



SOCIO-ECONOMIC EVIDENCE IN PRACTICE IN FORCIBLY DISPLACED SETTINGS

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EXAMPLES OF USES OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA IN
ADVOCACY, POLICY AND PROGRAMMES

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This publication was produced by UNHCR's Theresa Beltramo, Senior Economist, Jedidiah Fix, Economist, and Rebecca Ong, Senior Communications Officer with key contributions from UNHCR Economists: Carlos Guzman Gutierrez, Craig Loschmann, Florence Nimoh, Masud Rahman, Nikolas Pirani, and Ibrahima Sarr. We are grateful to comments from Natalia Baal, UNHCR Senior Strategy and Policy Officer, and from the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center for reviewing the section on EGRISS. Sectoral insights were provided by UNHCR Senior Sector Specialists Pieter Ventevogel (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support) and Valarie Gatchell (Food Security and Nutrition), as well as by UNHCR Development Officer, Annasophia Heintze. Thanks also to Maja Lazic, Deputy Head, and Domenico Tabasso, Senior Economist, of the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center for reviewing the publication and Paula Elice, Consultant, World Bank, for input on impact evaluation. Thanks are due to Sajjad Malik, UNHCR Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions, and to Betsy Lippman, Senior Advisor, Division of Resilience and Solutions, both of whom provided invaluable guidance and review.

Questions? Please email hqsoluti@unhcr.org

FRONT COVER

BANGLADESH. *Rohingya refugee children in Bhasan Char Island after their relocation from the Kutupalong and Teknaf refugee camps of Cox's Bazar.* © UNHCR/AMOS HALDER 2022

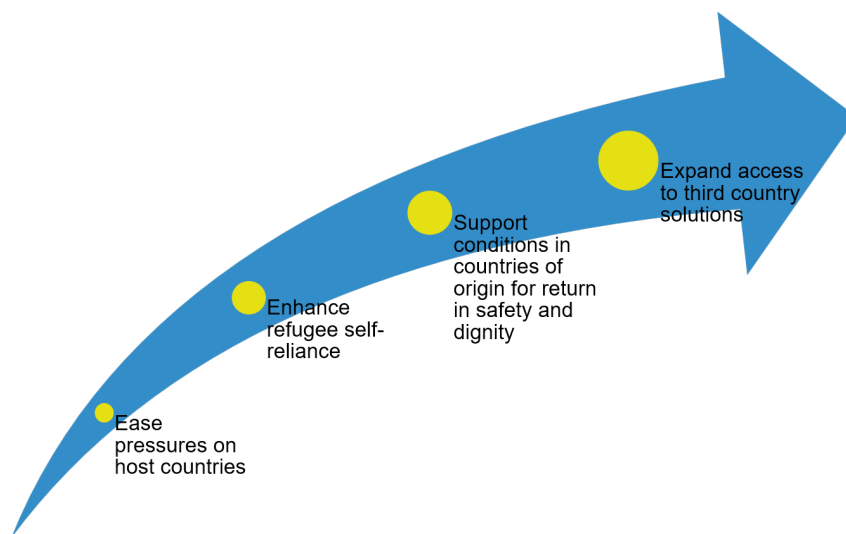
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Introduction

Three years after the endorsement of the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#) in 2018 by the member states of the UN General Assembly, the [GCR Indicator Report 2021](#) finds that while better data is critically needed, the data available point to progress towards the GCR's four objectives. But growing needs and challenges abound. The number of forcibly displaced and stateless people has reached a historic **100 million**, equivalent to 1 percent of the global population. New threats to refugees and other forcibly displaced populations are emerging as a result of the war in Ukraine and the resulting global economic slowdown and higher fuel and food prices. This comes at a time when many countries hosting refugees are facing an already weak economy on the tail of COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Global Compact Four Objectives



More than ever, evidence-informed solutions are imperative to delivering cost-effective, durable outcomes. Household-level information that capture the distinct socio-economic impacts of displacement are necessary to accurately inform area-based approaches that uplift forcibly displaced families and host communities. The many obstacles to collecting these data are well documented, including less frequent data exercises in developing countries, difficulty in tracking these highly mobile populations, and the added challenge of collecting data in areas that are insecure or difficult to access, among others.

