

## Speech to UNHCR Executive Committee

### Reporting from the 2022 UNHCR Consultations with NGOs

Delivered on behalf of NGOs and UNHCR by:

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Dear Chair, Excellencies, UNHCR and NGO colleagues,

We are honored to report on behalf of UNHCR and NGOs on the global consultations that took place in June this year. Held through a hybrid format, the three-day event gathered 500 registered participants, representing an unprecedented diverse group with 25 organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people, 29 Faith-Based Organizations, 89 national and local NGOs and 82 international NGOs. The themes for the 2022 Global Consultations, "Climate Action and Localization", built on respective discussions and outcomes from the seven Regional Consultations and the UNHCR-NGO Monthly Consultations of 2021, and the quarterly consultations in 2022.

This year, the co-organizers (UNHCR and ICVA), developed the content of the consultations through two Working Groups focusing respectively on localization and on climate action. Each group included 8 members selected through an open application process and represent national and international NGOs, organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people, and UNHCR. The role of the two Working Groups also extended to drafting the first iteration of the Consultations' main output: a set of 30 recommendations that build on the recommendations which came out of the regional and global monthly NGO consultations. These 30 recommendations were refined during the event. Myself and my esteemed colleague delivering today's statement represent the two Working Groups.

The comprehensive consultations started with eleven online side events organized by 28 Organizations and Networks worldwide as well as UNHCR entities, and then moved to the hybrid main sessions. The objectives of the consultations and side events were threefold: first, to exchange information on progress made on the region specific recommendations and the commitments made during the 2021 Monthly and Regional Consultations, and to review those that could be endorsed to become global recommendations; second, to develop new recommendations to inform future UNHCR-NGO collaborations to address protection and solutions challenges related to Localization and Climate Action; and third, to feed into globally driven processes such as the UNHCR Strategic Framework for Climate Action and preparations for the second Global Refugee Forum. The main achievement of the Consultations was the development of recommendations reflecting a collective understanding that while the localization principle has been widely endorsed, the modalities to develop localized responses to traditional crises and to prepare ourselves for other drivers of displacement must take root in a more expeditious, concerted manner, and it must also go beyond merely directing limited amounts of resources to national NGOs.

On the topic of localization, UNHCR and NGOs' representatives discussed the challenges, opportunities and good practices linked to the recognition of organizations led by forcibly displaced people and their existing

*\*\*\* Top 3 recommendations for each session as voted by participants*

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capacity, the role of local organizations in influencing national and international policies, and UNHCR's approach to meaningful engagement, including in funded partnerships.

All sessions identified lack of funding, training, awareness, and capacity as the underlying barriers to meaningful engagement, with the need to promote organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people, marginalized groups, and other local actors as equal partners. The importance of partnerships based on solidarity and trust was in fact highlighted as a way to address the risks related to funding locally-led refugee responses. Less restrictive approaches for initiatives led by forcibly displaced people was, therefore, the most emphasized recommendation, coupled with the need for multi-year funding and reduced transaction costs.

Local organizations have specific knowledge on the nuanced problems faced by their immediate communities and are exceptionally placed to provide an appropriate response. This was demonstrated through some good practices such as refugee-led capacity strengthening for other local actors, refugee-led funding consortia, and platforms for engaging with refugee-led initiatives. Two of the main recommendations, therefore, focused on support for increased participation of refugees and local organizations in advocacy and policymaking, emphasizing the need of structural changes for the recognition of refugee-led initiatives within the national frameworks and addressing issues such as language barriers and the use of humanitarian jargon in coordination fora.

While UNHCR's efforts on localization were recognized, UNHCR is urged to be more transparent about its initiatives to achieve this agenda. Representatives of different local NGOs, consortia, and networks promoted further advancement in decentralization and encouraged UNHCR to better disseminate ideas, resources, and skills from headquarters to field, regional bureaus and national offices. Member states are strongly encouraged to advance their localization agenda through delivering on Grand Bargain commitments, which includes ensuring increased funding and support for initiatives led by refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons so that they can expand service delivery to targeted groups.

