

# Humanitarian Innovative Financing

‘Grab and Go’ Pocket Guide

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A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK  
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE  
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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### About ICVA

The [International Council of Voluntary Agencies](#) is a global network of 168 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in 160 countries, operating at global, regional, national and local levels, whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice.

## What does this mean?

**Humanitarian innovative financing:** “Reflects a range of financing models and approaches that leverage humanitarian capacity and funding (grants) to catalyse capacity, partnerships and financing (capital) from the development, local and private sectors. At its core, humanitarian innovative financing aims to broaden the resource base in fragile settings, generate efficiencies, and achieve more sustainable impact on affected populations – reducing needs and providing humanitarian exit strategies over time”. See Grand Bargain (2024) [Strategic Dialogue on Innovative Financing – Summary Note](#). At its core, humanitarian innovative financing is about new ways to combine actors, instruments, and approaches to drive greater effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact for crisis-affected communities. Capital may come from humanitarian actors (such as donor governments, United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), philanthropic foundations or civil society); development actors (such as development finance institutions, multilateral organisations, national development agencies, and local and national governments); or private sector actors (such as investors, companies and corporations, family offices, banks, sovereign wealth funds, and high net worth individuals). Instruments include grants, debt, guarantees, equity, pay for success, insurance and carbon finance. Approaches include advisory models, blended finance, carbon finance, debt swaps, facilities and funds, insurance, outcomes-based finance, and technology-enabled humanitarian finance. See International Institute for Management Development (IMD) (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#). The intersections between humanitarian innovative financing, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, climate change financing, and anticipatory action lie in their shared focus on proactive, sustainable, and integrated approaches to addressing global crises by bridging the gap between immediate humanitarian needs and long-term development goals.

**Advisory model:** An approach that involves engaging humanitarian agencies as consultants and implementation partners to use their deep contextual knowledge, skills, and networks to advise investors, with the aim of enhancing a project's social impact and mitigating potential social risks. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and International Rescue Committee (IRC) (2024) [Advisory Model Partnership Playbook](#).

**Blended finance:** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines blended finance as “the strategic use of development finance for the mobilization of additional finance towards sustainable development in developing countries”. See OECD (2018) [Blended Finance Guidance](#). The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) defines humanitarian blended finance as “a range of financing models that ‘blend’ humanitarian resources with financing from development banks and/or private finance. It is an umbrella term used to cover different types of blending and is therefore used to describe multiple types of innovative financing by different actors”. See ODI (2024) [Humanitarian Innovative Financing in fragile settings: Taking stock and charting the road ahead](#). Also see Chemonics (2021) [Blended Finance Technical Briefs Primer](#).

**Carbon finance:** “A mechanism that leverages market-based approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by monetizing the carbon reductions achieved by various projects. This involves the creation and trading of carbon credits, which represent a ton of CO2 equivalent reduced, avoided, or sequestered. Projects can include renewable energy installations, reforestation efforts, energy efficiency upgrades, and more. These projects not only help mitigate climate change but also often generate additional benefits such as job creation, improved air quality, and enhanced biodiversity”. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#). Carbon finance is also known as ‘green finance’. See ODI (2024) [Humanitarian Innovative Financing in fragile settings: Taking stock and charting the road ahead](#).

**Debt swaps:** “Debt swaps are financial transactions in which a portion of a developing nation’s foreign debt is forgiven in exchange for investments in social or environmental conservation measures including debt-for-nature swaps or debt-for-education swaps”. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and KfW (2020) [Innovative Development Finance Toolbox](#).

**Facilities:** “Pooled financing models in which developmental capital providers align on a common financing or investment strategy”. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and KfW (2020) [Innovative Development Finance Toolbox](#).

**Funds:** “Pooled financing models in which various capital providers with and without different risk-return-impact profiles align on a common financing or investment strategy”. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and KfW (2020) [Innovative Development Finance Toolbox](#).

**Insurance:** “Mechanism as part of which the insurance provider promises to provide financial compensation in the instance of an event that results in a financial loss”. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and KfW (2020) [Innovative Development Finance Toolbox](#). There are different types of insurance that may be used in the humanitarian and development sectors including weather-index insurance (payouts based on predetermined weather triggers such as rainfall or temperature), parametric insurance (payouts based on broader range of events such as earthquakes or hurricanes), health and pandemic insurance (payouts for healthcare costs and pandemic-related disruptions), and social protection insurance (payouts for economic and livelihood shocks to ensure access to basic services and support).

