UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Route Based Approach

UNHCR's strategic foresight along prioritized mixed movement routes

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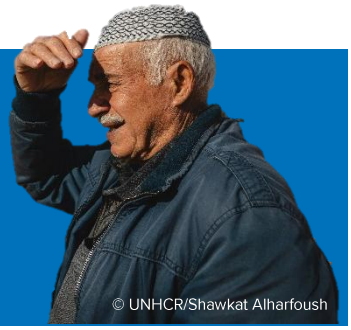
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UNHCR has developed a practical methodology for route-based predictive analysis. This methodology aims to strengthen route-based analysis within the broader Routes Monitor ecosystem. It draws on innovative approaches such as those outlined in the UN Futures Lab's strategic Foresight Guide, and incorporates horizon scanning and scenario building.

Routes Monitor is the main entry point for route-based evidence, movement data, protection analysis and related analytical products. Within this architecture, the scenario methodology provides a forward-looking analytical layer, helping UNHCR and partners assess how mixed-movement routes may evolve and what this could mean for preparedness, protection analysis and operational decision-making. and operational decision-making.

Why is this important?

Mixed movements can change rapidly. Understanding how the factors influencing the movements may evolve is essential for preparedness, anticipatory action, and evidence-based decision making.

This scenario-building approach will help UNHCR, partners, policy makers and Governments explore a range of plausible future movement trends and identify the risks, opportunities, and operational implications that may emerge along mixed movement routes. This methodology strengthens Routes Monitor by adding a forward-looking component to route-based analysis. By considering how different drivers of change may interact, the exercise will support stakeholders in anticipating potential developments and preparing for their humanitarian consequences.

This approach is currently being piloted in Mali and will be refined based on lessons from the pilot. The scenarios are not forecasts; they describe plausible ways the situation could develop.

How does the methodology work?

The methodology builds on established humanitarian risk analysis and foresight approaches, including ACAPS scenario development methodologies and the UN Foresight Guide. It combines structured expert judgement, horizon scanning, and signal monitoring to assess how emerging trends, risks, and uncertainties may shape future developments. The methodology combines two complementary components:

1. Scenario Development

UNHCR leads a structured analytical process to identify key trends, drivers of change, emerging risks and critical uncertainties that may influence future mixed-movement dynamics. This process may be informed by consultations with subject-matter experts and relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.

This analysis is used to develop a set of plausible future scenarios illustrating how the context may evolve over a defined timeframe, taking into account:

- key trends and drivers of change
- emerging risks and uncertainties
- assumptions shaping the current operating environment
- possible interactions between different drivers.

2. Signals Monitoring and Analysis

To support the scenarios with evidence, UNHCR monitors and analyses a set of indicators across four domains:

Movement pressure

Security context

Policy and protection environment

Humanitarian response capacity and access

Changes in these indicators will provide signals of how the situation is evolving and help show which scenarios are best supported by the current evidence.

What are the outputs?

The exercise produces three practical outputs:

Scenario narratives

A set of three to four short scenarios describing different but plausible ways the context could evolve. These scenarios help stakeholders consider potential humanitarian consequences and preparedness actions under different future conditions.

Signal dataset

A structured dataset containing signal scores, supporting evidence, and analysis across the four monitoring domains.

Score visualization

A visualization translating signal scores into an accessible overview of current trends and emerging risks providing an actionable summary of signal scores by domain and indicator; overall likelihood and risk readings; key drivers influencing the assessment; emerging trends and areas requiring closer monitoring; and implications for preparedness and anticipatory action. This visual output is designed to support operational decision-making, communication with partners, and regular review of evolving risks along mixed movement routes.

This provides an evidence base for ongoing monitoring and scenario updates. They contribute to the route-based analytical resources available through Routes Monitor, enabling users to assess trends, monitor evolving conditions and consider the potential implications of different scenarios within a common analytical framework.

How can the results be practically used?

The scenarios and signals are intended to support preparedness planning, anticipatory action, operational decision-making, protection analysis, advocacy and engagement with partners, regular monitoring of evolving risks along mixed-movement routes. By combining expert knowledge with systematic signal monitoring, the methodology helps stakeholders move from reacting to events toward anticipating and preparing for potential future developments. To ensure these outputs are accessible and connected to the wider evidence base, Routes Monitor will serve as the primary entry point for presenting or referencing scenario outputs, signal visualizations, methodological notes and related route-based analysis.

Contact
Email: ams-dips@unhcr.org
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