



# **GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY**

2019-2025

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The Strategy builds on the UNHCR Global Strategy for Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE) 2014-2018.

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UNHCR works closely with a number of key partners to deliver clean energy to persons of concern, including:

IKEA Foundation  




The **IKEA Foundation** works to create a better everyday life for the many people. As the philanthropic arm of INGKA Foundation, the owner of the IKEA Group of companies, it focuses on improving the lives of vulnerable children by enabling their families to create sustainable livelihoods, and to fight and cope with climate change. UNHCR and the IKEA Foundation have built a unique and innovative partnership that has been transformative for UNHCR. It has introduced new ways of working and has deeply influenced how the organisation partners with the private sector, particularly when it comes to access to clean energy as well as economic and financial inclusion. Since 2010, IKEA Foundation has committed more than USD 207 million dollars in both cash and in-kind donations to UNHCR's programmes. Learn more at [www.ikeafoundation.org](http://www.ikeafoundation.org)

**Sustainable Energy for All** shares and supports UNHCR's vision of a world where all refugees, displaced people, host communities, and support structures have access to sustainable energy; [www.seforall.org](http://www.seforall.org)

UNHCR's Energy Strategy delivers and contributes to the vision and goals of the **Global Plan of Action** for Sustainable Energy Solutions in Situations of Displacement (GPA) [unitar.org/ptp/sustainable-energy](http://unitar.org/ptp/sustainable-energy)



Cover photo: Za'atari, Jordan. Za'atari's solar power plant provides clean energy to 80,000 Syrian refugees living in the camp. It delivers annual carbon emissions savings equivalent to 30,000 barrels of oil.  
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## VISION

*All refugees,  
host communities and support structures  
should be able to satisfy their energy needs  
in a sustainable manner,  
without fear or risks to their health, well-being  
and personal security,  
while ensuring the least possible  
environmental impact.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UNHCR Global Strategy for Sustainable Energy 2020-2025 aims to enable refugees<sup>1</sup>, host communities and other persons of concern to UNHCR to meet their energy needs in a safe and sustainable manner and to ensure that UNHCR's response is also environmentally sustainable. The Strategy seeks to increase the sustainable use of renewable energy sources to minimize environmental impact, in a way that includes host communities and other stakeholders, while improving refugees' protection and well-being. In line with the UNHCR Climate Action Framework and the Global Compact on Refugees, and with the objective to protect the most vulnerable, the strategy will focus on promoting investments "(...) scaling-up capacity development for smart, affordable and appropriate technologies and renewable energy in developing and least developed

refugee hosting countries".

Between 2020 and 2025, UNHCR will promote strategic action outcomes:

- Addressing refugee households' energy needs from the onset of an emergency;
- Improving access to sustainable, safe, affordable and clean household cooking energy;
- Expanding sustainable household access to lighting and connectivity;
- Expanding sustainable electrification of community facilities, while limiting overall consumption;
- Transitioning UNHCR global office infrastructure to renewable energy sources.

### DEFINITIONS

**Energy:** refers primarily to the source powering cooking, lighting, heating and electricity needs of refugee households and businesses, as well as community facilities such as schools and health centres, in displacement settings and UNHCR offices and facilities.

**Renewable Energy:** refers to energy options that are naturally replenished over time e.g. solar and wind energy and biofuels.

**Sustainable Energy:** solutions that meet current energy needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own energy needs.

**Clean Energy:** is defined according to the two following definitions for cooking and electricity.

**Clean Cooking:** according to the emissions standard defined by the WHO for cooking stoves and sustainable fuel provision (defined as sources from renewable biomass, LPG, Ethanol, Biogas from renewable sources, or renewable electricity sources).<sup>2</sup>

**Clean electricity:** access to lighting and connectivity if the energy required to power and/or charge the devices is provided by a renewable energy source.

**Connectivity:** defined as an energy source that can power small electric appliances and enable connectivity, consistent with the World Bank definition.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The UNHCR Energy Strategy applies mostly to refugees and their host communities, but may in some cases be extended to include returnees, stateless persons and IDPs.

<sup>2</sup> [WHO guidelines for indoor air quality: selected pollutants](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Beyond Connections : Energy Access Redefined](#)





A Greenlight Secondary School student displays her new solar lantern. Kenya.