Encouragingly, the forced displacement data landscape has recently begun to change. Data investments, partnerships and innovation are beginning to show their promise, resulting in a substantial number of new datasets and analyses. [UNHCR](#) and the [World Bank](#) are among organizations taking the lead in data generation, often working together with global and regional partners in the field. Amplifying these efforts, the two organizations established the [World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement](#) to significantly improve the quality, quantity and accessibility of microdata on refugees, internally displaced, stateless people, and host communities. Importantly, a growing number of datasets are produced by or in collaboration with national governments who are taking ownership of the effort to include forcibly displaced populations in official data. These new datasets are then published in a safe, protected way, including on the [UNHCR Microdata Library](#), to generate a [global public good for practitioners](#).

This publication highlights a collection of instances where recently generated data and evidence are used in practice by UNHCR and its partners to protect and advance solutions for forcibly displaced people and host communities. This work is evidence of UNHCR prioritizing data and evidence in its response. From piloting tried-and-tested development approaches in forced displacement contexts to undertaking new initiatives, the featured examples illustrate research that is responsive to operational needs and focused on outcomes fundamental to refugee self-reliance: livelihoods, mental health, empowerment of women, food security, building solid beginnings for children, and inclusion of refugees in national systems.

Historic inclusion of Venezuelans in Colombia follows evidence of positive labour market impact for hosts and refugees

Colombia hosts over 2 million Venezuelans, representing more than a third all Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean. More than half of the Venezuelan population in Colombia lack regular status, affecting their ability to access essential services, protection and assistance.

A [recent study](#) by the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and Universidad de los Andes looked at the effect of 500,000 Venezuelan refugees in Colombia offered the opportunity in 2018 to obtain temporary permits granting access to basic services, social security and formal employment.

The findings show that two years on, compared to Venezuelan refugees who did not enrol in the temporary programme, those with access to formal employment experienced 60 percent improvement in consumption, 31 percent more income, and had better physical and mental health. Among enrolled Venezuelan refugees who worked, they were 10 percentage points more likely to work in the formal economy, indicating that they pay taxes and contribute to the social security system, thus contributing directly to the host economy.

Based on the evidence of overall positive impacts on Venezuelans and Colombians, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank provided over \$800 million in concessional loans as well as technical assistance to support the expansion of this policy by the Government of Colombia.

The concerted evidence-informed support contributed to Colombia's [historic initiative](#) in 2021 to provide 10-year Temporary Protection Status to Venezuelans. This initiative gives Venezuelans much needed documentation and access to services and to the formal labour market.

Such inclusion is key to long-term solutions, which in turn serves to lessen the dependency of people on humanitarian assistance while also contributing to the host country through their skills, knowledge and work.

The inclusion of Venezuelans Displaced Abroad in Colombia truly showcases the effect of well-coordinated policy and research. The government's generous approach to Venezuelans is enabling a more comprehensive humanitarian-development response to Venezuelans and host communities in Colombia.

At the same time, it provides a path forward and examples of possible durable solutions for other refugee-hosting countries around the globe.



Andres from Venezuela received his Temporary Protection Permit. With documentation in hand, he plans to start and register his business legally, obtain a bank account, and gradually grow his business. © UNHCR/Daniela Carmago 2022

Innovative solutions for refugee inclusion fuelled by multi-year research in Kenya

In support of the Government of Kenya's and UNHCR's Solutions Roadmap in Kenya, UNHCR and the World Bank, funded by the Dutch [PROSPECT fund](#), have joined forces to design and implement a longitudinal panel survey as part of the [Kenya Analytical Program on Forced Displacement \(KAP-FD\)](#).

The panel survey, which repeats surveys over time to the same household, will generate rich data representative of all refugees and host communities in Kenya. Included in the survey sample are approximately 6,000 refugee households living in camps and settlements (Kalobeyei, Kakuma and Dadaab) and in urban areas, and 3,500 Kenyan households living in major refugee-hosting areas.

