

Basic Needs Approach in the Refugee Response

This document presents the basic needs approach that UNHCR is pursuing and expanding across operations when providing multi-purpose cash grants to refugees in collaboration with partners.

What is a Basic Needs Approach?

UNHCR defines the basic needs approach as a way to enable refugees, based on their socio-economic vulnerabilities, to meet their basic needs through means to survive and access to services.

Anchored in a rights-based approach and delivered in partnership, it is an integral part of protection and solutions.

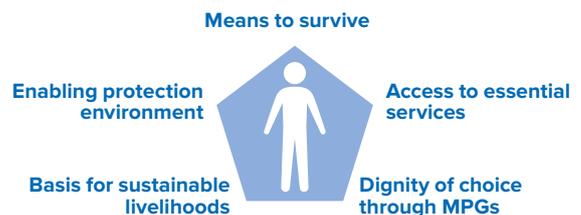
Utilizing a poverty lens, the basic needs approach consists of such elements as: identity management, multi-sectoral needs assessment, response analysis, delivery of assistance, referrals, accountability to affected people and monitoring.

UNHCR identifies refugees in need and with partners analyses their economic vulnerability based on a context-specific minimum level of expenditure – as a poverty line – that a refugee household needs to meet the costs of food, basic household items, rent, and water each month.

UNHCR and partners then design the response to enable refugee households to fill – at a minimum – these basic needs through assistance and service provision, both year-round and during seasonal events, such as harsh winters.

The basic needs approach is particularly suited to Multi-Purpose Cash Grants (MPGs), which can be more cost effective and timely than in-kind assistance, delivered at scale to a large dispersed refugee population. MPGs empower refugees, enabling households to decide how to prioritize their expenditures.

Why a Basic Needs Approach?



Being part of UNHCR's core business, it **facilitates the delivery of an immediate minimum safety net**, to be complemented by more specific sector interventions through in-kind or cash, or ensuring access to services.

- It is an **integral and critical part of the protection and solutions strategy**: it ensures protection through registration and accountability to affected people.
- It also promotes refugee **access to national systems and services and longer-term and sustainable solutions**.
- **It puts the refugee at the centre** of assistance design, encouraging sectors to combine their efforts into **one coordinated and standardized package of MPGs and services**.
- Anchored in multi-sectoral needs assessments, it promotes **do no harm**, addresses inconsistencies in assistance levels and can **result in efficiency gains**.
- It can **facilitate the referral** of households or individuals to a specific sector or protection intervention.

