

NGO Statement on Africa

Dear Chair,

This statement has been drafted in consultation with, and is delivered on behalf of, a wide range of NGOs and aims to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

Chair, the brutal and multi-faceted spectre of drought, catastrophic levels of hunger, conflict, coups, climate breakdown and COVID-19 continue to loom over millions of Africans and consume tens of thousands of lives. The impact of these multiple threats on African communities may not yet have been fully quantified. Yet, many countries on this continent, which is home to 30 million refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, and stateless people are nevertheless showcasing their commitments to international obligations to protect those forcibly displaced.

An ongoing lack of responsibility-sharing worldwide and increasing global inequality are amongst the greatest challenges African nations face in accelerating commitments to finding durable solutions to displacement. This is despite the promises enshrined in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the Global Compact on Refugees.

With appetite for vaccine take up in the global north all but saturated, vaccines are finally arriving on the African continent in the millions. As the COVAX Facility began distributing vaccines to humanitarian settings during 2021, some of the continent's poorest and crisis-affected countries showed open willingness to including refugees and asylum seekers in their national health plans and allocating some of what little protection against the virus they had to these vulnerable groups.

In 2021, Angola, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Rwanda, and Uganda all provided vaccines to refugees and IDPs.¹ But turning vaccines into vaccinations is still a monumental and hugely underfunded challenge. As one NGO report has found, administering vaccines in South Sudan's fragile health system cost at least six times the global estimate. Additional funding for vaccine delivery costs especially in areas beset by humanitarian and displacement crises will be crucial for COVAX to be effective.

Progress on including stateless communities in vaccine roll outs has thus far been slow and some governments' 'citizens-first' approach persists in deciding where socio-economic safety nets are allocated. For stateless people in Kenya and South Africa, for example, lack of documentation has resulted in exclusion from state relief², exposing how lack of nationality in times of crisis can mean 'the difference between life or death'.³

Devastating losses to livelihoods and income for refugees, stateless people, and IDPs in nations across Africa without the same economic safety nets enjoyed by rich countries has also become a defining feature of the pandemic for millions. Essential social services in fragile and conflict-affected countries

¹ UNHCR commends South Sudan as first refugees receive COVID-19 vaccination, Press Release, 21 May 2021: <https://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/press/2021/5/60a77d2f4/unhcr-commends-south-sudan-as-first-refugees-receive-covid-19-vaccination.html>

² CESF Consortium, Together we can. The COVID-19 Impact on stateless people & a roadmap for change, June 2021, https://files.institutesi.org/together_we_can_report_2021.pdf.

³ UNHCR warns stateless people risk being left behind in coronavirus response, UNHCR, Press release, 11 May 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/5/5eb95222ec/unhcr-warns-stateless-people-risk-behind-coronavirus-response.html>

have been hit hard, with women-focused health services such as sexual and reproductive health, family planning and maternal health near collapse in many hosting communities.

Woefully underfunded humanitarian responses have led to reductions of food assistance for over 3.3 million refugees' dependents on aid to meet basic needs in Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, and the United Republic of Tanzania – equal to 72% of all refugees in the East, Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes region last year.

This in turn has led to the rise in negative coping mechanisms, highlighting how women and children fall disproportionately victim to the secondary impacts of COVID-19. The shadow pandemic of gender-based violence (GBV) has been devastating, and, for children, the massive reduction in access to education has led to far greater protection threats. One NGO report maps a 73 per cent⁴ increase in intimate partner violence for displaced women and girls across Africa at the height of the pandemic. These extremely concerning rollbacks to progress achieved prior to the pandemic come in addition to ongoing gender-discriminatory frameworks, especially nationality laws in Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Togo, Liberia, and Eswatini that prevent women passing their nationality to their children – contributing to statelessness and GBV.

We have also witnessed an alarming increase in desperate communities being unable to access the humanitarian aid they need because humanitarian aid agencies are not being granted the safe, unfettered access necessary to deliver it. This is especially the case where conflicts continue to rage.