**Outcomes-based financing:** “A financing contract where the funder only pays once the pre-agreed social and/or environmental outcomes have been achieved by the service provider (like results-based financing).” Examples include awards, prizes, challenge funds, matching funds, impact investing, and social, development and humanitarian impact bonds. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#).

**Technology-enabled humanitarian finance:** “The application of digital tools and technologies to enhance humanitarian efforts by addressing critical data challenges. This approach improves the efficiency of data collection and analysis, ensuring better privacy and security standards while increasing data availability. By leveraging technology, it becomes possible to identify, evaluate, and conduct due diligence on impactful and financially viable humanitarian investment opportunities”. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#).

## What are some quick facts and figures?

The global humanitarian financing gap now stands at approximately US \$25 billion annually. In 2024, the UN appealed for US \$49.59 billion to assist 299.4 million people, yet donors contributed just US \$22.57 billion – covering less than half (45.5%) of the required funding. See [OCHA Financial Tracking Service](#). While the value of humanitarian innovative financing is difficult to quantify, it offers significant potential. In 2024, the global impact investing market was valued at US \$1.5 trillion, and development finance institutions (such as European Investment Bank, World Bank and Asian Development Bank) collectively held over US \$1.8 trillion in assets. See Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) (2024) [Sizing the Impact Investing Market 2024](#) and One Campaign (2024) [Data Dive: Unlocking a trillion dollars for development](#). Redirecting even a fraction of these resources toward humanitarian innovative financing could significantly address escalating needs. The impact investing market alone is over six times the size of global Overseas Development Assistance, which totalled US \$223.2 billion in 2023. See OECD (2023) [Development Assistance Committee](#).

Private donors, including companies and corporations, philanthropic foundations, and individuals are playing a greater role in humanitarian financing, contributing US \$7.3 billion (17%) in 2023. See Development Initiatives (2023) [Falling Short? Humanitarian funding and reform](#). The World Economic Forum (WEF)'s [Humanitarian Resilience Investing \(HRI\) Initiative](#) is aiming to raise US \$10 billion to scale 1,000 businesses in frontier markets (less developed economies) by 2030, using contributions from governments, development finance institutions, philanthropic foundations, private sector entities and other stakeholders.

## What's the background?

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, innovative financing emerged as a key tool for advancing the Millennium Development Goals. Initiatives such as the [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#) introduced public-private partnerships and results-based financing, inspiring similar approaches in the humanitarian sector. The 2010s saw the rise of social impact bonds, catastrophe bonds, Islamic finance, and crowdfunding along with innovations such as risk-pooling instruments, forecast-based financing, and insurance. Technological advances such as blockchain and mobile money platforms further enhanced transparency and efficiency in fund disbursement. In 2016, the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing published [Too Important to Fail: addressing the humanitarian financing gap](#), which advocated for innovative solutions such as social impact bonds, micro-leaves, and Islamic finance. That same year, the [Grand Bargain](#), agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit, urged donors and humanitarian agencies to strengthen collaboration between humanitarian and development actors, laying the foundation for the [HDP Nexus](#). The 2020s brought the application of advisory models, blended finance and green bonds to humanitarian contexts. In 2023, the [Grand Bargain 3.0](#) called for sector-wide transformation through anticipatory action, multi-sector collaboration and innovative financing. In 2024, the Grand Bargain hosted a [Strategic Dialogue on Innovative Financing](#).

