



Forced Migration Working Group

Online

20 October 2020 (11:30-13:30)

Participants: Act for Peace, Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, CARE International, Christian Aid, Good Neighbors International, HIAS, International Catholic Migration Commission, Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Intersos, Lutheran World Federation, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, Plan international, Translators Without Borders, Tzu Chi Foundation, Women's Refugee Commission, World Vision.

Agenda

1. UNHCR Executive Committee
2. 2020 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations, future of Consultations & HC Dialogue
3. Rohingyas Donors Conference
4. AoB including Upcoming HC (re)election, IDPs, and Nagorno-Karabakh situation.

1. UNHCR Executive Committee

- ExCom held from 5 to 9 October. Debates largely focused on the current pandemic, key related challenges and some measures taken by States and UNHCR to avoid the spread of the virus. Several States expressed as a key consideration the equitable access to diagnostics, medicines, vaccines and medical equipment for displaced populations.
- On protection, UNHCR was vocal with States on how the pandemic challenges international protection norms, to recall – as NGOs do – that measures taken to stop the spread of the virus should remain temporary and non-discriminatory. A deep disappointment with the overall levels of resettlement places available and departures this year was also shared. UNHCR also expressed alarm about the increase in reported SGBV cases.
- Not only linked to the pandemic, UNHCR expressed serious concerns about States failures on search and rescue for displaced population at sea and its opposition on externalization of asylum procedures. Interesting starting to note UNHCR using the terms of externalization. Gillian Triggs also mentioned in her statement the Protection Dashboard, which maybe strangely does not seem to feature in the description of the HC Dialogue protection session.
- Another focus was the several current emergencies, in Venezuela and Central America, in Central Sahel and in Europe, Greece and Nagorno-Karabakh, the Rohingyas.
- Special attention was directed to policies, e.g. the published EU Pact on Asylum and Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. Most of States provided updates on the status of their pledges made at the last GRF.
- Reactions and comments following the **two NGO statements**: On [the General Debate](#) (focused on youth and children), the HC thanked NGOs, mentioning that the statement was excellent. Agreeing completely and mentioning the importance of the UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations for exchange between UNHCR and NGOs.
- For the statement on [International Protection](#), disappointingly, we did not hear direct feedback from the A-HC and/or the Director of the Division of international protection. However, informal positive reactions were received from the UNHCR Europe Bureau on the statement (especially related to the mention of recent legal developments in Hungary).
- [The statement on UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations](#), reporting back on the event, was welcomed and supported by the US. Interestingly, the ExCom Rapporteur also made a largely positive and supportive intervention on the consultations (first time ever).
- An ExCom conclusions two-year work program was adopted and will include themes on **international protection and durable solutions in public health emergency and MHPSS**. On both, there is room for NGOs to bring inputs to the process. **Let us know of any interest.**



- Election of the ExCom Bureau. The new chairperson is the ambassador from Brazil, the vice-chair will be the ambassador from Lebanon, the second vice-chair is from Djibouti.
- The new ExCom Rapporteur is Gregor Schotten from Germany.
- NGO ExCom side event focused on the theme “[Resilient communities in climate-induced displacement](#)”: Thanks for CARE and IDMC support. Gathering 80+ participants from diverse stakeholders including States, it generated an interesting exchange even though mostly from NGOs. Open exchange with elements around protection, policies, legal architecture. Disappointing that UNHCR did not intervene on protection of displaced population in the context of climate change. An event summary is being prepared and will be shared asap.
- FYI, UNHCR sent an email to some NGOs asking those interested in follow-up conversations on the UNHCR’s Strategic Framework on Climate Action to contact Andrew Harper.
- Some NGOs have complained about **restrictive access to the Standing and Executive Committee meetings**. Decision was taken not in a consultative manner and shared too late.
- Hope to have something more inclusive for the next Standing Committee, still respecting COVID-19 measures. Suggest **discussing** possible modalities in Jan/ Feb **with UNHCR Partnership Section, ExCom Secretariat** and interested NGOs.

International Catholic Migration Commission

- Important to have this discussion with UNHCR and NGOs so we can inform them how important it is for NGOs to be present in the room and have *ad hoc* discussions with States. Appreciate how ICVA is taking this up and happy to support ICVA in that sense.
- Examples of IOM’s International Dialogue on Migration event in hybrid form this year at the CICG allowed NGOs to come in and it worked. Idea of a spill over room also worked with the recent Human Rights Council.
- On the NGO ExCom side event: What is your sense of States sensitivity to the growing need to look at climate-driven displacement? My sense is it is a growing topic.
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CARE

- We need to bring up the restrictive space for NGOs as an issue. Colleagues in NY are observing similar issues; concerned that COVID-19 slowly becomes an excuse for shrinking space; may not be deliberate but it is a real concern.
- Surprised there were no questions from Member States during the NGO ExCom side event, wondering if it is usual or it is something that we did not do right?