Before moving into a breakdown of key issues facing some of the core displacement contexts across the continent, we summarise our overall recommendations as follows:

- 1) Increased vaccine equity is urgently needed. We welcome UNHCR stepping up its advocacy in support of global vaccine equity – particularly its decision to join the Red Cross / Red Crescent partners in coming on board with the NGO-led call for a “people’s vaccine”.
- 2) Improved information sharing about vaccines and how to access them is crucial. Misinformation and disinformation remain rife, especially in marginalised communities. Working with refugee-led organisations and local groups, UNHCR should increase investment in developing accessible vaccine information packs in relevant languages and formats designed to reach displaced communities.
- 3) All displaced people, including stateless persons and those without nationality of their country of residence, must be included in state and international relief efforts.
- 4) Efforts to end statelessness must continue, including the reform of gender-discriminatory nationality laws and the establishment of legal safeguards against statelessness across the continent. UNHCR advocacy to end gender discrimination in nationality laws and statelessness is especially critical in this time of increased incidence of GBV, given links between GBV and discriminatory nationality laws and statelessness.
- 5) Donors must fully fund Humanitarian Response Plans and Regional Response Plans – and improve response where it is already likely happening.
- 6) Donors and UN Agencies must stand alongside NGOs to advocate strongly to all governments for safe and unfettered access to deliver aid to populations in need – including ensuring clear, timely humanitarian exemptions to UN or unilateral sanctions regimes.

⁴ What happened? How the humanitarian response to COVID-19 failed to protect women and girls, International Rescue Committee, Report, 12 October 2020: <https://www.rescue.org/report/what-happened-how-humanitarian-response-covid-19-failed-protect-women-and-girls>

Governments must fund and support innovative methods to deliver aid to communities cut off by conflict or flooding - such as the aerial delivery of life-saving basic needs.

- 7) Donors and UN Agencies must stand alongside NGOs to advocate strongly to all governments for the alleviation of bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian operations. To promote the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of aid, donors and UN agencies need to actualise their commitments to the Grand Bargain agreement by increasing the quality and flexibility of funding to local and national NGOs, including women-led and refugee-led organizations.
- 8) The work of refugee-led organizations and groups supporting their communities must be more widely recognised. Host governments should also ensure that conditions are conducive for these groups to have the legal status that can enable them to receive support from around the world.
- 9) In compliance with international obligations and laws, all states must refuse measures that erode the international protection system, placing many asylum seekers, stateless people, and refugees at risk of *refoulement*, detention, protracted displacement or restrict any durable solutions prospects.
- 10) All actors must increase accountability to affected populations in key contexts across the continent using findings from 2021 multi-sector needs assessments. Women and girls, speakers of marginalized languages, and people with disabilities (particularly those with hearing loss) are among those routinely facing barriers to accessing information and making their views heard.

Regional specific updates:

The East, Horn & Great Lakes region

A staggering number of people are projected to be in acute food insecurity in the first five months of 2022 across the **East, Horn & Great Lakes region**, which hosts 67 per cent of all Africa's refugees and 20 per cent of the global refugee population.

It is projected that **more than 59 million people will face acute food insecurity** in some parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan⁵ in the first six months of 2022.

Of this number, more than 18 million are projected to be one step away from famine and more than half a million already face death from catastrophic levels of hunger. This hellish situation is a stain on humanity and a tragic reflection of how unequal the world is. During the pandemic the world's 10 richest men doubled their wealth while millions in this one region alone – many of them displaced – found it harder each day to survive.

Nearly 4.7 million children are expected to be acutely malnourished in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia in 2022, including more than 1.4 million severely acutely malnourished. In Somalia, a drought-driven displacement crisis has already begun. Livestock and income loss, combined with water and food shortages, has forced more than 245,000 from their homes, with projections of up to 1.4 million people displaced in the first six months of 2022.

The potential of this immense crisis to generate even more displacement is of extreme concern to NGOs. Chronically underfunded HRP's for all of the crises in the region are leading to devastating cuts to food baskets and other aid provisions. Donors must scale up funding for these plans as a matter of extreme urgency.

⁵ Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity | February to May 2022 Outlook, Report, 26 January 2022, WFP-FAO: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/hunger-hotspots-fao-wfp-early-warnings-acute-food-insecurity-february-may-2022-outlook>

In **South Sudan**, many refugees and IDPs mistrust the glacial rate of progress of peace talks and lack confidence to return. The transitional government must agree to the tabled plans. Some parts of the country are still heavily affected by floods making the lives of IDPs hard and the conditions for return almost impossible. Protection concerns for displaced women and girls have increased due to spikes in widespread intimate partner violence and other forms of GBV made worse by the pandemic and ongoing weak governance.

