2022–2025

Global Development Strategy: Shelter and Settlements

NRC NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

Global Development Strategy: Shelter and Settlements

Type of document: Strategy document

Approved by: Marit Glad, Global Programme Director

Owner: Amelia Rule, Global Shelter and Settlements Lead

Published: November 2022

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this document.

History of revision

Date:	Name:	Action:

Cover photo: Hugh Kinsella Cunningham/NRC

Displaced community members at a shelter site constructed by NRC in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

Shelter and Settlements

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is one of the leading Shelter and Settlements (S&S) actors in the humanitarian sector. We are recognised by stakeholders for our expertise on emergency and transitional shelter, longer-term housing solutions and settlement-wide interventions such as community infrastructure and school construction. NRC provides dignified, durable and sustainable solutions that create lasting change beyond our first-line response, with wider impacts in terms of health, safety, inclusion and self-reliance.

By the end of 2025, our work will be developed through participatory approaches. Shelter is a process rather than just a product. We already demonstrate technical and engineering proficiency; however, successful and sustainable shelter relies on software activities to fully realise positive impact. Through a more holistic design of our projects, we will deepen our expertise in providing safe and inclusive assistance suitable to the length of displacement. We will be a key player in environmental issues and access to clean energy in Shelter and Settlements and will enable the wider sector through our expertise and tools. We will focus on defining our settlements-based approach as an opportunity for meaningful sectoral integration supporting pathways to self-reliance, and we will be able to document positive change.

To get to this point, the global Shelter and Settlements development strategy will focus on the priorities below. Click on each heading to go to the respective section.

1 Use, support and change local markets to meet people's S&S needs

2 Scale up NRC's clean energy portfolio

3 Ensure dignified shelter suitable for the length of displacement

4 Explore the settlements-based approach as a basis for wider programming in NRC

5 Improve adherence to Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP)

6 Adapt to the changing climate and reduce environmental impact

7 Enhance our work on housing, land and property (HLP) rights

8 Engage in advocacy to change policy and practice

9 Scale up and multiply impact through digital technology

10 Improve collaboration and exchange of expertise with local actors

Introduction

What is the purpose of the development strategy? It shows where NRC will focus global programme development and innovation efforts, and towards what areas we will channel internal resources and global fundraising efforts in relation to the core competency (CC). The strategy covers NRC's global portfolio, therefore countries and regions will find workstreams that are more or less relevant for their particular context.

Who is the audience? The strategy is primarily intended for the core competency technical line and other relevant staff at country, regional and global level, but can also be shared externally.

Who will implement it? The global core competency leads are responsible for leading the implementation of the strategy. They will engage with regional and country colleagues, primarily through the technical line, to get input, exchange experiences, share work, conduct pilots, develop trainings and guidance, fundraise etc. This will be done both remotely and through face-to-face workshops and seminars at country, regional or global level. Global technical guidance and tools will be developed to support the implementation. The strategy is ambitious and will require successful fundraising if we are to achieve our goals.

What is expected from countries and regions? Except for prioritised workstreams (see below), country and regional offices can select the workstreams that are most relevant for them. The response policy provides a framework for the activities and themes falling within the scope of each core competency, and countries can implement any activities within that scope that are relevant in their context. Contributions to the core competency development strategies should be factored into the annual workplans and balanced scorecards of the core competency team. As guidance becomes available for new areas of work, countries and regions are expected to follow this. Please reach out to the global lead if your country/region is planning to do, or already doing, work or pilots in line with a workstream.

What does it mean if a workstream is prioritised? All country and regional offices implementing the core competency are expected to contribute to or implement elements of this workstream within the current strategy period 2022–2025. Prioritised workstreams are marked with orange in the overview on page 3 and with a grey flag (▶) after the heading.

How did we arrive at these workstreams? The strategy was developed through a participatory process across the organisation. The process identified areas of work needed to: 1) address quality issues discovered through monitoring, evaluations and risk monitoring to ensure we comply with the NRC Response Policy and the quality standards we adhere to; 2) stay relevant by responding to global trends in the sector and beyond; and 3) deliver on the NRC Global Strategy.

What does the strategy not do? It does not: 1) set boundaries for what NRC does and does not do within a core competency (see NRC Response Policy); 2) provide technical guidance on how NRC will implement certain activities (see framing papers, handbooks, guidance notes); 3) promote NRC's activities and approaches (see capacity statements, value propositions and programme presentations).