International Rescue Committee and Plan International

- Agreed.

ICVA

- Happy to look into convening a discussion with UNHCR and NGOs.
- The option of a spill over room was discussed with ExCom Secretariat and UNHCR Partnership but for October ExCom it was not possible.
- Issue of possible long-term effect is important and useful to know this is also relevant to NY.
- On the NGO ExCom side event, difficult to guess because no States invited took the floor, we can look at who joined the meeting as an indicator.
- During the General Debate at ExCom, interventions on the topic were made by several States including Fiji, Nigeria, and Ethiopia.



- Many States come to those events (ExCom and the side event) but the fact they do not speak is not an indication that the event is not valuable to them. They listen, sometimes follow-up individually.

Plan international

- Looking at the General Debate, saw the Global Compact is used as a basis of most of the statements from States particularly from refugee-hosting States.
- SGBV was mentioned overall by States. There was an opening related to children, but few States talked about child protection and children, it is a gap. It is something we can look at moving forward.

International Rescue Committee

- CARE raised very legitimate feedback. General level of interest of what NGOs have to say but we do not get a lot of response especially on the spot after the delivering the NGO statements. Should we circulate a quick survey on the usefulness of the NGO ExCom side event and of the NGO statements? Do our collective actions pay off?

ICVA

- More geared to the idea discuss some time ago to organize a meeting between NGO and States before StandCom and ExCom. Not sure survey would bring answers.
- On CARE's question: normally the side event is in the morning and shorter. There is normally not a lot of questions from States. Usually, interventions and questions are from the usual suspects, i.e. Nordics and US.
- To push in the direction of States interventions, preparation is needed before the event, which we did not have time to do properly this year.
- This year, the NGO ExCom side event was longer, online, and on a topic where some States would not be necessarily too keen on speaking about (e.g. US). Maybe what we could have done differently is we could have asked questions directly to States and presentations could have been more directed to recommendations to States.

Women's Refugee Commission

- States are much more willing to talk in the room than when they feel they may be recorded online, and it was a Friday when ExCom was over. Not sure a survey would help to get feedback. NGOs should also integrate a better gender balance in such panels.

International Catholic Migration Commission

- Concern about survey: as NGOs we have a responsibility to raise issues on what we see on the ground. Would not feel comfortable being censored.

International Rescue Committee

- Legitimate concern from ICMC. In no way should we have self-censoring of NGO statements. But it would be useful to learn if our interventions influence States' decision-making.

CARE

- All reflections are useful and also on flagging that silence does not mean a lack of interest.
- NGO statements are great and one way of voicing our issues and putting it on the table. Have we looked at the effectiveness of the statements? How do we follow-up?

ICVA

- We need to find time to discuss between NGOs on the topic, maybe early next year.



- An example of how the statement can be used and followed-up is on international protection and the Hungary part mentioned above. This paragraph in the NGO statement came from meetings we had with ECRE, UNHCR Europe Bureau and NGOs on Hungary.
- ICVA will share the NGO statement to those who attended the Hungary meeting and see it could lead to other actions, e.g. discussion on approaching the EU delegation and asking where we stand and what kind of possible actions could take place between EU, NGOs, UNHCR on the recent legislation in Hungary.

2. 2020 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations, future of Consultations & HC Dialogue

• **Welcome your suggestions and feedback on the Annual Consultations.**

- We have seen the result of the survey of the Annual Consultations, as usual, no high response, one third only of participants.
- Managed to have the consultations, with no major disruptions. We managed to have a set of recommendations; it could have been better, more focused, better prepared but it is there and supposed to feed into [High Commissioner's Dialogue](#). Can ask how much it will feed into, but part of the job was done.
- Heard complaints about pre-cooked recommendations: they were not. A draft was shared and options were there to feed into it, though communication was not best and there was not enough time to properly feed into them.
- The NGOs' inputs received on the recommendations have been almost all included.
- Criticisms in the survey about the interactivity of the consultations as a whole and focused on some sessions (e.g. Protection with pre-selected interventions only).
- Remind that we had only six weeks to organize the consultations, something imposed on us.
- Refugee-led organizations (RLO) were present and had the opportunity to participate meaningfully. They were speakers at most sessions. RLO also participated in the chat box although not hugely. RLOs did not really contribute to the recommendations. Going beyond 'usual suspects' from RLOs remains a challenge.
- Regional breakdown was discussed with UNHCR Partnership Section: lack of NGO from MENA but not in terms of invitations sent. There was a careful balance between the regions. Does it mean invitation does not reach the right persons/NGOs in that region? Does it mean language is an issue when sending the invitation?
- On the reporting side, there were comments in the survey on the absence of NGO Rapporteur this year. There was no NGO Rapporteur due to all the changes in the last months and the lack of time. But also a longer-term perspective and based on meetings with NGOs last year on the future of the consultations: there was a concern that the NGO Reports were often long, not necessarily useful and used; there was also the notion that reporting on a dialogue should best be done jointly (not just from one side). Hence, the evolution of a joint reporting between UNHCR and NGOs with something more efficient and concrete. However, again this may not have been communicated properly in advance and more probably needs to be done to find the right joint formula/process.
- Will probably see with UNHCR how to develop a short summary of each session.

