

NGO statement
Strategic partnerships and coordination

Distinguished Chairperson, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

This statement has been prepared in close consultation with the NGO community and is delivered on behalf of a diverse group of UNHCR's NGO partners including local, national, international, women-led and refugee-led organisations.

Despite the unprecedented challenges of the past year, we value UNHCR's continued commitment to the Principles of Partnership and recognise notable improvements in the quality of relationships between UNHCR and NGO partners. Promoting the 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 measures to harmonise and simplify UNHCR's partnerships with NGOs in line with Grand Bargain commitments will lead to further positive outcomes.

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

Local and national actors are often the first responders in a humanitarian crisis, with the advantage of strong contextual and cultural knowledge, and greater access to affected communities. We commend UNHCR in providing 25 per cent of funding in 2020 to local and national NGO partners. To progress commitments to the Grand Bargain and the **localisation agenda**, including the eight priority actions outlined in Pathways to Localisation, NGOs welcome further increases in the amount and proportion of UNHCR funding to local and national NGO partners, with a specific focus on women-led and refugee-led organisations.

In 2020 **one global and several regional annual partnership consultations** were held virtually, and in 2021 UNHCR will launch process that includes consultations with NGO partners. UNHCR should proactively promote the meaningful engagement and participation of local, national, women-led and refugee-led organisations in these forums and ensure their concerns are addressed. Practical strategies to maximise engagement with NGO partners include developing joint goals, priorities and agendas, sharing calendar schedules well ahead of time (at least three months in advance), and ensuring that conclusions and recommendations from global and regional consultations complement each other and are shared with all NGO partners in a timely manner to promote synergies and learning.

Ensuring NGOs including local, national, women-led and refugee-led organisations are equitably represented and have an **equal voice in humanitarian planning, coordination and decision-making**

structures at multiple levels is crucial. NGOs welcome UNHCR's continued leadership in promoting the role of NGOs in leadership positions in agencies, Humanitarian Country Teams and Clusters. Other strategies to facilitate strengthened collaboration between UNHCR and NGOs include joint planning and monitoring visits, country and regional NGO dialogues to discuss operational issues and maintain coherence in the interpretation and application of partnership guidelines, and improved communication with NGO partners throughout the partnership selection and award process.

NGOs support the continued efforts of UNHCR to **systematically track and report disaggregated data on funding flows to local and national NGO partners** and regularly publish overall funding figures, noting current work on baseline analysis of UNHCR's engagement with women-led organisations and further localisation work planned in 2021. Building from this baseline, we encourage regular, at least annual, tracking and reporting on the quantity and quality of funding women-led organisations access from UNHCR and its implementing partners, including their ability to access Partner Integrity Capacity and Support Costs.

We welcome UNHCR's Gender Equality Toolkit (2020), Operational Guidance on Accountability to Affected People (2020) and the new Results Based Management (RBM) Framework, recognising their potential contribution to **closing the gap in reporting on funding to Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG)** across sectors. The RBM Framework, introduced in all UNHCR operations in January 2021, offers a new approach to planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting which will enable better financial tracking of crosscutting priorities, including on gender equality and women's empowerment. The RBM Framework presents an opportunity for UNHCR to further track overall funding for GEEWG, across and within sectors, using a harmonized definition of GEEWG and measurement tool commonly adopted by other leading UN humanitarian agencies and institutional donors.

The RBM Framework is also expected to **address gaps in sex- and age-disaggregated data collection**, as identified in UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability report (2018–2019). NGOs commend this important measure and encourage extending tracking of women-led organisations participation in sectoral working groups, given this data is currently unavailable. Women-led organisation's ability to directly participate in the refugee response coordination mechanisms at field and country-level is critical to ensuring gender-responsive programs.

Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) continue to struggle accessing medical, psychosocial and legal services, despite collective efforts. The secondary effects of COVID-19 have only compounded this gap in service. UNHCR's 2019 Global Strategic Priorities Progress Report set out necessary ambitions on gender-based violence interventions which require urgent action, in particular significantly **increasing funding for GBV prevention, response and mitigation** proportionate to the growing needs. NGOs encourage UNHCR to ensure that GBV funding is tracked and reported separately from protection and other sector funding, so that gaps can be monitored.

NGOs congratulate UNHCR for nearing 40% of women in leadership position in country operations and for having 44% women of all its staff at all levels. NGOs encourage UNHCR to continue to increase the percentage of women in leadership position in the field and in all its offices.¹ NGOs acknowledge the significant progress UNHCR has made towards a stronger framework for partnership over the last 12 months. We also appreciate UNHCR's collaborative and transparent approach to information sharing and working through challenges with NGOs from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. NGOs encourage UNHCR to embed measures outlined in the **IASC Harmonised Approach**

¹ *She Leads In Crisis Report*, CARE International, March 2021: <https://www.care.org/our-work/reports-and-resources/she-leads-in-crisis-report-card/>

to Funding Flexibility in the Context of COVID-19 within ongoing operations in 2021 Project Partnership Agreements (PPAs) and continue to share lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic to reflect on what is working well and what could be improved. NGOs also look forward to the full implementation of all 14 initiatives agreed at the **January 2020 UNHCR-NGO Partnership meeting**.

The **UN Partner Portal** continues to be a useful tool for UNHCR and NGO partners, noting there is scope to further capitalise on harmonisation and simplification efforts and increase the user functionality. UNHCR's acceptance of results from the shared Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Common Assessment Tool is positive, and NGOs have identified a range of 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 UN Partner Portal survey released in January 2021 with a more substantive consultation to co-design and co-create 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 a positive step, NGOs request for no more than the necessary level of reporting and encourage more UNHCR operations to fully adhere to the guidelines concerning reporting requirements for partners. Beyond this, 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 (MWIC) protocol** definitions have demonstrated UNHCR's intention to cover a fairer share of programme costs, although some improvements are still necessary; Implementing a MWIC pilot and engaging in discussions on specific concerns such as personnel costs will enable UNHCR and NGO partners to have a more transparent and equitable understanding of what it costs to implement a project and help to build trust around NGO decision making. NGOs also encourage UNHCR to support their fair share of shared direct costs.

UNHCR's commitment to **harmonised and simplified approaches to due diligence and audit** will strengthen the capacities of local, national, women-led and refugee-led organisations to absorb UNHCR funding. NGOs welcome methods that promote better sharing and management of risk between UNHCR and NGO partners, and transformative approaches that contribute to greater organisational sustainability and local humanitarian leadership. Practical strategies to achieve this include joint assessments of NGO partners and developing a common assessment tool, pooled resourcing for NGO capacity strengthening activities, peer linkages, twinning and mentoring of local, women-led and refugee-led organisations, and support for NGO engagement in partner consultations, cluster coordination and decision-making forums.

We welcome UNHCR's leadership on these initiatives and look forward to seeing increased uptake and use by other donors and United Nations (UN) agencies. We encourage UNHCR to continue to ensure that the policies, guidance and practices that underpin partnerships with NGOs are clearly communicated, understood and applied at all levels of UNHCR's operations, including headquarters, regional bureaus, and country and field offices. Additional opportunities for joint UN and NGO partner collaboration will serve to further promote harmonisation and simplification efforts across the UN Development System.

We commend UNHCR for its ongoing commitment to strengthening partnerships with NGOs in order to seek the best outcomes for refugees, displaced communities and stateless people in some of the world's most fragile and conflict-affected contexts. We thank UNHCR for its participation in the Grand Bargain and would welcome further leadership in advancing this agenda on behalf of the humanitarian community, with a focus on harmonisation and simplification of partnerships and promotion of the localisation agenda in collaboration with NGO partners.

Thank you.