## Why does it matter?

Addressing the humanitarian financing gap is essential to effectively respond to the increasing scale and complexity of global crises, driven by protracted conflicts, climate-induced disasters, and widespread displacement. These challenges have overwhelmed traditional funding mechanisms, such as government grants and private sector donations. Humanitarian innovative financing offers a way forward by engaging diverse actors and using different instruments and approaches to expand the donor base, unlock new capital, and enhance the sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of humanitarian action. As global humanitarian appeals increasingly prioritise lifesaving assistance through “boundary setting”, collaboration between humanitarian agencies and development actors is crucial to reduce needs over time. See Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2024) [Joint NGO statement - Global Humanitarian Overview 2025](#). Humanitarian innovative financing also creates opportunities to integrate disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, and resilience-building into humanitarian strategies, providing long-term benefits for vulnerable communities. Additionally, it encourages a shift from reliance on short-term grants to sustainable long-term instruments, such as debt, equity, and insurance. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#). In this space, NGOs – particularly local and national NGOs (L/NGOs) – play a critical role, offering deep expertise in humanitarian programming, local knowledge, and strong connections with governments and private sector entities. See Grand Bargain (2024) [Strategic Dialogue on Innovative Financing - Summary Note](#). While not a silver bullet, humanitarian innovative financing approaches, when strategically applied to specific actions in appropriate contexts, can help bridge the growing funding gap and support sustainable, long-term outcomes.



## What's been achieved?

Over the past two decades, numerous agreements have underscored the importance of innovative financing to achieve sustainable development goals and strengthen humanitarian action including the [2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness](#), [2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#), [2016 Grand Bargain](#), [2016 High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation](#), [2017 OECD-DAC Blended Finance Principles](#), and [2021 OECD-DAC HDP Nexus Recommendation](#). Humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR, WFP, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Danish Refugee Council and the International Rescue Committee, amongst others, have developed a range of innovative partnerships with development finance institutions, multilateral organisations and private sector entities to pilot and scale up humanitarian innovative financing initiatives, particularly advisory models, blended finance and social impact bonds. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and DG ECHO (2024) [Pilot Initiative on Blended Finance for Humanitarian Aid](#). To date, the most successful initiatives have typically been implemented in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), livelihoods, and energy/climate sectors, often in displacement contexts, with the private sector mainly being involved as a delivery partner on the ground through local private operators. Several multi-stakeholder platforms have been established including the ICVA Humanitarian Financing Working Sub-group on Innovative, Nexus, and Climate Financing, WEF [HRI Initiative](#), and the Grand Bargain [Humanitarian Innovative Financing Community of Practice](#). These platforms emphasise the importance of humanitarian innovative financing, producing tools, guidance, and best practices to promote uptake across the sector, including playbooks enabling potential replication. There are efforts to strengthen the institutional capacity of stakeholders, such as the [IMD Driving Innovative Finance for Impact Program](#) and [Nexus Academy](#). In 2024, the Grand Bargain, together with WEF and ICRC brought together stakeholders with experience in innovative financing mechanisms and tools to identify concrete actions for scaling up innovative financing. See Grand Bargain (2024) [Strategic Dialogue on Innovative Financing - Summary Note](#).

## What's left to do?

Humanitarian innovative financing accounts for only a small portion of overall humanitarian financing, with many models still in pilot phases or restricted to specific countries or regions. Scaling and replicating these approaches requires states to actively engage and establish mandates that enable humanitarian and development actors to collaborate effectively in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. See Grand Bargain (2024) [Strategic Dialogue on Innovative Financing - Summary Note](#). Accessing humanitarian innovative financing poses significant challenges for NGOs, especially L/NGOs. The project pipeline remains narrow, as projects are complex and time-intensive to design, further compounded by high risk levels, regulatory hurdles, and legal barriers. Many NGOs lack the awareness, technical expertise, and infrastructure needed to work with advanced financial instruments and approaches. Donors provide limited funding to develop and source investment projects, which restricts the ability of NGOs to utilise grant funding to attract private sector investment. This process also demands upfront capital and specialised skills. Humanitarian agencies, development finance institutions, multilateral organisations, and private sector entities face challenges collaborating due to differing mandates, organisational cultures, risk appetites, and operational languages. Stakeholders may struggle to align their interests, particularly on issues of humanitarian principles, revenue generation ethics, and intellectual property. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and Innovation Norway (2023) [How to manage intellectual property rights in humanitarian innovation partnerships](#). The absence of standardised metrics, fragmented efforts, and weak leadership on the HDP Nexus undermines accountability and scalability. Strengthening coordination, coherence, and trust-building remains essential to drive progress.