## INTRODUCTION

**The Global Strategy for Sustainable Energy aims to enable refugees, the communities hosting them and other persons of concern to meet their energy needs in a safe and sustainable way.**

Energy is a basic need and a key to overcoming poverty and resolving environmental degradation. Restrictions on energy access negatively impact populations in humanitarian settings. A lack of safe access to adequate energy poses serious risks for displaced and vulnerable people. Well-planned energy interventions, on the other hand, can provide significant benefits associated with protection, gender equality, food security, water, sanitation and health, education, livelihoods, connectivity and environmental protection. Access to energy is also empowering, enabling women in particular to gain greater control over their lives and futures.

UNHCR will promote sustainable household energy technologies, including the expanded use of renewable energy, to minimize the environmental impact of operations in a way that is inclusive of host communities and other stakeholders while improving the protection and wellbeing of refugees. Likewise, the Strategy aims to increase access to clean energy for schools, health centres and other institutions. It equally strives to complement UNHCR's efforts to introduce comprehensive energy efficiency measures and equip its global office infrastructure with sustainable energy solutions.

The Strategy comprises the overall conceptual framework that aims to ensure that energy interventions enable enhanced protection and dignified lives for refugees. It provides the principles for the organization's protective, catalytic and operational energy actions for 2020 to 2025.

UNHCR's work in the area of energy will be guided by its protection mandate and a set of principles contained with the High Commissioner's Global Strategic

Directions 2017-2021<sup>4</sup>, the UNHCR policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD), the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the 2030 Agenda for UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the UNHCR Strategic Framework for Climate Action (SFCA), the Global Plan of Action for Sustainable Energy Solutions in Situations of Displacement (GPA), the UN Climate Neutrality Strategy and the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

As a core component of the UNHCR protection mandate and global commitments<sup>5</sup>, the Strategy aims to safeguard refugees from protection risks such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and/or tensions between refugees and host communities due to environmental impacts or competition over energy resources. It also supports access to rights, nutrition, education and livelihoods, thereby promoting the self-reliance of refugees.

UNHCR recognizes that energy access is not only a development goal (SDG 7) in its own right, but also a bridge between short-term humanitarian responses and longer-term development goals. For example, ensuring safe access to affordable, reliable and modern energy is essential to attainment of SDG 5 on gender equality. A review of all SDG targets based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup> showed that energy was a factor in 125 (74 per cent) of the 169 targets<sup>7</sup>, highlighting the fundamental importance of the subject. The Strategy will therefore also promote a broader approach to finding lasting solutions for refugees and host communities, across the humanitarian-development nexus.

UNHCR's role for the implementation of the Strategy will include direct operational responses. However, UNHCR's default role will increasingly be as a catalyst, encouraging other actors to implement energy projects, in particular development actors and the private sector, in collaboration with national and local authorities.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2017-2021

<sup>5</sup> GBV Accountability Framework

<sup>6</sup> A/RES/70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

<sup>7</sup> State of Electricity Access Report, 2017





A South Sudanese refugee given a small grant to start a restaurant cooks on an improved stove in Ocea, Northern Uganda.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**PROTECTION OUTCOMES:** limited access to energy can have severe repercussions on the safety and security of refugees; in particular, it exposes them to heightened risks of SGBV. Safe access to affordable clean energy is closely linked to the enjoyment of rights associated with protection, peaceful co-existence, education, safety, health, nutrition, WASH (Water Sanitation and Hygiene), food and livelihoods. Energy should therefore be conceptualized as a critical means of achieving protection outcomes across sectors of GBV in line with the UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of Risk Mitigation and Response to Gender-based Violence.<sup>8</sup>

**PROTECTION MAINSTREAMING:** protection mainstreaming is a key principle guiding UNHCR interventions across the range of its operational engagements, including in the energy field. It refers to the process of incorporating protection principles and promoting meaningful access, safety and dignity, accountability and participation and empowerment in interventions in all aspects of programming. It also specifies the requirement to do no harm and to prevent and mitigate the risk of any unintended negative effects of interventions.<sup>9</sup>

**AGE, GENDER AND DIVERSITY<sup>10</sup> INCLUSION:** the UNHCR policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) aims to ensure that all segments of a population have equitable and non-discriminatory access to assistance and protection, and have a say in decisions that affect their lives. Through this approach, energy interventions should suitably and sustainably address different energy needs, and ensure that all energy-related technology is appropriate to different groups within the refugee community. Special measures to ensure inclusiveness and accessibility for specific groups of concern, including women, girls and boys, older persons and persons with disabilities, will inform and guide implementation of the Strategy.

**EQUITY:** the provision of energy must promote equity for all and support should be extended to surrounding communities wherever possible. Host communities may require particular assistance in the context of a humanitarian operation or to address their energy needs. The SDGs provide a basis for such an inclusive approach: the principle of leaving no one behind.

**PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT:** meaningful community participation will ensure that the agency and capacities of communities are recognized and engaged in developing interventions placing user needs and preferences first and foremost when designing and delivering energy responses.

**SUSTAINABILITY:** UNHCR will prioritize energy solutions that meet the current energy needs of refugees and host communities without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own energy needs. This will mean understanding refugees' energy needs, prioritizing renewable energy technologies, enhancing livelihood opportunities and strengthening the technical and managerial capacities of staff and partners.

**EFFICIENCY:** UNHCR is aiming to deliver high quality, efficient services in its operations. This includes giving priority to energy efficiency measures and reducing energy demands wherever possible. UNHCR will promote the careful use of energy resources by refugees, host communities, partner organizations, and raise awareness within the UNHCR organization.

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation and Response to Gender-based Violence, 2020

<sup>9</sup> For more information see the GPC

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR, Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, 2018





A Rohingya family learns to use their new solar lantern. Bangladesh.

## CONTEXT AND SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Despite growing awareness of the importance of energy for the wellbeing and protection of refugees, large displaced populations still lack sufficient access to clean, sustainable, reliable, appropriate and affordable energy. According to estimates by the Moving Energy Initiative<sup>11</sup>, some 85 per cent of displaced populations in camps burn biomass such as firewood for cooking, and some 97 per cent have limited or no access to electricity. In situations where firewood is the main source of fuel, the competition for dwindling natural resources is frequently a trigger for tension between refugees and host communities. It also has negative impacts on local ecosystems, which refugees often rely on for their livelihoods. The resulting environmental degradation can be long-lasting, expensive and difficult to reverse.

At the socioeconomic level, access to sustainable household energy is conducive to social cohesion in environments with scarce resources. More hours of light and access to electricity also offer more chances for productive activities like learning and business development, as well as greater mobile and data connectivity. These in turn facilitate improved well-being and self-reliance for refugees.

An additional energy issue in refugee situations is the energy used by humanitarian agencies, such as UNHCR, for their own operations. In some settings, a large proportion of the available energy is consumed by service providers. With the rapid development of new energy technologies, especially solar, there is an opportunity to reduce non-renewable energy expenditure by switching from fossil fuels to clean energy. Solar generation and energy storage solutions have not only become cheaper and more efficient, they now represent the fastest growing part of the global energy sector. Expanding and transforming energy systems towards such renewables offers opportunities for local, national and regional economies.

Transforming energy programming to reduce negative environmental impacts, while meeting the needs of refugees, host populations and humanitarian operations, requires close collaboration with refugees, host communities and host governments. Strengthened partnerships with donors, and between development and humanitarian actors will be essential for the transition to sustainable energy solutions that meet refugees' needs and improve their well-being and protection. Likewise, new partnerships are needed with the private sector and with research institutions in order to support innovative approaches to meeting energy needs in humanitarian situations.

UNHCR energy activities need to take into account and support important global commitments relating to energy and the environment. At a multilateral level, States are investing in ongoing efforts to implement the commitments outlined in the Paris Agreement.<sup>12</sup> The UN Climate Neutrality Strategy<sup>13</sup> also commits all UN entities to minimizing their impact on climate change by measuring their greenhouse gas emissions, making efforts to reduce these emissions and offsetting unavoidable emissions. This Strategy is complementary to the UN-wide Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030 Strategy, with the latter reflected in UNHCR energy activities.

The international community has acknowledged the key role of energy through the Sustainable Development Goals (2030 Agenda), which include SDG 7 – Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All. In addition to universal access, SDG 7 aims to achieve a significant increase in renewable energy and to double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency. UNHCR believes that access to sustainable, clean energy is closely linked to protection and a key factor in ensuring that basic needs are met, as well as in creating more sustainable and inclusive communities and building resilience to climate change.

<sup>11</sup> GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION (GPA) FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

<sup>12</sup> Paris Agreement

<sup>13</sup> Greening the Blue, the UN Climate Neutrality Strategy



These principles are supported by the Global Plan of Action for Sustainable Energy Solutions in Situations of Displacement<sup>14</sup>, which UNHCR cofounded in 2018.

In a similar vein, the Global Compact on Refugees<sup>15</sup> (GCR) calls for increased investment in renewable energy in countries hosting refugees, – in order to secure “safe access to fuel and energy”. It further encourages all actors to “promote integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems (...) in or near refugee-hosting rural and urban areas”. The GCR makes specific reference to the need to reduce disaster risks and recognizes that “environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements”.

