NGO statement on Africa

This statement was drafted in consultation with a wide range of NGOs.

NGOs in the region welcome the Refugee Compact which presents a major opportunity to innovate for improved refugee protection. With Africa home to one-third of the world’s forcibly displaced population, the African Union’s 2019 focus on durable solutions for refugees, returnees and IDPs is timely. This demonstrates political will to address forced displacement through more structured and sustainable approaches.

However, several policy and practice bottlenecks still need to be removed. These include huge unmet needs; gaps in national expertise on comprehensive refugee responses; lack of measurable and time-bound targets on health, safety, education, and economic well-being; and, issues with UNHCR’s financial flexibility, predictability and transparency. With this in mind, NGOs call for:

1. **Support to host States in improving comprehensive refugee responses**

Two years after the New York Declaration, there is still scarcity of national institutions for government-led comprehensive response in some of the most protracted refugee situations. Even where the CRRF is implemented, the focus remains at the national level, resulting in discrepancies between national policy and field realities. Bottom-up approaches are needed, with full participation of primary stakeholders (including refugees, host communities and IDPs) coupled with a systematic devolution of central authority to empower local authorities to manage comprehensive, multi-stakeholder responses.

However, significant capacity gaps still hamper efforts of national and sub-national authorities to coordinate and facilitate joint outcomes. We therefore recommend that UNHCR provides further guidance to host government-led secretariats and processes to reach collective outcomes. Efficient institutions for coordination remain critical to harnessing international solidarity.

NGOs also call on UNHCR to further promote alternatives to camps because positive outcomes from comprehensive responses hinge on refugees’ socio-economic inclusion. Established practice in Uganda and recent developments in Ethiopia have demonstrated that political will remains essential to unlocking inclusion. The political tone set by the AU in its 2019 theme provides a distinct opportunity for UNHCR and NGOs to intensify advocacy with host governments along those lines.

2. **Establish clear, measurable and time-bound targets to realize socio-economic rights**

The Compact does not define targets and indicators for refugee populations, but a critical dimension of comprehensive responses is to have targets and goals in place to ensure stakeholders are accountable to refugees and host communities in promoting their socio-economic inclusion. This is also crucial to ensure that no one is left behind in the progress towards the SDGs. We therefore recommend that UNHCR further invests in its capacity to mobilize international support, allowing host governments and other stakeholders to accelerate progress towards set targets and goals, particularly ensuring that critical needs are met throughout the displacement cycle.

This requires UNHCR to focus more on advocacy and policy, acting as an agenda setter and convener, and enhancing global resource mobilization. This shift, from a focus on interventions and direct
implementation to improving capacities and resources of partners can go a long way in empowering national and sub-national actors, including NGOs.

3. **Increase financial transparency, flexibility and multiyear funding to support medium- and long-term outcomes**

Although predictability of funding has improved, a large proportion remains short-term even in protracted displacement contexts in the region, where partnerships with NGOs have existed for decades. Predictable funding is essential to delivering and measuring progress against medium- and long-term outcomes. We therefore urge States and UNHCR to accelerate reforms to expand predictable, multiyear funding.

In addition, NGOs wish to draw UNHCR and States’ attention to the following situations:

**Chronic underfunding is undermining a comprehensive refugee response to the South Sudan refugee situation.** In Ethiopia and Uganda, which together host 90% of South Sudanese refugees, competition over scarce resources between refugees and host communities is still an obstacle to the full implementation of comprehensive responses despite legal and policy advances. In Uganda, there are concerns that the South Sudanese refugee response is not adhering to the 70-30 split between hosts and refugees as agreed in the CRRF. This seems to be due to resource scarcity amid increased displacements from the DRC. In this context, funding for the South Sudan refugee situation is a litmus test for States to demonstrate the GCR efficacy. Moreover, some NGOs in Uganda regret that allegations of mismanagement resulted in freezing funds intended for the refugee response. The refugee response is already seriously underfunded and it is fundamental to avoid refugees being further affected by those regrettable developments. We hope that the oversight and accountability lapses highlighted in 2018 will be rapidly addressed so that donors’ confidence can be restored.

**In the DRC, UNHCR needs to improve IDP protection,** particularly through strengthening its camp coordination role and partnership with IOM and through robust advocacy against forcible camp closures and involuntary movements. In doing so, UNHCR should show increased flexibility, reaching out to IDPs where they are, given that most do not live in official camps. Indeed, many IDPs choose to move to areas that are neither camps, nor areas of return, nor destinations of displacement. In consequence, they often receive limited assistance or are left unconsidered.

**In the Horn of Africa, Somali refugees risk increasing marginalization** from comprehensive responses owing to continued fragility in Somalia and perceived links to insecurity in host countries. UNHCR and States must encourage alternatives to camp, invest in institutions of asylum, and mitigate against host government practices that expose Somali refugees to additional risks.

**Finally, violence against women and girls in northern Nigeria is alarming,** particularly along the border with Cameroon, where they have been abducted from school, forcibly used as human bombs, sex slaves or forcibly married. The targeting of schools has adversely affected children’s education, which, combined with structural gender and age dynamics in the region, makes refugee and IDP girls especially vulnerable. The situation calls for urgent intensification of protection interventions.

A detailed version of this statement is available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.