UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Greening and Sustainability Team

Transforming into a **Green** UNHCR

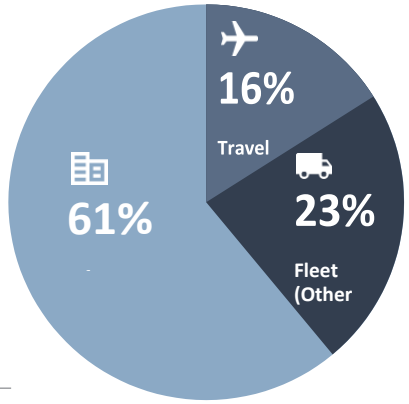
Challenge: The high carbon footprint of responding to refugee needs globally

UNHCR is a global organization and its operations are designed to deliver a global response. But the infrastructure that supports them, including around 530 offices and 7,000 vehicles – the largest fleet in the UN system – leaves a large environmental footprint. UNHCR's mission to serve 92 million forcibly displaced and stateless people and their host communities often means working in areas without a stable grid connection and with high security needs, making the use of fossil fuels a practical necessity. (UNHCR is also working to reduce the environmental footprint of the people it serves, under the Global Strategy for Sustainable Energy 2019-2024.)

As a result, UNHCR's operations generate annual emissions of 97,136 metric tons of CO_2 equivalent (tCO_2eq), chiefly generated by office infrastructure, followed by the vehicle fleet and air travel. To put that in context, it takes around 119,000 acres of forest to absorb that amount of CO_2.

UNHCR Sources of CO_2

Greening the Blue Report 2020: UNHCR Data



Vision: A green UNHCR in 10 Years

Despite the challenge of operating in the most remote areas of the world, *UNHCR's vision is to become the leading humanitarian agency in environmental sustainability*. Within the next 10 years, UNHCR aims to transform its infrastructure, fleet, and travel to minimize its environmental footprint and enable green solutions, while continuing to adhere to the highest standards of refugee protection and response.

In terms of carbon emissions, UNHCR is already offsetting its entire carbon footprint as an organization and it will continue to do so. In addition, UNHCR aims to reduce its carbon footprint by at least 45% by 2030 through sustainable solutions, including transitioning to green energy, switching to electric vehicles, and optimizing travel, all while maintaining full operational capacity to meet the needs of refugees and other people of concern, as well as host communities.

This vision is part of UNHCR's commitment to prioritize responsible climate action at all levels of the organization, as outlined in the recently created Strategic Framework for Climate Action. This framework outlines how UNHCR will lead transformational change in three key areas in which climate change and human displacement intersect: (1) law and policy, (2) humanitarian operational support to refugees and host communities, (3) greening UNHCR itself. This third pillar aligns with but also aspires to exceed the commitments laid out in the 'Greening the Blue' initiative, the UN system-wide commitment to improve environmental sustainability.

Strategy: 5 Key Greening Initiatives

To achieve this vision, UNHCR has developed a comprehensive package of 5 key green initiatives:

1. Green Box:

To transform, UNHCR first needs to measure. The Green Data initiative replaces manual systems of energy measurement and reporting with automated, real-time monitoring utilizing the internet-of-things. In this initiative, UNHCR is deploying 'Green Boxes', automated energy meters, to all offices globally to collect energy data in real time while lessening the burden on frontline staff. This data allows UNHCR to develop fact-based business cases for the most appropriate pathway to transition each office, and to monitor and sustain the changes over time. Over the next five years, UNHCR will deploy similarly cutting-edge technologies to measure other aspects of environmental sustainability such as water and waste.

2. Green Financing Facility:

Once real-time measurement and business cases are developed by the Green Data initiative, the next step is to finance the transition of offices to clean energy. Rather than traditional, relatively inefficient grants-based models, UNHCR has established the Green Financing Facility (GFF) with two innovative mechanisms to finance clean energy transitions.

For larger offices, the GFF has a guarantee mechanism to back commercial contracts with the private sector via long-term agreements such as power purchase agreements or leases. For smaller offices, the GFF has a revolving fund mechanism to cover the up-front capital expenditure for renewable energy systems while capturing the resulting savings over multiple years so that additional offices can be transitioned to renewable energy.

These innovative financing mechanisms feature strong efficiencies and financial sustainability. They allow UNHCR to transition offices using at least 50% less donor funding than traditional pure grant mechanisms. Additional benefits include lowering the operational and maintenance burden on frontline staff and creating commercially viable opportunities for private sector in fragile contexts via open, competitive procurements.