What is the duration of the strategy? The strategy reflects the duration of the NRC Global Strategy 2022–2025, and includes a mid-term review.

Please note: NRC has clear ambitions to make all our programmes more people-centric and improve how we design and implement responses as one – both across core competencies, and between programmes and advocacy. How we will go about this is still not decided. These two elements will therefore be strengthened across the core competency development strategies as part of the mid-term review.

Incentive-based volunteers installing a window as part of NRC's caravan repairs in Zaatari camp, Jordan. Photo: Tina Abu Hanna/NRC

1 Use, support and change local markets to meet people's S&S needs

Strategic outcome:

Shelter and Settlements programmes have the expertise to undertake market system analysis to make informed modality choices, utilise critical markets, and increase access to markets for the people we serve.

Ongoing S&S programmes use markets to deliver many of our services, through interventions targeting housing, construction or labour market actors (tenants, property owners, suppliers, regulators, etc.). We also engage in cash and voucher assistance (CVA) to provide shelter, infrastructure, essential household items and related expenditures (rent, utilities, etc.). However, we have strong evidence that cash alone, without a market analysis and companion programming, continues to fail to meet shelter needs or be sustainable.

By 2025, we want to improve our capacity and resources to deliver services using market system approaches, while empowering communities to make their own financial choices. With a focus on inclusion, we will ensure market assessments and risk assessments become key mandatory steps to inform programme decision-making and choice of complementary services.

We will apply systems thinking to our market approaches, with a focus on local leadership, connections to livelihoods and addressing structural barriers to safe housing solutions, especially for women and marginalised groups.

Global initiatives will include guidance notes, tools and training to ensure S&S teams have:

- a better understanding of formal and informal markets (labour, construction, and rental housing markets) and can create better-designed programmes to engage with these markets
- continued support to design successful rental market interventions, in collaboration with ICLA and LFS teams, to build sustainable projects
- access to new approaches where relevant, such as housing finance models, housing insurance, and hosting arrangements
- complementary guidance for cash-for-shelter programming, such as engaging with the rental market on favourable terms and identifying quality materials for repair or construction

2 Scale up NRC's clean energy portfolio

Strategic outcome:

Displaced populations have access to reliable, clean, affordable and sustainable energy that will improve their living conditions at home, across the community (schools, infrastructure, etc.) and contribute to self-reliance (livelihoods).

Energy is a daily necessity at home for the forcibly displaced, whether it be for cooking, lighting, heating and cooling of shelters, powering or maintaining connectivity. However, sustainable access to energy is often inefficiently supported in emergency responses. Without energy access for shelters, institutions and settlements, protection risks increase, especially for women and marginalised groups. Health and access to education are diminished, and livelihood opportunities are restricted. At the household level, carbon-based fuel is often part of winterisation projects, but we continue to struggle to make fuel consumption efficient. At a community level, there are few piloted clean energy projects which are sustainable in the long term.

By 2025, we will improve our energy efficiency across shelter typologies, and make access to sustainable, affordable energy a cornerstone of creating safe and healthy homes and communities. All energy projects, regardless of the phase of response, will start with an energy needs assessment.

Global initiatives will include learning and developing tools from pilot programmes to ensure access to clean energy. With these tools, coupled with technical deployments from energy experts, our teams will be supported to understand diverse energy needs, and analyse and identify existing as well as new energy solutions.

NRC S&S will work together with other core competencies on guidance to ensure an integrated energy approach, including:

- WASH on behaviour change in our S&S programmes
- LFS on using inclusive, gender-sensitive, market-based approaches, and on working with the private sector and local entrepreneurs to access energy
- Education on access to clean energy in schools
- Protection from Violence on community engagement to increase ownership and maintenance of energy solutions in settlements

In 2020, solar panels were installed at the NRC office in Mankien, South Sudan. The team now have their own power supply and enjoy renewable energy 24/7. Photo: Iban Colón/NORCAP

3 Ensure dignified shelter suitable for the length of displacement ⚑

> **Strategic outcome:**
>
> Displaced populations have access to dignified shelter suitable for the length of displacement, and our S&S interventions provide a foundation for wider sectoral impacts and pathways to self-reliance.