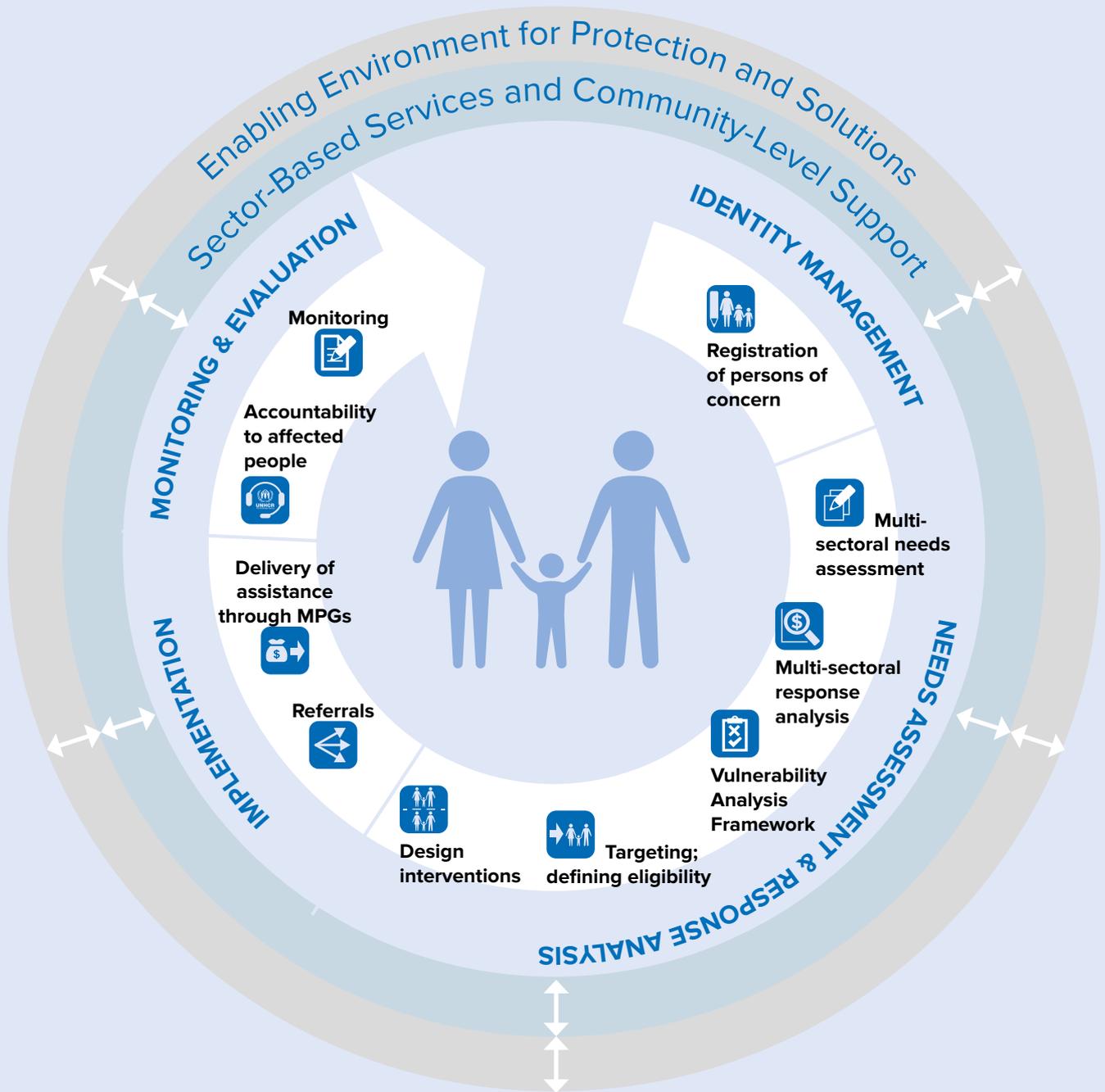
UNHCR and Basic Needs

UNHCR has employed a multi-sector response to refugee emergencies and cash assistance for more than two decades. The UNHCR Results Framework defines basic needs in terms of access to basic services and assistance in health, nutrition, WASH, food, shelter, energy, education, as well as domestic items and specialised services for people with specific needs. The current basic needs approach builds on these experiences, with the added value of cash becoming an option in an increasing number of contexts.

The Syria crisis has grounded existing sector-based approaches to basic needs in a common understanding of socio-economic vulnerability of refugee families and communities within the overall protection and solutions strategy for refugees and a broader complementary coordination system. Recent policy directions, such as alternatives to camps, has increased focus on building on existing structures and development initiatives, including facilitating access of refugees¹ to national service delivery systems so to ensure sustainability of the response and foster solutions.

¹ Refugees refers in this document to refugees, asylum-seekers, returned refugees and stateless people.

BASIC NEEDS APPROACH



* The end-to-end solution cycle is the process by which UNHCR and partners organize their programming. While conceptually the end-to-end solution operates in a sequential fashion – registration → needs assessment and analysis → implementation → monitoring – in reality certain phases often take place simultaneously (e.g., assessment and implementation) or repeatedly (e.g., monitoring throughout the year) depending on the situation and operational realities. The end-to-end solutions cycle is dynamic, with constant adjustments to programming, reflecting the variable nature of the environments in which UNHCR works.

AN END-TO-END SOLUTION

The elements of the basic needs approach are pursued in partnership, with partners engaging in or managing various activities. It is essential that the basic needs approach is pursued in a coordinated manner as its elements are all closely linked, feeding back to and building on each other.

1. IDENTITY MANAGEMENT



Registration of persons of concern

By providing a record of their status, registration helps protect refugees and give them access to services or assistance. It defines the total potential beneficiary population and captures data that can be used for initial vulnerability modelling and targeting. When combined with biometrics, registration can reinforce beneficiary authentication during assistance delivery. Registration can identify persons with specific needs who may need targeted interventions or require adaptations to regular programming.