Insights from longitudinal panel surveys have proven essential to informing public policy. Compared to cross-sectional datasets, which give a snapshot of individuals at a given point in time, longitudinal panels capture long-term, life cycle changes in outcomes and unintended spillover effects of interventions. Taken together, these insights allow for novel evidence-informed dialogue, policy and programmatic decisions.

The longitudinal panel is the first component of the KAP-FD which measures a myriad of socio-economic measures including poverty, employment, food security, marriage and fertility, women's empowerment, social norms, mental health, migration trajectories and social cohesion. It is also designed to enable a better understanding of the causal factors in the transition from primary to secondary schools, a key factor to better livelihood outcomes.

A second component of the KAP-FD pilots an integrated programme and impact evaluation. The pilot includes the provision of mental health services with livelihoods interventions and targets youth entrepreneurs (ages 18-35) in refugee and host communities.

Promoting the use of data in policy-relevant research is another key objective of the KAP-FD. In this regard, the third programme component builds pathways, including through networks and capacity building, between data collection and their use by local scholars and practitioners.



Students at a primary school in Kakuma camp attend a mentorship programme which supports adolescent refugee girls and equips them with life skills. © UNHCR/Samuel Otieno 2020

The KAP-FD builds on successful UNHCR-World Bank efforts to generate and use data on forced displaced in Kenya. Past collaboration have provided critical information on the social and economic situation within [Kakuma](#), [Kalobeyei](#) and [urban areas of Kenya](#) where refugees live. The data has been particularly important in UNHCR's engagement with private and government actors. It also informs strategic planning within UNHCR, providing systematic analysis to evaluate the conditions of refugees and host communities in education, employment, poverty, and access to water, hygiene and sanitation services, among others. These and other interventions have resulted in better lives for refugees and hosts, attracted private sector investment, and contributed to the area-based development initiative, the [Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Programme](#) by the Turkana West County Government.

Early results from an impact evaluation of a graduation programme for refugees and hosts in Mozambique finds positive impacts on livelihoods and social cohesion

The Graduation Approach is a [proven approach](#) in development contexts that combines and sequences safety nets, livelihoods and microfinance to create pathways for the poorest to "[graduate out of extreme poverty](#)". To date its application is far less common in refugee situations and its impact is not quantified, though the [Poverty Alleviation Coalition](#), convened by the World Bank and UNHCR with 13 non-governmental organizations, is working to change that.

Seeking to fill a data gap and inform future projects based on the graduation approach, UNHCR and the London School of Economics undertook an [impact evaluation of a graduation programme](#) for refugees and the host community around the Maratane Settlement in Nampula, Mozambique. Funded by the U.S. Government, the programme provided cash and skills training, supported consumption, wage employment, and entrepreneurship for self and wage employment.

[Early results](#) show that at the end of the two-year programme, participants of the graduation project were 40 percent less likely to skip meals and earned 30 percent more household income compared to the control group. In addition, more than 10 percent of the participants had bought or constructed a new house and more than 10 percent had invested in electrical grid connections, a likely signal of the refugee's interest to remain in Mozambique in the long-term.

Beyond financial wellbeing, the programme was designed to promote trust and social interaction between refugees and host communities, which are fundamental to peace and allowing communities in the area to thrive. On this aspect, the impact evaluation showed mutual trust among participating refugee and host households were significantly higher compared to non-participants, indicating that working together builds trust and social connection.

This rigorous evaluation comes at a critical time for the Government of Mozambique's response to forced displacement. With support from UNHCR, the government is designing an integrated settlement in Nampula for refugees and hosts to promote socio-economic integration and resilience for both communities. Scaling up the graduation approach and livelihoods interventions are core components of the local integration efforts to address the overall vulnerability to food insecurity and poverty, which remains very high in the Maratane Settlement.



Refugee and host community woman participate in a training session on waste management in Maratane Settlement in Nampula Province. © UNHCR

Inclusion in national statistics paves the way for timely policymaking and planning

Until recently, most forcibly displaced persons were excluded from national statistics, including in regular household surveys that inform policymaking and planning in most countries. In the cases where they were included, the data effort often used different terminology and methods, leading to results that may be inconsistent or incomparable. As a result, governments as well as humanitarian and development actors lacked the data and evidence needed to address the rapid increases in displacement and high levels of marginalization and poverty that often accompany forced displacement situations.

The Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics (**EGRISS**) was established in 2016 by the UN Statistical Commission. Since then, the group's members – currently 52 national statistical offices and 28 regional and international organizations – have been working to address the limited availability of quality data and lack of integration in national statistical systems. This work has centered around the development of the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (**IRRS**) and IDP Statistics (**IRIS**). The focus of the current mandate (2020-2024) is on promoting and supporting implementation of the recommendations and other capacity development activities.

UNHCR, together with the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center, supports the implementation of the recommendations on statistics relating to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP), including through i) efforts to improve available guidance and refine methodological elements of the recommendation, ii) promoting the use of the standards in concrete country activities, and iii) providing capacity building to national statistical offices to include forcibly displaced in national surveys.

The **EGRISS Annual Report 2020-21** shows strong momentum at both country and institutional levels to include refugees or IDPs in national censuses and household surveys, conduct displacement-specific household surveys, improve the use of data from administrative registers, and adopt experimental use of modelling and other methods to gather data on these populations. To name but a few examples – out of more than 100 that have been identified – in the **Central African Republic**, IDPs were included in the 2021 Harmonized Household Living Conditions Survey, providing much needed detail on the highly vulnerable population. In **Morocco**, migration surveys by the High Commission for Planning in 2018 and 2021 produced insights on socio-economic conditions, access to labour markets and administrative status.

Most recently, the national statistics office in **Honduras** is preparing a survey to assess the number of IDPs in the country, monitor trends of internal displacement, and track progress towards reaching durable solutions. While in **Brazil**, UNHCR and the Brazil Institute of Geography and Statistics are planning an agreement to facilitate the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons in the national census and other statistical activities.

Quality data are key to **UNHCR's work** to protect forcibly displaced and stateless people and respond rapidly and effectively. Advancing the inclusion of these populations in national statistics is necessary to address **gaps in their rights and access to opportunities**.



Research in Brazil tracks wellbeing of relocated refugees and generates data for the country's refugee response

Among Brazil's response to the arrival of displaced Venezuelans, a key strategy involves relocating Venezuelans to cities with better economic and integration prospects. Implemented as part of the government's *Operação Acolhida* (Operation Welcome), the relocation strategy is supported by multiple UN agencies, including UNHCR, civil society organizations and municipalities throughout the country.

Given the importance of the relocation strategy for the protection of Venezuelan refugees and migrants and achieving durable solutions, the Brazilian government has been supportive of research efforts by UNHCR and its partners to generate evidence and monitor the implementation of the strategy as well as provide insights to its future path.

Building on past research that examined the [impact of the relocation strategy on hosting cities](#), UNHCR extended its research scope to investigate how well Venezuelans coped after their relocation. The research involved almost 3,000 phone interviews using quasi-experimental methods to understand the impact of the relocation effort. Among positive results for relocated Venezuelans, the research found a much lower unemployment rate among those who were relocated – 11 percent compared to 31 percent among Venezuelans still living in shelters in Roraima, their first port of arrival, and 12 percent for Brazilian nationals.

Further, relocated Venezuelans had higher incomes on average, earning BRL 1,325, slightly above the national minimum wage and about half of the average income of the host community. In contrast, Venezuelans in Roraima earned on average BRL 595, less than the minimum wage and almost three times less than the average income of the host population. In education, among children under 18 years of age, over 70 percent from relocated families were enrolled in school, compared to 36 percent among children in Roraima.

It should be noted that the socio-demographic profile of the relocated Venezuelans points to selectivity, as they tend to have higher levels of education and there are more men than women among them. This selectivity may influence the results of the research, given that the relocated Venezuelans are generally better off socio-economically compared to the population that remains in Roraima.

The research points to the need for investment in education, skills and training, and support for local market development within Roraima, as a significant portion (23 percent) of Venezuelans in Roraima have indicated a preference to remain there. At the same time, the study reveals potential for expanding the relocation strategy, as the remaining and larger portion of Venezuelans in Roraima (77 percent) have indicated their interest to relocate.