Act for Peace

- Felt that participation was not that high, 90-100 people per session. Less than the in-person consultations in 2019 and surprising given that online meetings allow for more participants.
- Technical aspects were a bit complicated that made difficult for some people to engage.

ICVA

- Part of the evolution UNHCR is pushing for with the consultations is to reduce participation, the idea of a 35 persons meeting even being voiced at some point. ICVA pushed back on this



and we settled on about 200 invitees only for NGOs, RLOs. Additional participants were from UNHCR staff and then there was a category of observers, just invited to listen in, not contribute as not NGOs/RLOs (e.g. other UN Agencies, Academia).

- 200 people invited and, we got 100 participants: Did we not invite the right persons? Is it a result of NGOs dividing participation among their staff for each session? Requires thinking.
- Not sure the survey helped and complicated to read as most of the respondents only went to one session and therefore cannot provide a whole perspective on the consultations.

Norwegian Refugee Council

- Considering that it was done at the last minutes and COVID-19 pandemic impacted on what NGOs have said previously during meetings with UNHCR on the future of Annual Consultations but wondering how to have a more impact on consultations, if we look forward, how to make the consultations more useful. How we will be going forward?

Lutheran World Federation

- Is there an update on regional consultations? I understand UNHCR planned to have them.
- Difficult to discuss the shape of the global consultations when we do not have an idea of them. Remember last year we had a meeting with UNHCR and NGOs on the future and regional consultations, saying regional will feed into the global one. Still do not know what the UNHCR Regional Bureaus looks like, the introduction requested has not happened.

ICVA

- COVID-19 was a big reason on how things were organized but not the only one: remember we started to work on climate change as theme until March and then the HC decided – before the pandemic – that he didn't want this theme for the consultations.
- For the future: UNHCR decided there will be a focus regional consultations in 2021 and no global consultation. The global consultation come back in 2022. So far, we do not have information and plans for the regional consultations. We only heard one consultation might happen in the next weeks in Southern Africa.
- Loise and I will not be involved in regional consultations. Our Regional Representatives might get involved in some of them as was the case the past 2 years. Maybe, in regions where we do not have representatives (e.g. Europe), we could play a role.
- In parallel, discussion with UNHCR Partnership section to continuing some type of meetings on the model of the COVID-19 weeklys, but on a monthly basis and not be focused only on COVID-19. The idea would be to organize concrete meetings focused on policies being developed by UNHCR, ongoing reviews, etc. so that NGOs can provide concrete inputs.
- On whether regional consultations feed into the global or the global feed into the regional consultations is not yet decided, though there is apparently an intention to establish such a link with a focus on regionals in 2021 and then a global one in 2022. One important issue is how to work out this coherence and link with a decentralized and somewhat disjointed process (e.g. partnership section is not a central authority that can push for the coherence). This requires therefore exchanges with the Bureaus and this is complex.
- One difficulty is when Partnership section expect we can help in this regard but we cannot even know enough in advance details about the regional consultations (definitely not in advance to factor that into yearly workplans): We do not when there will be regional consultations, how many, the topics and how the topics are selected.
- On UNHCR presenting the set up and the bureaux, there is a bit of disconnect between each Bureaus. In Asia for instance, point of contact is established. Maybe we can look into this.



- Those invited at the UNHCR-NGO consultations should have received invitations for the **HC Dialogue**. A multi-stakeholder event and ICVA pushed for the inclusion of more NGOs and provided few suggestions. **If you have not received an invitation, let us know** and we will see what can be done with UNHCR Partnership and GRF team.
- NGO speakers during the panel session look constrained, except maybe for the last session, which apparently may be the only one with options of speaking ‘from the floor’. NGOs can share questions in advance and spontaneous interventions seem to be limited to the chat.
- Panellists seems almost selected. If you are interested, reach out to the GRF team.
- Recommendations from the Consultations are now on the website of the HC Dialogue; question marks on how it will be referred to during the sessions. Reflections on how to bring up, could be referred during the report of the HC Dialogue. We could think about building statement around the recommendations, using it, flagging it if there is opportunity during the last session. Welcome your thinking and ideas on that.