The second main theme of the Global Consultations was framed with direct reference to UNHCR's 2021 Strategic Framework for Climate Action. Recommendations on this topic focused on preparedness to emergencies induced by climate-related and natural hazards, building resilience, improving adaptation, and the role of local actors. Recommendations *inter alia* suggested measures to mitigate the risk of climate change related displacement and promote the use of existing protection tools to address related needs.

First, the role of preparedness, anticipatory action, and forecasting to build resilience of displaced persons and their host communities to disasters was thoroughly discussed. NGOs and UNHCR highlighted the importance of strengthening inclusive early warning and preparedness coordination mechanisms that mobilize local, regional, and global actors in support of national governments and communities. Participants stressed the importance of considering contextual knowledge, such as local vulnerabilities and capacities to develop responses on that basis. For instance, taking local expertise into account is fundamental for successful planned relocations of communities unable to adapt to adverse climate impacts. This harnesses the potential of displaced populations to become ambassadors for disaster risk reduction and climate action when empowered and included in decision-making processes.

Second, participants and panelists particularly pointed out the relevance of UNHCR's Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change

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and disasters<sup>1</sup> that recalls that people may have valid claims for refugee status when they flee across borders in search of safety in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters. The top recommendations on improving preparedness, forecasting and anticipatory action reiterate the importance of increasing engagement with local communities in all phases of preparing for emergencies and disaster preparedness strategies. As to international protection, recommendations advise applying existing refugee and human rights instruments to displacement across borders in the context of climate change and disasters. NGOs and local actors highlighted the need to strengthen capacities of asylum officers to better understand the intersections between climate change and the application of existing instruments. Member States are specifically recommended to mainstream climate change and disaster related displacement considerations into national development plans, through a whole-of-government approach.

To conclude, we invite you to read the full list of recommendations, which is publicly available on the dedicated webpage of this year's global Consultations with NGOs. Some are particularly addressed to you, Member States, and are pertinent to the design and plan of policies and programmes.

The most resounding takeaway of the NGOs Consultations is the need for multi-year and quality funding, which is crucial for predictable and impactful humanitarian action.

Following up on recommendations is an important collective responsibility and undertaking, involving continued advocacy, partnerships as well as policy, and legislative and programmatic adaptations. States must do their part. UNHCR and NGOs will also work together, especially to follow up on the top twelve recommendations selected by participants. Avenues for this work may include, inter alia, ongoing and future partnerships and next year's seven UNHCR-NGO Regional Consultations, which will provide an opportunity to discuss progress. 2023 will also be decisive in supporting the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees with the second Global Refugee Forum, which will surely address issues discussed at the Consultations.

UNHCR and NGOs will continue to robustly engage on operational, policy, and advocacy priorities to prepare and respond to the protection and durable solutions needs of forcibly displaced populations.

Finally, we also thank all the participants of the Consultations for their active and collective work ahead of and during the Consultations.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters*, 1 October 2020, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f75f2734.html> [accessed 28 July 2022]

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## Recommendations

### from the 2022 UNHCR Consultations with NGOs

#### Session 1. Panel on Localization on inclusive advocacy coordination of local organizations and organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people.

##### A. Goal setting

##### 1) **Establish inclusive advocacy coordination mechanisms in all contexts of forced displacement.**

UNHCR should ensure that inclusive advocacy coordination mechanisms exist at national and/or regional level in all situations of/ at risk of forced displacement. These mechanisms should promote support to local governments and other stakeholders in grounding their policies international standards, gender, age, and diversity considerations and taking into account the perspectives of displaced persons.

##### B. Capacity strengthening

##### 2) **Partner with existing national NGO networks and coordination bodies to support their work in local languages.**

UNHCR should establish agreements with existing National NGO networks and/ or coordination bodies, and support them with specifically mandated funds, in order to foster locally led advocacy.

##### 3) **\*\*\* Invest in promoting participation and co- leadership of local actors in inter-agency coordination mechanisms.**

UNHCR and INGOs should support the meaningful participation of local organizations and enable them to take on co-leadership roles in coordination mechanisms. This requires advocating with host country governments and the UN coordination system respectively, conferring more power to local actors, including women-led organizations which face gender specific barriers to participation, and covering costs such as networking membership fees and related human resources (e.g., coordination staff).

