

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
82nd MEETING
15-16 September 2021

NGO statement on the Grand Bargain

Dear Chair, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

This statement was prepared in close consultation with a wide range of NGOs and reflects their diverse views.

NGOs have played and continue to play a vital role in providing humanitarian assistance across the globe reaching out to the people in need, including internally displaced persons. Given our proximity to the people we serve and our unique ability to access hard to reach areas, we continue to provide emergency response, despite the growing access constraints, and the enormous risks we continuously face. Since 2016, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has increased 88%, from 125.3 million to 235.4 million¹. Meanwhile, humanitarian financing during this same period has increased by just 14%, from USD \$27.1 billion in 2016 to USD \$30.9 billion in 2020².

Looking forward to 2022, humanitarian crises remain prevalent across the globe, and we continue to struggle with the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In this evolving context for humanitarian response, the original objective of the Grand Bargain to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the humanitarian system continues to be relevant – bringing together donors, UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement, and NGOs to ensure we use limited resources to their greatest potential.

Over the past five years, we have seen concrete progress in a number of areas, including on cash, localization and joints needs assessments, to name a few. However, it has become clear that, collectively, we have not yet achieved the transformational change that the original Grand Bargain promised. For this reason, the Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework endorsed this year at the June Grand Bargain Annual Meeting refined the overall objective to achieve “*Better humanitarian outcomes for affected populations through enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and greater accountability, in the spirit of Quid pro Quo as relevant to all*”. To reach this objective, we recognize that it is vital to achieve a critical mass of quality funding, and to provide greater support to the leadership, delivery, and capacity of the local responders. Both these priorities have proven to be especially relevant during the COVID-19 response.

The Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework also reflects an urgent need to move the focus from Geneva to the operational level, among the people in need we serve, where real transformation is required. Donors and humanitarian organisations, international and local actors must work together to offer the most effective and efficient assistance possible to the people who need it the most.

¹ According to the Global Humanitarian Overview in 2021 <https://gho.unocha.org/> and in 2016: <https://www.unocha.org/publication/global-humanitarian-overview/global-humanitarian-overview-2016>

² See 2021 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report: <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2021/#downloads>

To ensure that the Grand Bargain commitments can be translated into concrete realities, NGOs urge UNHCR and Members States to:

- Continue providing quality funding to all partners, UN agencies and NGOs alike, and strive to meet the 30% target of humanitarian contributions that is unearmarked or softly earmarked. We encourage donors who have not yet met this target to continue to individually work towards this objective, and donors who have surpassed this original 30% target to continue increasing their provision of flexible funding to the extent possible. To strengthen the delivery and capacity of local actors, it is paramount that States also provide such quality funding directly to their local partners.
- Uphold their commitments to **localisation**, by strengthening **quality partnership, flexible** funding, and **Less Paper more Aid** such as reducing burdensome donor procedures, **harmonisation of donors' procedures**, including those related to **due diligence**. There is clearly room to further reduce administrative and compliance burdens on NGO partners while maintaining appropriate accountability.
- In 2021, UNHCR introduced up to **50% budget flexibility for low-risk NGO** partners. We hope these measures will become the norm going forward and pave the way to broader UN reform towards higher flexibility.
- Continue working together with NGOs and UN agencies to build better systems for risk management and risk-sharing.
- We welcome the increased focus on risk management planned for the Grand Bargain 2.0, which must lead to serious **long-term strategic partnerships** rooted in **mutual trust** and recognition of each other's roles and contributions. This should result in better collaboration among all different stakeholders which, ultimately, will increase and maximize the benefits for those who are our very reason to exist: people in need of humanitarian assistance. In practice, improved trust and sharing of risks should lead to increased direct funding to local NGOs, opening the door for new and more diverse local NGO partnerships, and increased strategic engagement by and with the local actors over longer timeframes.
- With the implementation of the Grand Bargain 2.0, we urge active participation in the new "caucus" approach, designed to address political blockages to implementation, and engage with new National Reference Groups, which will be a critical avenue for local partner participation in the Grand Bargain.
- We urge UNHCR and other UN agencies to expand the use of multi-year funding agreements with partners, with a particular focus on countries where protracted humanitarian situations are at their worst, such as in Yemen.
- Finally, to continue open communication and dialogue with NGO partners on progress related to the Grand Bargain, specifically localization. Better transparency between UNHCR, other UN agencies, Member States and NGO partners on funding flows, budgeting, and levels of direct support to local partners is critical to understand the degree to which aid is reaching those on the front lines of humanitarian response when they need it most.

At the end of this statement, we would like to also extend our sincere appreciation to UNHCR and the donors' community for their efforts undertaken in implementing the Grand Bargain commitments. We stand ready to continue working together to transform them into a concrete reality in all countries where we operate.

Thank you, Chair.