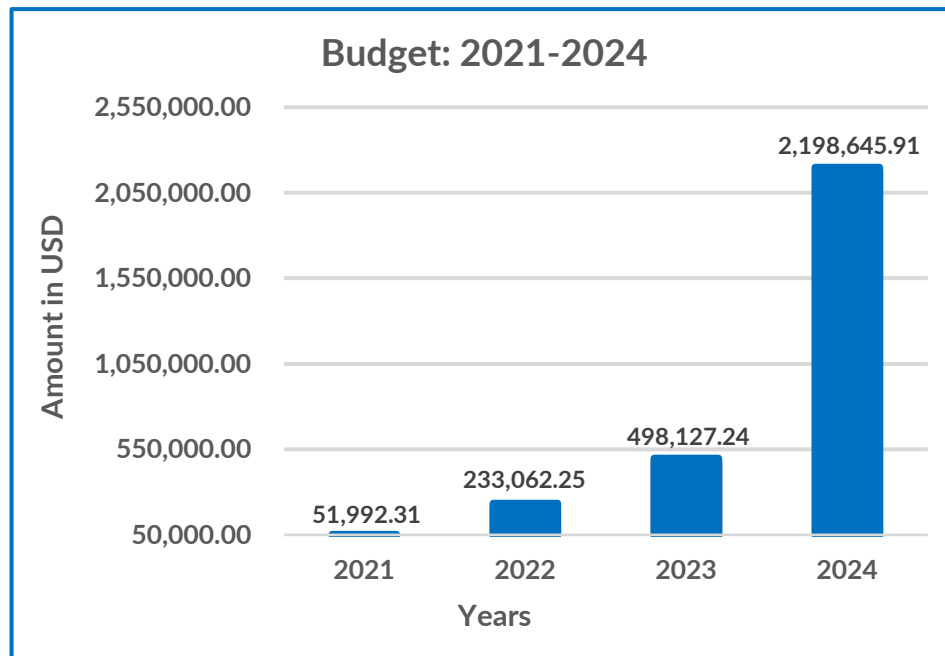
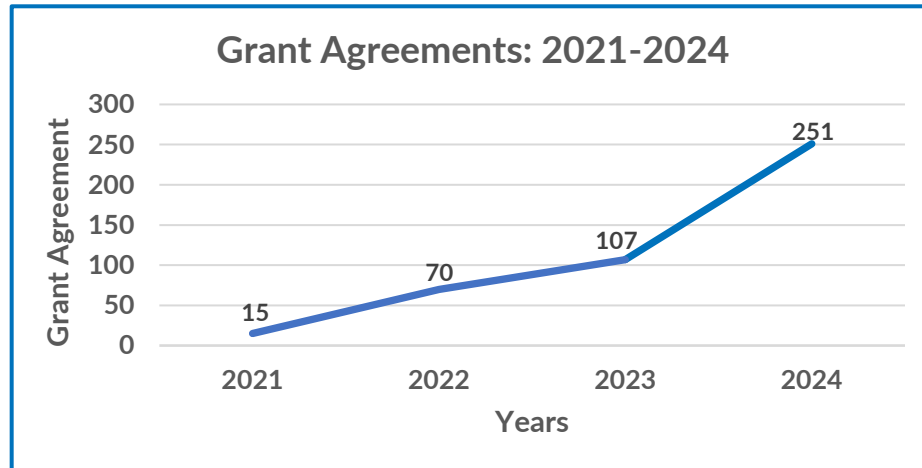
Uganda

Uganda: The pilot project in Uganda demonstrated the potential of Grant Agreements for organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

For further insights, visit [Piloting Grant Agreements for Displaced Communities in Uganda](#).

Grant Agreement Trends Over the Years

Since the introduction of Grant Agreements in 2021, their use has expanded steadily every year, with over 440 Grant Agreements signed since the pilot, for a cumulative budget of nearly USD 3 million.



It is important to highlight that, in 2024, out of the 251 Grant Agreement partners, 50 were women-led organizations and 11 were youth-led organizations, reflecting UNHCR's commitment to supporting inclusive and diverse leadership in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups.

CONTACT US

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