NRC recognises the life-saving nature of emergency shelter. We also know, however that a tent, a place in a collective centre or a one-off rental support are insufficient as a shelter response beyond the initial weeks of displacement. There is often an over-reliance on emergency solutions such as shelter non-food items and tents, which if repeated, can perpetuate vulnerabilities for displaced populations.

From first-line assistance, shelter solutions provide outcomes across all our core competencies. Shelter interventions protect dignity, provide privacy, security and protection, and support physical and mental health as well as being a foundation to self-reliance.

By 2025, we will provide dignified shelter assistance, from emergency shelter to longer-term solutions. This assistance can be improved or adapted over time to make sure affected populations are living in adequate shelter, within a healthy environment, and as part of a community with increased capacity to cope. We will leverage the wider aspect of shelter programming to better support affected populations. For example, learning outcomes for children improve if they have an adequate place to sleep, having storage space means water is kept clean, and enhanced ventilation in homes improves health and reduces vector-borne diseases.

Global initiatives will include:

- developing integrated guidance with other core competencies – Education, ICLA, LFS, Protection from Violence and WASH – to promote the wider impact of shelter and joint sectoral outcomes under NRC's One Response work
- gathering evidence of shelter as a foundation for self-reliance
- exploring improved transitional shelter options through working with civil society and local actors, including hosting and repairs and rehabilitation
- supporting best practice such as effective information, education and communication materials developed together with communities, and use of behaviour change communication

4 Explore the settlements-based approach as a basis for wider programming in NRC ▶

Strategic outcome:

NRC programmes improve our support to communities affected by displacement by placing settlement programming at the heart of our response, encouraging integration and community participation to create connected and sustainable living environments.

People do not only require support at a household level, nor do they perceive their recovery in sectoral terms. Often household-level activities are not embedded into the wider settlement context and environment, with shelters located in risk areas, far from services, health centres, schools and community infrastructure. Equally, S&S teams often work on infrastructure projects with no shelter or wider site improvement outcomes, stretching capacity to work on S&S programmes.

By 2025, we want to phase out S&S teams constructing for other parts of the organisation without S&S outcomes. We will explore our settlement-based programming, starting with ensuring all our settlement interventions are part of integrated programming, are identified by the communities, and are connected to shelter outcomes. By ensuring the population and their homes are connected to infrastructure and public space, we will improve wellbeing, safety and security, sense of identity and social cohesion, and will provide a place to belong.

Global initiatives will include guidance and tools to support:

- exploration of an NRC "settlements-based approach"[1], collaborating with local authorities to address the shelter and wider settlement needs
- developing our S&S community participatory assessments and planning (Site Management/UDOC), in collaboration with the Protection from Violence team
- exploring how to phase out S&S teams constructing for other parts of the organisation without any S&S outcomes
- ensuring WASH services become an integral part of settlement solutions
- working with the LFS team on settlement improvements to improve standards of living and achieve both LFS and S&S programmatic outcomes

---

[1] Settlements Approach Guidance Note.

5 Improve adherence to Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP) ⚑

Strategic outcome:

There is meaningful participation of communities in all steps of programming, ensuring safe and inclusive Shelter and Settlements programming, amplifying the voices of affected populations, and improving access for people with disabilities.

Participation, facilitating better inclusion, and safe programming have a long history in the shelter and built environment sector, but we are yet to see the needed paradigm shift which hands over decision-making power to those affected. Across the humanitarian sector, affected families in emergencies are not involved enough in decisions made on the type of assistance they want or need, especially in complex emergencies. This applies especially to the specific needs of women and people living with disabilities.

By 2025, as part of Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP), meaningful participation will be a central part of our work to improve inclusive access to our interventions and facilitate solutions-embedding in the communities we work with. Instead of being given what is available or what someone else decides – leading to disempowerment, lack of ownership and poorly designed projects – our work will be led by the voices of the community as much as possible, prioritising their specific capacities and vulnerabilities.

Global initiatives will include:

- applying SIP Minimum Standards to safeguard the people-centred nature of NRC's programmes
- a focus on community planning and participatory design throughout the project cycle, from assessments to co-creating projects that build on the aspirations of those we work with
- building skills to facilitate participation in S&S programming and highlighting the benefits of diverse, inclusive, multi-disciplinary teams
- developing tools for safety and security throughout the construction process including operation, maintenance, and decommissioning
- applying results of community feedback mechanisms to ensure we are learning and adapting projects to the changing needs, risks and impacts of our interventions
- addressing SIP in our settlement interventions, including participation in assessments, planning, project design, and monitoring and evaluation
- ensuring site safety during construction through improved contract management

Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP):

SIP ensures the mainstreaming of protection, age, gender and diversity in NRC programmes. Our SIP Minimum Standards describe a number of actions, in a suggested hierarchy of urgency, that guide NRC country offices to ensure that our programming is safe, accessible, accountable and participatory.