Women’s Refugee Commission

- Sharing the question raised during the opening registration so if other NGOs want to raise a similar question on that while register, that would maybe encourage UNHCR to answer. *“As the UN Secretary-General noted in August, the gendered implications of COVID-19 risks “losing a generation or more of gains” made in terms of gender equality and the rights of women and girls. How is UNHCR prioritising gender equality in its work and ensuring that its five Updated Commitments to Women and Girls in the AGD Policy are being actively put into practice in COVID responses to reinforce the work previously done on gender equality? While we have seen SGBV and PSEA being prioritised, gender equality does not seem to be given the same emphasis, particularly given the delay in replacing UNHCR’s senior advisor on Gender Equality”.*

ICVA

- Good idea, **you can share the questions during this meeting or by e-mail to ICVA and we will circulate it** and NGOs can amplify it.
- ICVA raised a question on the SDGs and if COVID-19 made UNHCR rethink its approach. How UNHCR is aligning its policies around SDGs, whether they will update their note.

Norwegian Refugee Council

- On the questions raised, it is so different from how we dealt with previous Dialogues where we had opportunities to amplify issues or have a voice in the process. Do you have clarity on what we could do? Do you have a target on who would participate in those meetings outside posing a question through registration? Ideas around that and what we can do?

ICVA

- **We will follow-up with UNHCR with regard to side events, participation in-person in December, and more clarifications on interventions from the floor in December.**
- How concrete the HC Dialogue can be, is one avenue is to explore ExCom conclusion of international protection and durable solutions during health emergency, it is clearly COVID-19 related ExCom conclusions and hopefully, the recommendations from HC Dialogue can feed into ExCom. Something that can help you to target your messages.

3. Rohingya Donors Conference

- In addition to what was shared by e-mails, we are now at the stage of finalizing the NGO statement. InterAction is inserting all the NGO inputs in the final NGO statement and we are going to have a meeting together to discuss final modalities.



- Despite our push, we did not get NGO inputs on funding and on coordination architecture in Bangladesh. Tell us if those issues are not relevant but surprised on the funding part.
- We have to work on the shorter/oral version that will focus on the recommendations.

CARE

- We felt we were unable to decide to sign on or not. The latest version we saw yesterday is too messy and we did not know how the final document will look like.

ICVA

- The final document is not open to last modification today but open to final sign-on. It will be circulated to facilitate sign-ons.
- **Welcome to share your advice** on the signing on process, unbranded, or networks branded only or the number of sign on without mentioning the name because of fear of repercussion.
- To take the floor at the conference, apparently no chance, for individual NGOs.
- The event will be live streamed.

Christian Aid

- Some NGOs are hesitant to sign on because of sensitivities with the Government of Bangladesh. It might be easier if it went only under the banner of networks.

4. AoB.

- Upcoming **(re)election of the High Commissioner for Refugees**, set to be decided at UNGA on 23 Nov. under agenda item 119 (d). What we can share is basically what is now publicly available through the [note by the Secretary-General \(A/75/338\)](#), indicating that Grandi is proposed by UNSG Guterres for only half a term, until 30 June 2023, so basically less than 6 months before the 2nd GRF. **Welcome reflections and information NGOs might have.**
- **IDPs:** We may discuss how to come back on track with our work related to the High-Level Panel. This could include discussing a UNHCR additional submission to the HLP on “[Unlocking Solutions for the Internally Displaced](#)”. This was the background to an ExCom side event last week. Please see [here](#) some quick reflections provided at the event. **UNHCR flagged they are happy to have an exchange with NGOs on the basis of the above**, if there is an interest.

Women’s Refugee Commission

- Organizing a **dialogue with concrete recommendations focusing on the first workstream of the HLP** (solutions, prevention and the nexus) on 5 Nov. 2-4pm. If interested to join, contact Enzo.TabetCruz@plan-international.org and (genevarepresentative@wrcommission.org).

CARE

- Any knowledge about UNHCR plans in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh? Number of displaced is increasing and there are few actors on the ground and no coordination, no OCHA presence. Will have a call with OCHA responsible in the region. Will ICVA contact UNHCR to organize a meeting between NGOs and the Europe Bureau? **Any other NGOs interested?**

ICVA

- Good point. We will get in touch with UNHCR Europe Bureau and ask if a debrief on the topic is possible. One Bureau staff is actually on mission at the moment in the region.
- **Happy to get NGO reflections on the follow-up on meeting** organized by ICVA, ECRE and the Europe Bureau on Hungary, Greece, etc. (e.g. should we continue touching on new themes (like Nagorno-Karabakh) or should we have a continuum on 1-2 topics (e.g. follow-up on Greece and Hungary).