

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
80th MEETING
23-25 MARCH 2021

NGO statement - Strategic partnerships and coordination

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a variety of NGOs.

Despite last year's unprecedented challenges, we value UNHCR's continued commitment to the Principles of Partnership and recognise improvements in the quality of our relationships. Promoting meaningful engagement and participation of local, national, women-led and refugee-led organisations in UNHCR's strategic partnerships and coordination structures and continuing to implement harmonisation and simplification measures with NGOs will lead to further positive outcomes.

In 2020, UNHCR delivered \$1.4 billion of humanitarian assistance with the support of 1,000 NGO partners across 135 countries. Prioritising strategic partnerships promoting **predictable, flexible and multi-year funding** will bring better outcomes for affected communities, strengthen opportunities for joint advocacy, create efficiencies in programming, and enable robust capacity strengthening for NGOs. **Multi-Year Partnership Agreements** are an important first step towards multi-year funding. UNHCR should enhance communication and guidance to appropriately inform and engage NGOs on multi-year opportunities.

We commend UNHCR for providing 25% of funding in 2020 to local and national NGOs. To progress on the Grand Bargain and **localisation agendas**, we welcome increased amounts and proportion of UNHCR funding to those NGOs.

In 2020, **Global and Regional Partnership Consultations** were held virtually. Consultations with NGOs are also planned for 2021. Practical strategies to maximise engagement should include developing joint goals, priorities and agendas, sharing calendar schedules in advance, and ensuring that conclusions and recommendations from global and regional consultations are complementary, shared with all NGOs in timely manner, and promote meaningful engagement and participation of diverse local organisations.

Ensuring NGOs, in their full diversity, are equitably represented and have an **equal voice in humanitarian planning, coordination and decision-making structures** is crucial. NGOs welcome UNHCR's continued efforts in promoting NGOs' role in leadership positions in agencies, HCTs and Clusters. Other strategies to facilitate strengthened UNHCR-NGOs collaboration include joint planning and monitoring visits, country and regional dialogues, coherence in the interpretation and application of partnership guidelines. Improved communication with NGOs throughout the partnership selection and award process is fundamental.

NGOs support UNHCR efforts to **systematically track and report disaggregated data on funding flows to local and national NGOs** and regularly publish overall funding figures. We also encourage regular tracking and reporting on the funding to women-led organisations.

We welcome UNHCR's Gender Equality Toolkit, Operational Guidance on AAP and the new RBM Framework, recognising their potential in **closing the gap in reporting on funding to Gender Equality and Women and Girls empowerment**.

The RBM Framework offers a new approach to planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting, enabling better financial tracking of crosscutting priorities and should **address gaps in sex- and age-disaggregated data collection**.

UNHCR's 2019 Global Strategic Priorities Progress Report set out necessary ambitions on GBV interventions which require urgent actions, especially significant **funding increases**. NGOs encourage UNHCR to ensure GBV funding is tracked and reported separately from protection and other sector funding, so gaps can be monitored.

NGOs acknowledge the significant progress UNHCR made towards a stronger partnership framework over the last year. We appreciate UNHCR's collaborative and transparent approach to information sharing and work with NGOs taken from the start of the pandemic. Measures outlined in the **IASC Harmonised Approach to Funding Flexibility in the Context of COVID-19** should be embed within ongoing operations in 2021 PPAs and UNHCR should continue to share lessons learned from the pandemic. NGOs also look forward to the full implementation of all 14 initiatives agreed in **January 2020**.

The **UN Partner Portal** is a useful tool, noting the potential improvements on harmonisation and simplification efforts and the user functionality. UNHCR's acceptance of results from the shared PSEA Common Assessment Tool is positive, and NGOs identify other improvements including electronic signing of PPAs, online narrative and financial reporting, and harmonised approaches to due diligence, capacity assessments and audits. NGOs welcome the opportunity to build on the results of the January 2021 Portal survey, with a more substantive consultation on future iterations of the Portal.

UNHCR's adoption of the **8+3 reporting template** aims to reduce the number and frequency of formal information requests made outside of the PPA. While this is positive, NGOs request for no more than the necessary reporting and encourage more UNHCR operations to fully adhere to reporting requirements for partners-related guidelines. The introduction of 4 per cent Partner Integrity Capacity and Support Costs for local and national NGOs and use of the **Money Where it Counts protocol** definitions demonstrate UNHCR's intention to cover a fairer share of programme costs, although improvements are still necessary. Implementing a Money Where it Counts pilot and engaging in discussions on concerns will enable a more transparent and equitable understanding of what it costs to implement a project and help build trust. NGOs also encourage UNHCR to support their fair share of common direct costs.

UNHCR's commitment to **harmonised and simplified approaches to due diligence and audit** will strengthen local organisations' capacities to absorb UNHCR funding. NGOs welcome methods promoting better sharing and management of risk, and transformative approaches contributing to greater organisational sustainability and local humanitarian leadership. Practical strategies include joint assessments of NGOs and developing a common assessment tool, pooled resourcing for NGO capacity strengthening, peer linkages, twinning and mentoring, and support for NGO engagement in decision-making forums.

We welcome UNHCR's leadership on these initiatives and look forward to seeing increased uptake and use by donors and UN agencies. We encourage UNHCR to continue to ensure that the written documents and practices underpinning partnerships with NGOs are clearly communicated, understood and applied at all levels of UNHCR's operations. Additional opportunities for joint UN-NGO collaboration will serve to further promote harmonisation and simplification efforts across the UNDS.

We commend UNHCR strengthen partnerships with NGOs and thank UNHCR for its participation in the Grand Bargain and welcome further leadership, focusing on partnerships harmonisation and simplification and localisation agenda promotion, in collaboration with NGOs.

Further details will be available at icvanetwork.org
Thank you.