The data made available through this research helps to fill an existing gap in information regarding the socio-economic conditions of Venezuelans after they are relocated from Roraima. It is expected that the data will support the formulation of public policies that takes into consideration the profile of the Venezuelan population and their vulnerabilities.



Venezuelan children in Brazil participate in activities organized by UNHCR and its partners that bring together refugee and migrant communities. © UNHCR/Allana Ferreira 2021.

New evidence highlights disproportionately high burden of mental health on refugees and motivates inclusion of mental health services in new emergencies

Refugees face harsh conditions. [Studies](#) in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Chad, and Jordan show that on average, two-thirds of refugees lack the resources needed to meet basic nutrition and essential needs. Other research show refugees live in overcrowded conditions, share toilets with other households, and many walk long distances to collect firewood for heating and cooking. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed many deeper into poverty, as [surveys in eight countries](#) show forcibly displaced and host communities were economically worse off and many were severely food insecure during the pandemic.

These conditions create significant psychosocial stress on mental health with potentially negative impacts on employment, productivity, and relationships. The mental health needs of forcibly displaced, if not attended to, could hold back their social and economic integration. The poor mental health of parents could also negatively impact their children's well-being.

For reasons outlined above, UNHCR prioritizes mental health in its operations and research. Both contribute to UNHCR's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programming, which builds the capacity of local staff to identify and support the management of mental health conditions. Recent evidence gathered on refugees and hosts underscores the severity of mental health issues among both groups. The growing body of evidence has informed recent emergencies including the Ukraine crisis response by ensuring mental and psychosocial support are provided at the outset of the emergency.

In **Jordan**, statistics from the first wave of the [Syrian Refugee Life Study](#) in 2020 indicate that 61 percent of Syrian refugees have depressive symptoms (according to the CESD-10 measure). It also points to a worrisome inter-generational impact: the children of depressed parents were assessed to have worse socio-emotional outcomes than other children.

In **Mozambique**, [new research](#) by UNHCR and the London School of Economics reveals a dire mental health situation. Three out of 10 refugees and two out of 10 host individuals experience depression, with more women than men suffering from severe depression. The refugee rate of depression is more than six times the global average.

In **Uganda**, 54 percent of refugees report being depressed more than a year after the pandemic began in the [third round](#) of the COVID-19 high-frequency phone survey by UNHCR and the World Bank. This rate is more than 10 times higher than the reported rate of depression found among Ugandans over the same period. Women refugees and those above 60 years old report higher depression rates.

While supporting livelihoods, employment, education and community development, all of which contribute to psychosocial wellbeing, UNHCR also works toward the integration of mental health into primary healthcare and advocates for the inclusion of refugees in national mental health systems. The recent evidence highlighted above is essential to help motivate continued and expanded investment by UNHCR and its partners to strengthen the delivery of mental health and psychosocial support services within communities.



UNHCR provides psychosocial support for Syrian refugees in Jordan, where demand for consultations have risen by 50 percent because of anxiety triggered by COVID-19. © UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle 2020.

Inclusion of forcibly displaced in national COVID-19 high frequency phone surveys provides first systematically collected data on refugees and hosts during a global shock

At the onset of the pandemic, national statistical offices and organizations that implement household surveys innovated to collect timely data necessary to understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on different swaths of society and inform evidence-based responses.

The World Bank and national statistical offices of more than 80 countries rapidly designed and deployed [COVID-19 High-Frequency Phone Surveys](#). The UNHCR, the World Bank and the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center joined efforts and advocated for the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons in some 10 countries: [Bangladesh](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Chad](#), [Djibouti](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Jordan](#), [Kenya](#), [Uganda](#), and in [Iraq](#) and [Yemen](#) with the World Food Programme. In addition, UNHCR implemented surveys in [Costa Rica](#) and [Mexico](#) to collect information on access to services, levels of food security, coping strategies and employment trends.

A review of these comparable phone surveys across forcibly displaced and host populations highlights refugees, IDPs and returnees' inherent fragility in relation to nationals. Displaced populations in the surveyed countries tend to be employed in sectors more vulnerable to economic shocks and report facing higher employment losses and slower recovery to pre-COVID employment levels compared to nationals.