2. NEEDS ASSESSMENT & RESPONSE ANALYSIS



Multi-sectoral needs assessment

Involving refugees and partners in participatory and joint assessments, in particular multi-sectoral, is a critical element, capturing additional socio-economic and protection data which through thorough analysis can refine vulnerability models and result in referral of individuals in need. The collection of multi-sectoral data and information at the household level on income and expenditure as samples, can inform for example econometric modelling.



Multi-sectoral response analysis

The selection of transfer modality will be based on sound and joint response analysis, considering such aspects as national and existing mechanisms, such as social safety nets, market capacity, political feasibility, delivery options, cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and systematic consideration of using cash-based interventions as the priority means of providing assistance and services. For guidance, please see the [Operational Guidelines for CBIs in Displacement Settings](#).



Vulnerability Analysis Framework

The framework defines which households are vulnerable among the entire refugee population. Various socio-economic or sector models can be applied as tools to prioritize who is eligible. An efficient tool for predicting the welfare of all refugee households is econometric welfare modelling. For example, please see the [Vulnerability Assessment Framework in Jordan](#).



Targeting; defining eligibility

Anchored in a rights-based approach, the identification and selection of individuals or households for appropriate assistance are based on multi-sectoral analysis of protection risks, wealth, and food insecurity, the vulnerability framework and the identified needs. Information from monitoring is analysed can be used to update targeting eligibility criteria and make other adjustments.



Design interventions

The definition of the value of assistance required by a refugee household to stay above the poverty line is based on multi-sectoral assessment of the expenditure a refugee will occur to cover such needs as rent, food, non-food items, education and health costs or based on existing government standards. This complements assistance and services. The Minimum Expenditure Basket is a useful methodology. For guidance, please see the [Operational Guidance and Toolkit for Multipurpose Cash Grants](#).

3. IMPLEMENTATION



Referrals

Building on registration data and assessment, the basic needs approach facilitates referral of persons with protection needs, or with other immediate needs, to the appropriate service provider. This includes referral of refugees to national systems, which is a priority.



Delivery of assistance

In line with UNHCR's [Policy on Cash-Based Interventions](#) and the cash commitment to the Grand Bargain, the delivery of cash assistance should be done through common transfer mechanisms accessible to all humanitarian partners on a direct and equal basis that promotes cost efficiency and collaboration.

4. MONITORING & EVALUATION



Accountability to affected people

Refugees must receive updates and information on how and when to receive their assistance, and complaint, appeals and feedbacks mechanisms must be in place, as part of a broader two-way communication approach with the persons of concern. Call centers and outreach are examples of effective means for such communication.



Monitoring

Monitoring the performance and impact enables understanding of the effectiveness of the interventions, market impact, and service provider performance. Monitoring can be done through post-distribution monitoring, appeals system, feedback mechanisms, and on-site monitoring. Monitoring of refugee access to services and interventions, including to national systems, is critical to ensure that they are not discriminated in any way. Monitoring of protection outcomes is equally important so to ensure for example social inclusion or to detect negative coping mechanisms.

An Integral Part of Protection and Solutions

The basic needs approach is not pursued in isolation and is always situated within the broader protection and solutions strategy for refugees.

- Meeting the basic needs of refugees through cash and in-kind services and assistance has important protection outcomes, including decreased risks of negative coping mechanisms. However, **refugee men, women, girls and boys face protection risks** — including around legal status, access to services, gender-based violence, child protection and risk of *refoulement* — **that cannot be addressed by monetized assistance alone.**
- The basic needs approach **is focused on individual household forms of assistance.** It does not replace the need for sector specific needs assessment, targeting and programming.
- **Specific needs may at times be better addressed through non-cash sector interventions,** such as where the local market faces supply disruptions, where infrastructural interventions at the community level would be more appropriate, where refugees do not have access to services and in situations involving specific protection concerns.
- **A basic needs approach is implemented with a view towards solutions.** This is particularly important in country operations with limited numbers of refugees where they are part of national systems and development programmes, such as when they enjoy financial inclusion. UNHCR has a key role in ensuring these linkages through referrals, advocacy and monitoring in close collaboration with all relevant partners.