3. Green Fleet:

UNHCR aims to transform its large fleet of vehicles to become the greenest amongst peer agencies. UNHCR is currently measuring its fleet emissions via the real-time Vehicle Tracking System, which is already installed in 80% of the fleet. In the near term, UNHCR will pilot and scale up the usage of ride-sharing systems to improve vehicle utilization. In addition, UNHCR is studying the future of electric vehicles and projecting the future of this technology with its operational and security needs in various locations globally. Over time, UNHCR will add electricvehicle models to its fleet line-up and deploy these clean energy vehicles where security and other contextual factors allow.

4. Green Travel:

Learning from the COVID-19 experience, UNHCR aims to structurally reduce travel-generated CO_2 emissions by 15% compared to 2019. UNHCR is also reviewing its travel policy to introduce environmental considerations, such as balancing the most economical versus the most direct route to reduce its carbon footprint from air travel. Additional costs for more direct routes will be partially offset by a new internal levy enacted on fossil fuel-based vehicles. UNHCR is also enhancing the quality of the data used for ICAO carbon footprint calculation through the “Air Travel Cube” inter-agency project.

5. Green Awareness & Behaviours:

Sustainable change is driven by human behaviour, so in addition to transforming its hard assets, UNHCR is also undertaking a comprehensive communications and behaviour change campaign to improve energy efficiency, reduce waste, and engage with environmental efforts. This multi-year initiative entails all levels of staff – from grassroots initiatives in many local offices to reduce plastics usage to the High Commissioner switching to a smaller electric vehicle. This multi-faceted campaign is field-centred, taking in the energy and creativity of best practices from UNHCR staff from around the world.

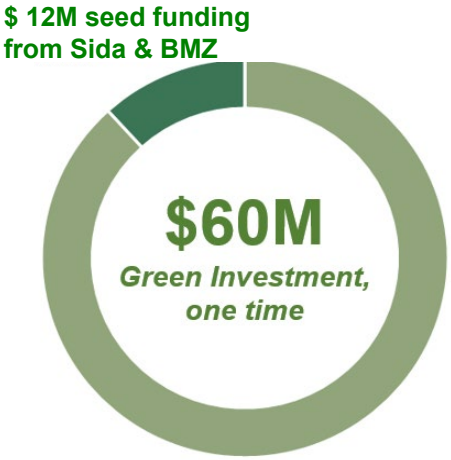
The business case for a green UNHCR

Kickstarting UNHCR's green transformation requires a **$60 million Green Investment** to switch all offices to primarily renewable energy by 2030. This one-time Green Investment will be managed by the Green Financing Facility as a long-term capital fund that will finance all future greening needs, including electric vehicles wherever possible.

UNHCR's greening strategy is underpinned by **a strong business case**. An initial $60 million Green Investment will yield a 2x return over 10 years and 2.6x over 20 years. That is, by deploying donor funding into the Green Financing Facility which has been designed for financial sustainability, an investment of $60 million will support around $115 million of green capital expenditure over 10 years. Over 20 years, the same capital continues to work, supporting $150 million of renewable energy assets without the need for additional donor funding.

Towards the $60 million Green Investment target, UNHCR has already received seed grants from Sida (Sweden) and BMZ (Germany) totalling $12 million, leaving a funding gap of $48 million.

In addition, greening will require additional recurring costs. Sustaining a green UNHCR will require a modest annual structural cost increase – a Green Premium of $2.5 million annually, to support a global Green Team to enact these initiatives, carbon offset purchases, and the additional cost of reduced carbon travel.



Wanted: Partners to help turn UNHCR green

UNHCR started with the largest challenge amongst peer agencies in terms of remote, high carbon operational locations, but has moved rapidly in the past year to develop advanced plans, pilots, and management systems.

For example, over 100 **Green Boxes** of real-time energy meters have been installed in UNHCR offices within the first three quarters of 2021, despite the logistical challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, UNHCR's **Green Financing Facility** initiative launched the first guarantee-backed procurement by any humanitarian agency for long-term energy-as-a-service contracts with the private sector. This pilot procurement round attracted 45 private sector bidders interested in co-investing to transition 10 UNHCR offices in remote, 'deep field' locations in East Africa, proving the viability of this innovative financing model to transition even the most remote UNHCR offices to clean energy.

In addition, UNHCR has established a **Greening and Sustainability team** under the purview of the Controller to implement and manage this green transition globally.

In short, UNHCR has the vision, the leadership, the plans, and the organizational set-up to become the leading 'green' humanitarian organization globally. What is missing is the remaining portion of needed funding. We invite interested donors to join UNHCR, Sweden, and Germany to fill the remaining funding gap of $48 million to fulfill the promise of a truly green refugee agency.

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