Batulo Mohamed, a drought-displaced mother with five children, constructs a makeshift shelter on the outskirts of Baidoa, Somalia. Photo: Abdulkadir Mohamed/NRC

6 Adapt to the changing climate and reduce environmental impact ⚑

> **Strategic outcome:**
>
> Shelter and Settlements programmes address climate change mitigation and adaptation and reduce the environmental impact of our projects while ensuring quality assistance to displaced populations.

The changing climate, caused by human activity, has a huge impact on the environment and habitat where vulnerable displaced populations live. Droughts, flooding and storms also mean more people are likely to be displaced, putting them in precarious positions and in need of more emergency and longer-term shelter solutions. Fewer natural resources are available, and their scarcity may contribute to reduced social cohesion and conflict, further exacerbating shelter and settlement needs and access to the materials we need to address them.

By 2025, we will aim to avoid further harm to the local environment by reviewing the process of programme delivery and our contribution to carbon emissions through our choice of transport, procurement options, delivery modality, shelter typology, energy consumption, and waste management.

We will prioritise response options that reduce the need for new construction, such as repair, rehabilitation, hosting or rental interventions. When choosing response modalities, the NRC Environmental Minimal Standards will be applied, alongside the use of environment screenings such as NEAT+, a project level tool with a S&S module.

Global initiatives will include:

- guidance on environmental screening and how to prioritise rehabilitation, recycling, and the elimination of waste
- research to investigate shelter solutions which are developed locally, respond to vernacular construction methods, and are based on market system assessments
- sharing of innovation efforts across country offices, with a focus on scaling and transferring lessons to other locations
- reducing impact to the local environment, and exploring positive impacts, ensuring climate-resilient settlements

Due to climate change and its associated impacts, Somalia is now recording more wet and dry weather events, often with disastrous consequences – as seen in this village in Jowhar District in 2021. Photo: Abdulkadir Mohamed/NRC

7 Enhance our work on housing, land and property (HLP) rights

Strategic outcome:

Shelter and Settlements programmes perform due diligence and work to improve security of tenure for affected populations, especially women, in all phases of the response.

Housing, land and property (HLP) rights are crucial for the economic and social wellbeing of displaced populations. In situations of conflict and reconstruction, the loss of these rights impacts women and girls disproportionately. However, in complex settings it can be challenging to understand the legal reality on the ground, and how tenure systems, arrangements and practices affect security of tenure for at-risk groups.

In terms of S&S programming, security of tenure is part of our Sphere[2] standards, and doing our due diligence checks is essential for safe and sustainable interventions. Security of tenure is a foundation of the right to adequate housing.

By 2025, our programmes will systematically assess security of tenure. They will carry out due diligence for our interventions in all phases of displacement and will build on our existing expertise in urban displacement.

Building on existing NRC guidance on HLP and due diligence, we will develop tailored guidance notes, tools and training on how we can best support displaced people, especially women, to exercise their right to adequate housing and their HLP rights.

Global initiatives will include:

- working with ICLA to negotiate terms for shelter and access to land, and achieving the five key Sphere actions in our S&S work
- collaborating with ICLA on due diligence in our S&S work and ensuring we implement S&S programmes to support security of tenure
- ensuring an understanding of how tenure systems, arrangements and practices affect security of tenure for at-risk groups
- supporting the mainstreaming of protection from forced eviction in our programming

---

[2] Definition of "security of tenure" in the Sphere Handbook:
https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/sphere/#ch008_008

8 Engage in advocacy to change policy and practice

Strategic outcome:

Advocacy globally, regionally and locally plays a clear role in supporting our Shelter and Settlements work, from reaching displaced populations and ensuring housing and land rights are observed, to promoting access to adequate housing and infrastructure.

NRC Shelter and Settlements strives to assist displacement-affected people to (re)build their homes and communities. But this task is too big to be undertaken by shelter specialists alone. There is a need and an opportunity to better integrate our advocacy efforts with our S&S programming to achieve more dignified, durable shelter solutions, and reduce our environmental impact.