Coordinating the Basic Needs Approach

Under the overall leadership of the host government, the **Refugee Coordination Model (RCM)** is the framework for coordinating and delivering protection and assistance in refugee operations. The RCM is applicable in all refugee situations and is adapted according to the phases of the response. Cash assistance, including MPGs, is integrated in the RCM and used as an implementation modality across sectors where appropriate and feasible.

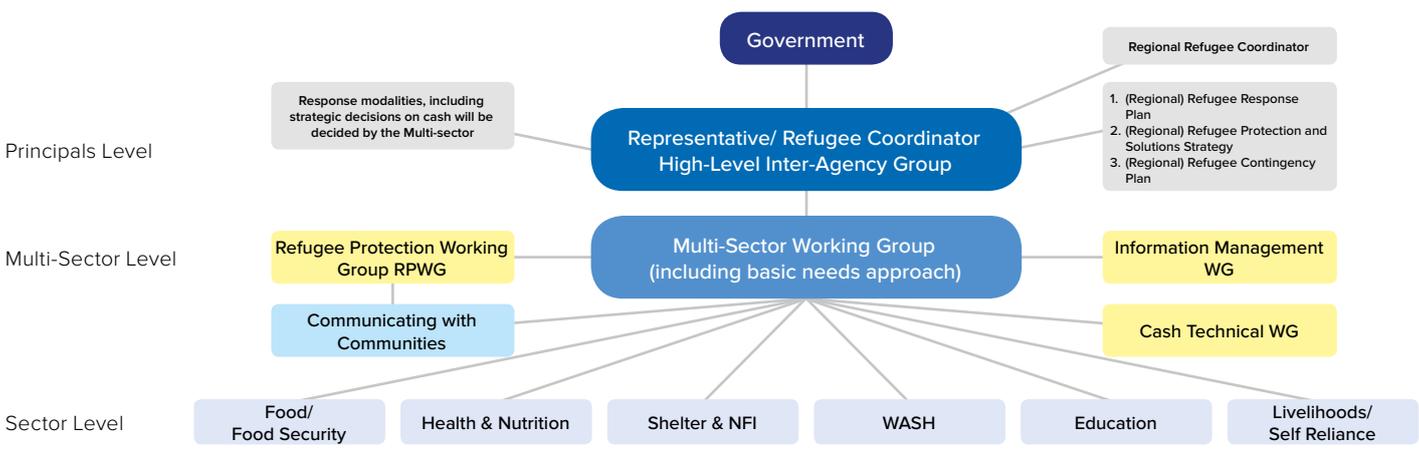
UNHCR is accountable to refugees for their protection and welfare and has therefore a comprehensive engagement in coordinating and delivering multi-sectorial assistance to them. The basic needs approach is an integral part of the multi-sectoral approach that the RCM is based on and is central to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.⁴ It is pursued in partnership.

The basic needs approach is not a sector in itself, but rather a multi-sector function that engages with and complements the other technical sectors coordinated by partners and / or governments. Its core functions presented on page three are all conducted as a coordinated multi-sector approach by multi-sector working groups, chaired by UNHCR. The Inter-Agency Refugee Response Plan reflects well the basic needs approach and cash considerations.

Coordination with the government when meeting the basic needs of refugees is a priority in order to build on existing national systems and development initiatives, such as social safety nets, while advocating for refugee rights. Working with development actors is equally important in order to implement a sustainable approach which builds on the capacity of refugees. The model below explains where the coordination of the basic needs approach sits within the Refugee Coordination Model.

Refugee Coordination Model

*The structures may be adapted and replicated based on context and need.



UNHCR is together with partners applying the basic needs approach in different formats to assist over two million refugees in such countries as Jordan, Niger, Malaysia, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Chad. For any questions, please contact the Cash-Based Interventions Section in the Division of Programme Support and Management at hqcash@unhcr.org.

⁴ The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, or “CRRF” as it is referred to in short, is attached to the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants which was adopted by the UN General Assembly Summit on Refugees and Migrants on 19 September 2016 (A/RES/71/1) and, as its name suggests, sets out the framework for comprehensive responses for major refugee situations.