## How can you get involved?

- **Familiarise yourself with humanitarian innovative financing:** Review key publications, join relevant webinars, and sign up for capacity-strengthening initiatives to build your knowledge and skills on humanitarian innovative financing. To start, see the Essential Reading list below and listen to the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (2024) [Catalysing change: how innovative financing can fuel humanitarian progress](#) webinar. Also see the IRC (2024) [Advisory Model Partnership Playbook for Investors and Humanitarian Partners](#), Good Humanitarian Donorship (2020) [Organizational Readiness and Enabling Private Capital for Innovative Financing in Humanitarian Contexts – Good Practices Playbook](#), and explore training courses such as the IMD [Driving Innovative Finance for Impact Program](#) and [Nexus Academy](#).
- **Pursue partnerships with established actors:** Seek out opportunities for collaboration with governments, development finance institutions, multilateral organisations, NGOs, and private sector entities to access humanitarian innovative financing approaches, especially where technical expertise, experience and/or accreditation are required. Some of the most promising humanitarian innovative financing approaches include blended finance, 'green' and carbon finance, debt (through concessional or flexible loans), guarantees, insurance and outcomes-based finance. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and ODI (2024) [Humanitarian Innovative Financing in fragile settings: Taking stock and charting the road ahead](#). Focus on co-creating approaches that are tailored to local contexts and develop an 'elevator pitch' which demonstrates your organisation's unique knowledge, skills, experience and networks to investors. Start by reaching out and speaking to stakeholders who have a track record of supporting humanitarian financing, and then stakeholders who have typically been less engaged.
- **Advocate and network:** Engage in multi-stakeholder platforms to contribute to policy discussions and amplify the voices of NGOs, particularly L/NGOs, in shaping the design and implementation of humanitarian innovative financing approaches. This includes the ICVA Humanitarian Financing Working Sub-Group on Innovative, Nexus, and Climate Financing, WEF [HRI Initiative](#), and Grand Bargain [Humanitarian Innovative Financing Community of Practice](#). Advocate for flexible funding from donors to explore and implement innovative approaches. Develop simplified messaging to articulate clear evidence on the impact, outcomes, value, risks (and mitigations) of humanitarian innovative financing approaches to build trust with donors and investors.

## What messages can you share with donors and funding partners?

- **Scale up predictable quality funding to support humanitarian innovative financing:** Advocate for the inclusion of fragile and conflict-affected contexts in global climate and development financing frameworks. Promote blended finance models to mobilise private capital alongside public and philanthropic funding. Encourage multi-year, flexible funding to address immediate humanitarian needs and support long-term development through HDP Nexus approaches. This includes investments in early warning systems and preparedness to maximise the impact of climate and anticipatory action financing.
- **Recognise the role and contributions of diverse stakeholders:** Strengthen the involvement of development finance institutions, multilateral organisations, and private sector entities through socially responsible partnerships. Formally acknowledge their contributions in Humanitarian Needs Overviews, Humanitarian Response Plans, and other appeals to increase their visibility. Enhance transparency



by introducing robust mechanisms and performance indicators in the [OCHA Financial Tracking Service](#) and [OCHA Pooled Fund Data Hubs](#) for humanitarian innovative financing contributions.

- **Improve access and inclusion for NGOs:** Ensure meaningful inclusion of NGOs, especially L/NGOs, in the design and implementation of humanitarian innovative financing approaches. Address barriers to entry and strengthen capacities through training, shared learning, and collaboration. Empower NGOs to engage effectively in mechanisms like advisory models, blended finance facilities, and impact bonds.
- **Advocate and network:** Provide strong political leadership to shape the narrative, set goals, and address barriers to humanitarian innovative financing. Use existing platforms such as the Grand Bargain to bring together key humanitarian actors, the World Bank, the OECD, and UNDP. Organise country-level multi-stakeholder dialogues to explore humanitarian innovative financing approaches in specific contexts. Promote joint planning, pooled resources, and shared accountability mechanisms to improve efficiency and impact. Invest in collective learning, evidence-building, and the exchange of best practices to encourage innovation.