By 2025, NRC Advocacy and S&S will be working collaboratively to advocate for people's opportunity to influence their own shelter and settlements options and solutions. Our messages will be informed by the evidence we gather through our programming: our data collection, research and analysis, using The Right to Adequate Housing as a framework.[3] Advocacy efforts will also be developed with the Global Shelter Cluster and will be based on engagement with the communities we serve, especially women and marginalised groups.

Global initiatives will include:

- guidance on how to influence policy and practice, including an evidence-based S&S advocacy strategy focusing on:
  - influencing law, policies and/or practices that have a discriminatory effect in relation to the right to adequate housing and HLP rights
  - influencing policies and/or practices that restrict achieving quality shelter and settlement solutions
  - contexts where governance issues are limiting people's power in energy markets, and where NRC will advocate for change to provide equal access including gender equality and climate justice
  - increasing the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing for those that we serve

- continuation of support for humanitarian coordination mechanisms and advocacy, especially that of the Global Shelter Cluster at both a global level as part

---

[3] The Right to Adequate Housing framework:
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf

of the Strategic Advisory Board, and national level, where we co-lead the Cluster in a response

9 Scale up and multiply impact using digital technology

Strategic outcome:

Shelter and Settlements programmes use appropriate data and digital technology to improve participation, efficiency and quality programming for the people we serve.

Over 100 million people are now displaced and more than half are living in inadequate shelter conditions, yet the humanitarian sector rarely reaches more than 20 per cent of needs. Some needs can be more easily met than others, but many people need additional and more sophisticated services. Digital solutions are needed to support quality and efficiency in our responses so we can focus on those people that need more tailored support. These solutions will increase our ability to access hard-to-reach populations, monitoring contexts, measuring our impact, and increasing participation of displacement-affected people in our projects.

By 2025, data and digital technology will become a key part of our S&S programming, from assessment and analysis, through communicating best shelter practices with communities, to remote monitoring and design software. Over the next four years, NRC will contribute to digital innovation in S&S and enhance digital skills. We encourage the exploration and testing of technologies, with the objective of identifying how these approaches can scale up our shelter and settlement activities and multiply our impact.

Through our engagement in digital modalities and global initiatives we will:

- expand our outreach and two-way information sharing to achieve greater participation in the design of our programmes and improve the monitoring of shelter activities
- introduce the use of geographic information systems (GIS) where appropriate, providing more accurate, efficient data collection and mapping, supporting stronger data analysis, such as monitoring our environmental impacts, mapping where people are sheltering, and rapidly assessing what damage has been incurred during a conflict
- strengthen evidence-based decisions and programme design and contribute to ensuring that our S&S teams are trained and equipped to use NRC's digital programme tools

NRC staff running a focus group discussion for an environmental impact assessment in Hpa-An, Myanmar, using GIS and KOBO data collection methods to look at soil erosion and flooding impacts. Photo: Nwe Nwe/NRC

10 Improve collaboration and exchange of expertise with local actors

Strategic outcome:

Shelter and Settlements programmes are embedded in local community and governance systems to increase local ownership and sustainability of humanitarian interventions.

NRC recognises that local actors are the main responders in any crisis, and we already collaborate with different types of local actors in the countries where we work. However, we want to do much better and significantly increase our collaboration and exchange of expertise with local actors.

There are a multitude of local actors that are relevant for our S&S work. By 2025, we will have prioritised local authorities and civil society, as we see them as particularly relevant for the implementation of inclusive and sustainable projects and we need to prioritise our efforts.

Global initiatives will include:

- identifying best practices that increase access for local actors to add their expertise and be a key part of the decision-making process in the provision of S&S support
- supporting and learning from initiatives looking at continuity of services when NRC exits, with a focus on building local governance models, especially for community infrastructure
- exploring secondments to local authorities to provide additional support on technical areas related to shelter, housing, and wider settlement/urban design, and to increase two-way knowledge sharing
- supporting opportunities for NRC to share technical resources, such as digital expertise, information and data management and mapping, with civil society organisations to help increase their reach and impact
- using the settlement-based approach to ensure meaningful collaboration with local authorities in settlement-wide interventions

In 2018, NRC built shelters and latrines in Al-Mishqafa camp in Yemen. Now we work there as part of an integrated approach, supporting residents with ICLA and Protection from Violence programming. Photo: Ingrid Prestetun/NRC