Notably prior to COVID-19, refugees were lagging far behind nationals in terms of employment. In Uganda where refugees have the right to work, there was a dramatic gap in employment pre-COVID. Just [29 percent of refugees](#) in Uganda are actively working compared to [64 percent of host communities](#) in 2018. Further food insecurity of forcibly displaced is on average much higher than hosts as a result of the pandemic.

A recent report by [OECD](#) highlights the knock-on effects from the war in Ukraine, particularly the rise of prices in food and energy creating inflationary effects on the global economy. Given the inherent fragility of refugees to socio-economic shocks made visible by the COVID-19 phone surveys, the food price and broader global economic shock as a result of the war in Ukraine will undoubtedly have a significant impact on forcibly displaced populations.

UNHCR, together with the World Bank and governments, is using the data to inform its response and promote the inclusion of forcibly displaced in national social safety net programmes in countries. In Mauritania, the [World Food Programme and UNHCR Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub](#) supported the data collection and assessment of the most vulnerable households who were included in the Government of Mauritania's social assistance programme in January 2022. UNHCR is also expanding its advocacy for the continued inclusion of forcibly displaced in national statistics exercises so as to monitor closely the impacts of the crisis and generate more reliable, timely and comparable data on forcibly displaced people and hosts

While these phone surveys were designed out of necessity, the tools and methodologies for remote data collection offer many benefits. Even as face-to-face survey interviews resume, the creativity and data innovations that enabled the surveys give policymakers new tools and ways to monitor the socio-economic conditions in forcibly displaced settings.

Wider use of impact evaluations offers new insights for forced displacement

Designing a programme based on sound evidence is essential to maximizing scarce resources. In humanitarian settings, recent decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the use of rigorous impact evaluations by development economists and other social scientists, with the results increasingly shaping policy and practice. Despite the rise in evidence more is needed to be done to bridge policymakers and academics to ensure knowledge is communicated in an effective and timely way to inform policy.

Implementing impact evaluations in forced displacement contexts is challenging due to the fact that refugees and other forcibly displaced are frequently located in fragile settings, undertake frequent movements, and humanitarian programmes tend to be rapidly developed and rolled out, thus limiting the ability to build in thoughtful impact evaluations.

Despite these challenges, thanks to dedicated efforts by development and humanitarian partners there is a [growing body of work](#). The [Building the Evidence on Forced Displacement](#) research programme, a collaboration between the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UNHCR, and the World Bank, has supported this recent expansion.

At the end of 2020, there were 40 documented randomized impact evaluations taking place in forced displacement contexts, close to double the number published over the past 20 years. [Completed and forthcoming evaluations](#) target a range of contexts and sectors, including:

- Engagement of refugees in productive activities in [Bangladesh](#)
- Health and education support programmes in the Horn of Africa
- Cash reintegration assistance for returning [Afghan refugees](#)
- Programmes to reduce gender-based violence in Cameroon
- Food distribution programmes in Iraq
- Pedagogical and socio-behavioural programmes for youth in Jordan
- Teacher training efforts in Lebanon
- Entrepreneurship support programme in Niger

Making good use of evidence and data

UNHCR and its partners have made great strides in improving the evidence base needed to inform policy. However, without linkages to the operational policy environment, even the most powerful approaches can have limited impacts on improving people's lives. UNHCR is strengthening the use of evidence and data in ways that sharpen the effectiveness of operations and teams on the ground as they deliver relief and support to forcibly displaced people, stateless populations and host communities.

To do that, UNHCR has a [dedicated multi-year investment from the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center](#), which, among other key initiatives, has enabled the hiring of economists in UNHCR's country and regional teams. The economist function at UNHCR has proved essential in building linkages between academics and policymakers. It has also given UNHCR operations the capacity to generate the data and evidence needed to support their advocacy and protection of people of concern.

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UNHCR DIVISION OF RESILIENCE AND SOLUTIONS

hqsoluti@unhcr.org

P.O. Box 2500

1211 Geneva 2

www.unhcr.org/livelihoods-and-economic-inclusion-data-and-analysis