## What are some good practices?

The IRC has developed a range of 'Advisory Model Partnerships' in fragile contexts such as the Middle East region to address challenges such as wastewater, infrastructure, climate financing and economic development. See IRC (2024) [Case Study: West Irbid Wastewater Project in Jordan](#), IRC (2024) [Case Study: IRC and Flat6Labs in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon](#), and IRC (2024) IRC and [AquaPoro Ventures in Jordan](#). The ICRC is piloting blended finance in a WASH project in Democratic Republic of Congo, leveraging around US \$9 million in grants to secure an additional US \$30 million from the World Bank concessional finance (grants and loans for the host government). See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#) and ICRC (2022) [Partnerships, financing solutions boost safe water access in DR Congo](#). Blended finance approaches are being piloted by UNHCR to promote access to financial and non-financial services for refugees and host communities in Uganda. See UNHCR (2019) [Sida, UNHCR and Grameen Crédit Agricole Foundation join hands to promote access to financial services for refugees and host communities in Uganda](#); Blended finance approaches are also being piloted by WFP to provide affordable financing to women smallholder farmers and micro-entrepreneurs. See WFP (2023) [Changing lives through innovative finance: 7 lessons learned from WFP's SheCan Initiative](#).

The Danish Refugee Council has partnered with private sector investors to establish the Refugee Investment Facility which supports finance and economic development for small and medium enterprises in Jordan and Uganda. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#). The Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Adaptation Fund provide essential resources to build resilience and support adaptation efforts in vulnerable communities. There are now two humanitarian organisations accredited for GCF – International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Save the Children. There have been a range of funds established to support HDP Nexus programming including [UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Funds](#), [European Union Trust Funds](#), and Nexus [Anticipatory and Emergency Response Fund in Somalia](#). There are also a range of insurance models including weather-index insurance (such as the [African Risk Capacity](#) and [WFP R4 Rural Resilience Initiative in Africa](#)); parametric insurance (such as the [Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility](#) and [Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative](#)); health and pandemic insurance (such as the [Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility](#)); and catastrophe bonds (such as the [World Bank Cat Bonds](#)).

Several humanitarian agencies including WFP, IRC and ICRC are working with development finance institutions and country governments on debt swaps. See IMD (2024) [Humanitarian](#)

[Impact Finance: Instruments and Approaches](#), DG ECHO (2024) [Pilot Initiative on Blended Finance for Humanitarian Aid](#), and ICRC (2023) [Debt Conversion for Humanitarian and Climate Impact](#). Several humanitarian agencies including ICRC and Save the Children have established impact bonds. For example ICRC developed the world's first [Humanitarian Impact Bond](#) to bring physical rehabilitation services to conflict-affected communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Nigeria. Save the Children Global Ventures has also established a range of [child-focused social impact bonds](#) focused on health and education. UNHCR has established the [Sierra Leone Education Innovation Challenge](#). There are also a few examples of carbon finance, including UNHCR which has established the [Refugee Environmental Protection Fund](#) to invest in impactful reforestation and clean cooking programs in climate-vulnerable refugee situations around the world.

## Who can you contact?

ICVA NGO members are eligible to join the ICVA Humanitarian Financing Working Group Sub-Group on Innovative, Nexus and Climate Financing, contact Manon Glaser [manon.glaser@icvanetwork.org](mailto:manon.glaser@icvanetwork.org). Grand Bargain signatories are eligible to join the Grand Bargain Humanitarian Innovative Financing Community of Practice, contact [gbsecretariat@un.org](mailto:gbsecretariat@un.org). Interested NGOs can sign up to the HRI Initiative [Call to Action](#) or join the HRI Initiative Community, contact [HRI-initiative@weforum.org](mailto:HRI-initiative@weforum.org). Interested NGOs can engage with the [Anticipation Hub](#) and its various global and regional working groups.

We may not always get everything right! If you have suggested comments on the Grab and Go Pocket Guides, or more information you think we should add, including good practices and policy and advocacy messages, contact Manon Glaser [manon.glaser@icvanetwork.org](mailto:manon.glaser@icvanetwork.org). We will regularly update these materials, so keep an eye out for the latest versions.

## Where can you go for further information?

### Essential reading

Airbel Impact Lab (2021) From hype to impact: Defining and driving innovative finance for people affected by violent conflict.

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## Guidance, tools and templates

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(Coordination)

## Geneva Office

Humanitarian Hub, La Voie-Creuse 16, 1202 Geneva  
[secretariat@icvanetwork.org](mailto:secretariat@icvanetwork.org)  
[www.icvanetwork.org](http://www.icvanetwork.org)