In the GCR is highlighted the importance to “Bolster national capacity to address accommodation, (...), infrastructure and environmental challenges in or near refugee-hosting rural and urban areas”; and the focus of the intervention to advocate investments

“in closing the technology gap and scaling-up capacity development for smart, affordable and appropriate technologies and renewable energy in developing and least developed refugee hosting countries”

This Strategy acknowledges that current energy generation and consumption habits are not sustainable and need to change: renewable energy sources need to be integrated and overall energy consumption reduced. In this sense, interventions such as provision of LPG, to reduce environmental degradation during emergencies, have to be seen as a transitional approach pending the development of complete renewable energy solutions. UNHCR will act as a catalyst for energy collaboration in displacement settings in order to promote and complement protection, humanitarian assistance and solutions. UNHCR field operations around the globe will be paramount in localizing this Strategy and ensuring that the Agency’s catalytic and operational role is implemented in a locally appropriate way.

<sup>14</sup> Global Plan of Action for Sustainable Energy Solutions in Situations of Displacement

<sup>15</sup> A/73/12 (Part II) Global Compact on Refugees



Solar electricity is generated during the day and stored for use of street lighting at night in Cox's Bazar refugee camps.

## STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

The Strategic Outcomes were developed based on the global recognition that, in displacement situations and far beyond, current energy generation and consumption habits are not sustainable and need to change. In all five Strategic Outcome Areas<sup>16</sup>, UNHCR will facilitate multi-partner approaches and evidence-based actions founded on systematically collected and analysed data.

### ENERGY IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

**OUTCOME 1:** Vulnerable refugees meet their priority energy needs (cooking, lighting and heating) during emergency responses.

#### CHALLENGES:

The energy needs of refugee households are typically not sufficiently met from the onset of an emergency for them to be able to cook food, find their way around at night and keep warm, as called for in the UNHCR Emergency Policy<sup>17</sup>. This exposes newly arrived refugees to protection and health risks. Additionally, environmental damage can be extensive but is often overlooked, especially where firewood collection takes place.

#### HIGH-LEVEL GUIDANCE:

- Integrate emergency energy requirements into contingency plans, humanitarian needs assessments, emergency market analysis, and humanitarian interventions.
- Ensure that distribution of cooking fuel and an appropriate clean, efficient cooking stove as standard items in non-food distribution is facilitated or cash based support is granted to refugee households from the onset of an emergency.
- Wherever possible give preference to clean, sustainable cooking fuel.
- Provide solar lamps as standard items in-kind distributions or cash-based assistance to refugee households from the onset of an emergency.
- Ensure that distribution of heating fuel and appropriate clean, efficient heaters is facilitated in the provision of winterization items, combined with safety training and heat insulation measures, as appropriate where appropriate.
- Coordinate with development and private sector actors to identify energy systems for cooking, lighting and heating that are affordable, sustainable, safe and appropriate (vis-à-vis local regulations, resource availability, community acceptance, environmental impact and technical feasibility), in the longer term.

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, August 2019

<sup>17</sup> As per internal UNHCR organization, Outcome 1, 2, 3 and 4 is managed by the Department of Resilience And Solutions (DRS). Outcome 5 is managed by the Division of Financial and Administrative Management (DFAM).



Hot cornmeal being prepared for the recently arrived South Sudanese refugees at Kuluba, Uganda.



## CASE STUDY: KUTUPALONG, BANGLADESH, SAFE ACCESS TO CLEAN COOKING FUEL

In October 2018 UNHCR and partners started a large-scale distribution of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to Rohingya refugees sheltered in Kutupalong and the other refugee settlements in Bangladesh. In March 2019 the LPG initiative reached more than 100,000 refugee and host community households, providing a clean, healthy, safe and reliable source of energy for cooking. As part of the distribution, refugees received hands-on training on how to safely and responsibly use the LPG cylinders and stoves. To ensure households have a consistent reliable source of LPG, UNHCR has introduced the global distribution tool, which is based on the use of biometric data. This greatly reduces refugees' wait time for LPG refills which can now be dispensed in under 120 seconds. UNHCR's joint monitoring with partners has shown that this initiative immediately and drastically reduced protection risks associated with firewood collection, and health hazards have also been reduced as refugees no longer have to cook on open fires using wood or other materials they find. Furthermore, the use of LPG is preventing the collection of 700 metric tons of wood from local forests every day. This has allowed UNHCR with its partners, including IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature), to make progress on forest restoration by planting tens of thousands of trees in the refugee settlements. While this example represents a significant success, UNHCR's goal globally is to move towards low-carbon energy cooking solutions, when technological advances allow.



A Rohingya family enjoys cooking together with safe, clean LPG. Bangladesh.

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