



Tateh, refugee recipient of 2016 Innovation Fund in Tindouf, Algeria, constructs adobe shelter from PET.

UNHCR Proposal for the Government of Belgium

Fueling innovation from the field up: The Innovation Fund 2.0

UNHCR Innovation

February, 2018

Project overview

Project Title:	<i>Fueling innovation from the field up: The Innovation Fund 2.0</i>
Total requested contribution:	<i>EUR 1,000,000 (USD 1,226,994)*</i>
Implementation Period:	<i>12 months from the start of the project</i>
Summary of Project and Expected Outcomes:	<i>The UNHCR Innovation Fund 2.0 aims to foster field-based innovation by providing support to discrete, well-defined projects that fall outside the scope of prioritised UNHCR operations and access to initial funding needed to undertake the process of design, testing (including experimentation), refining and increased value.</i>

* The exchange rate used is 0.805 (UN rate 01 March 2018)

Project objectives

This project aims to provide operations with the seed funding to explore innovative operational solutions thanks to a competitive internal call for proposals for small and impactful field-based projects.

This will contribute to the following broader objectives:

1. To promote and support the adoption of innovations by UNHCR field operations, by the broader humanitarian sector and by the non-humanitarian sector; and
2. To create a healthier enabling environment for innovation.

Background and operational context

The humanitarian sector is under continuously increasing constraints, especially when relating to refugees, IDPs, stateless and returnees. Indeed, the number of UNHCR People of Concern is at an all-time high, with new crisis being added to protracted ones. In addition to that, uncertain political and operational environments, limited financial resources, reduced humanitarian and protection spaces, and much more, challenge UNHCR on a daily basis and force the organisation to improve constantly, mainly through innovation. The greatest examples of such innovative changes are the CRRF and the partnership with the World Bank. However, UNHCR is committed to innovation at every level.

Indeed, an Innovation Service has been established in Headquarters since 2012 and directly reports to the Deputy High Commissioner. This Team is tasked with seeking innovative solutions for UNHCR operations worldwide and fostering innovation within the organisation.

UNHCR defines innovation as ‘*The implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), process, marketing method, or organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations.*’¹ In other words, Innovation is an application of invention so that it creates value. Innovation as UNHCR sees it, therefore, has a much wider scope than simply new technology or better operations; innovative improvement can be achieved in every aspect of our work and can be applied both to the organisation itself as well as the activities it implements and each of our partners.

Activities

In that context, and in recognition of the fact that innovation requires investment, UNHCR has decided to establish innovation funds administered by the Innovation Service when relevant and possible. This strategic approach is considered to be the best suited to respond to the needs identified by the Innovation team when fostering innovation. Indeed, innovation funds are open to all UNHCR operations and/or headquarters. They provide precious resources that are strictly additional to each operation’s budget. Together with the grants, the Innovation Service provides coaching and support to each winning project/team on the innovation process and methodologies, thus creating a safe and structured space to nurture innovation and success.

In addition to this, innovation funds serve three additional purposes:

- They are a way to gauge interest and appetite for innovation, providing information on what types of needs there are and where (e.g., is the scope for innovation greater in shelter or education rather than other sectors);
- They are a way of raising awareness with regard to the importance and seriousness of innovation;
- They are a way to educate applicants, participants and the wider workforce about innovation.

Innovation funds also represent an effective and efficient method to encourage and foster innovation within UNHCR. Indeed, they put partners and end-users in the lead, thus ensuring that efforts to innovate are concrete, to the point and as fast as necessary, avoiding waste of time and resources.

The Office established its first Innovation Fund in 2016 thanks to a contribution by IKEA. A total of 102 applications, requesting USD 3.5 million in funding, came from operations around the world. 17 operations, nine Innovation Fellows² and three UNHCR Ideas³ projects were selected to receive seed funding. Some examples of success can be found in the following article: <http://www.unhcr.org/innovation/investing-in-people-not-projects-a-look-at-unhcrs-experimental-funding/>

¹ OECD

² <http://www.unhcr.org/innovation/innovation-fellowship/>

³ <https://www.unhcrideas.org/>

UNHCR proposes to the Government of Belgium to fund the second innovation fund. The Innovation Service would be able to adjust and adapt to the delivery of the Fund using existing human resources. While additional contributors could easily top-up the fund, further donors are not considered at this stage.

The UNHCR Innovation Fund 2.0 will aim to support and facilitate the development of innovative projects and solutions for UNHCR operations by identifying potential innovators at every level and providing them with access to the initial funding needed to undertake the process of design, testing (including prototyping), refining and scaling up.

UNHCR plans to distribute the funding through a call for proposals open to all the operations (excluding headquarters), ranging over every sector and limiting the financial request between USD 20,000 and 60,000. The selection process would be carried out by the Innovation team in close collaboration with relevant supporting divisions (e.g., a submission regarding shelter would be analysed with the help of the shelter unit in headquarters to get substantive input). Selection will be based on the potential impact that each project can have on UNHCR and its partners' work. Specific criteria will be developed on the basis of lessons learned from the first Fund's experience.

After the implementation period, a developmental evaluation will take place, assessing the success or failure of projects which received funds, as well as how the innovation processes within UNHCR can be improved. These would be shared with the Government of Belgium, and with senior management, as well as used to inform future Innovation Funds, and other similar mechanisms within UNHCR. Successes would be, as with the first Fund, communicated to a wider community, using a range of media, including *inter alia*, the unhcr.org website, as well as social media, and other media outlets. Successful innovations will be disseminated in UNHCR's practice through the regular planning cycle with the support of relevant headquarter divisions.

Throughout the life of the Innovation Fund 2.0, ongoing communication efforts will be carried out, both internally and externally. Engagement around the fund's activities, using a variety of digital and non-digital platforms, will also be encouraged.

The parameters of the innovation fund 2.0 have been chosen to keep it relevant in view of the experience gathered during the first iteration. Indeed, keeping the call for proposals open to all sectors keeps the scope of possible innovative solutions developed as wide as possible, while limiting the call for proposals to the operations focuses innovation on more practical circumstances. The cap of USD 60,000 also allows to focus on impactful but agile projects.

The relevance of the projects submitted is ensured by the simple fact that they are elaborated by UNHCR's workforce all over the world to respond to their current challenges.

This fund will be separate from other sources of funding available for innovation, such as Innovation fellows and UNHCR Ideas.

Beneficiaries

The number of beneficiaries is unknown because of the open nature of the Innovation Fund 2.0.