In **Ethiopia**, no sustainable solutions have been agreed to find a resolution to the conflict in and around northern Ethiopia, despite diplomatic efforts. The re-emergence of drought in some parts of the country has made an already horrific situation worse, raising the stakes for humanitarian NGOs and UN Agencies attempting to coordinate a massive, underfunded, response to support victims of the conflict and those affected by drought. Heightened insecurity continues to hinder humanitarian access and delivery of aid to northern Ethiopia, particularly inside Tigray and bordering Afar and Amhara, where the conflict has spread. The humanitarian disaster unfolding across the country means higher levels of displacement are projected for 2022.

The **Democratic Republic of Congo** is home to 267 million acutely food insecure people – of which more than 5 million are one step away from famine – yet response plans remain woefully underfunded. There are 5.5 million IDPs in DRC and the protracted displacement crisis in the east continues to grow with new refugees arriving over the border regularly. A spate of recent violent attacks on IDP camps in Ituri province in 2021 saw women and children amongst those killed. NGOs joined UNHCR in expressing outrage and calling for security measures at the camps to be improved, yet we understand there were more attacks at the start of 2022. The recent kidnappings of INGO staff, as well as administrative impediments, show the need for far greater commitment from authorities to facilitate and protect the aid response. In addition, the country is regularly confronted with disease outbreaks including but not limited to COVID19. Recognising the drastically under-funded nature of the HRP, NGOs also want to highlight the findings of the 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview which emphasised the need for a greater commitment to increasing transparency and inclusion mechanisms to improve accountability to affected populations in the humanitarian response.

West and Central Africa

In the **Central Sahel**, spanning Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger the long-running presence of armed groups, weak governance, and resource scarcity have increasingly fuelled intercommunal violence and generated significant displacement flows. Together these factors have forced more than 2.5 million to flee their homes and the number in need of humanitarian assistance has recently risen sharply to 14.7 million.

Farming, trade, and transhumance have been significantly affected by insecurity and the devastating impacts of climate change, disrupting the livelihoods of millions. With the resulting decrease in food production and concerns that the lean season will be severe this year more than 8 million people could be food insecure by the summer. Despite continual politically tumultuous times in the region donors must not disengage from addressing the deteriorating humanitarian crisis and must immediately act to mitigate the effects of widespread food shortages. It is also crucial that donors engage with ECOWAS to avoid policies and practices that could further exacerbate the dire humanitarian situation.

Unfortunately, the dire humanitarian conditions show no signs of improving for people in the **Lake Chad Basin** in 2022. The complex challenges of climate change, worsening intercommunal clashes, and violence perpetrated by armed groups still affects Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. Despite the worsening trendlines international attention and engagement in the region has been dwindling each year. More funding and support must be secured so NGOs and partners can implement an effective response to the growing, intersecting crises.

In **Nigeria**, IDPs and refugees remain under pressure to return to unsafe areas in Borno State where they are exposed to serious protection and health risks and could even be facing imminent famine. Any relocation of IDPs and refugees must be voluntary and can only happen when conditions for durable solutions are in place. Returnees must be able to access essential services, adequate shelter, health, water, and livelihood opportunities.

The recent announcement of the creation of the Presidential Committee on the repatriation, returns and resettlement of displaced persons is welcome. We hope the Committee will focus on creating durable solutions for the remaining displaced populations. Informed decision-making on durable solutions will require effective two-way communication therefore humanitarian information, data collection and feedback mechanisms need to cater to a wider range of languages spoken by the affected population. Safe and unfettered access for humanitarian actors to all areas in Borno State is vital – especially to sites where IDPs have been transferred and where we hear reports of escalating malnutrition and an estimated one million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

There is also growing evidence of extreme protection concerns and accelerated conflict following the forced returns of IDPs in **Niger**.

The people of the **Central African Republic** continued to endure repeated outbreaks of conflict, widespread population displacement, low levels of birth registration, discriminatory application of nationality laws, alarming food insecurity, and limited access to basic services and economic opportunities in 2021. Insecurity and the increasing use of internationally banned landmines severely limited humanitarian access. As of early 2022, 63 percent of the country's 4.9 million citizens require humanitarian aid - 300,000 more than in 2021. In stark contrast to other countries, the international community should be applauded for providing 86 percent of the required funding for 2021, but these financial commitments must be maintained and even increased as the needs of Central Africans persist.

Thank you, Chair