##### 4) **Advocate for the protection of organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.**

Building on Regional Consultations dynamics, UNHCR and INGOs should leverage their influence to promote protection measures for local organizations, so that they can play a greater leadership role in advocacy without compromising their safety.

##### 5) **\*\*\* Advocate for economic empowerment of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.**

UNHCR and NGOs should jointly advocate for economic empowerment of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, in all their diversity, by promoting their right to work, access to finance tools, inclusion in national social protection measures and socio-economic response plans. Learning from the COVID-19 response, joint advocacy should include efforts to foster positive public perceptions of refugees and to ensure social protection systems are equipped to meet the needs of displaced populations.

##### 6) **Advocate for the inclusion of local actors in early warning and preparedness processes**

UNHCR and NGOs should advocate with host country governments to include local actors (including both at risk and affected communities) in all early warning and preparedness processes and plans. This will

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ensure that local perspectives (including from FBOs, youth-led organizations, and child participation) inform preparedness plans and pave the way for community-led responses.

## C. Financial obligations

### 7) \*\*\* **Deliver on the Grand Bargain commitment of '25 per cent'**.

Civil Society Organization (CSOs) should monitor that 25 per cent of funding for responses is effectively received by local organizations, as agreed through the Grand Bargain 2.0. CSOs should establish indicators to measure compliance and invest in national reference groups where these exist.

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## Session 2. Main session on Localization on recognition of organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons

### A. Goal setting

#### 8) **Collaborate with local actors to establish relevant institutional and technical capacity sharing opportunities**

UNHCR, UN Agencies and INGOs should establish institutional and technical capacity sharing opportunities (training, mentoring, coaching, etc.) with local actors (RLOs, NGOs, FBOs and Community Based Organisations (CBOs)), to prepare them for leading sustainable and effective humanitarian responses and to strengthen their accountability to donors and others. They intimately know the nuanced problems faced by their immediate communities and the best strategies for addressing them. Recognition of Capacity Assessments and Training Processes approved by Country-based Pooled Funds (CBPF) conducted for National NGOs by UN agencies would be a first step in that direction.

### B. Towards removing financial barriers

#### 9) **Provide financial support and encourage access to funds of consortia led by refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons.**

UNHCR, NGOs and UN Agencies should support – including through funding – consortia and/or networks of local organizations working either in similar geographies or similar sectors, to streamline accountability and fast track the flow of funds to local organisations. This is particularly important for consortia or networks led by refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons because they are often local.

#### 10) **Open funding access for initiatives led by refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons.**

UNHCR, NGOs, UN Agencies and Donors should avoid insisting on pre-determined program outcomes to enable these groups to build programs centred around fulfilling actual needs. UNHCR should help build trust in organizations led by refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons, as capable entities who can be accountable to donors, who can in turn be accountable to their own stakeholders.

### C. Placing impact at the centre of collaboration

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## **11) Innovate to establish new ways of reporting and demonstrating impact.**

Organizations led by refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons should play a bigger role in the design and implementation of accountability mechanisms relevant to their plans of action (including shared platforms such as project management technology that all parties can use to record verifiable information against agreed indicators). The collaboration between organizations, donors and UN Agencies to create this new accountability mechanism will allow for reliable reporting standards to ensuring financial and programmatic accountability.

## **12) Increase support to organizations led by refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons so that they can expand delivery to targeted groups.**

UNHCR, NGOs, UN Agencies and Donors should focus on efficiency and impact by supporting the organisations led by actors from the affected communities themselves thereby ensuring that the solutions meet the actual challenges they endure and the problems they face.

## **Session 3. Main session on Climate Action: Protection through Actions.**

### **A. Preventive Action**

## **13) Operationalize risk analysis, including through forecasting models, and engage with decision makers to trigger actions and investments.**

Forecasting models can inform proactive, proportionate, and practical preparedness actions if sufficiently operationalized, contextualized and funded. UNHCR and NGOs should ensure that risk assessment and forecasting are adapted to the specific local context, are objective and trigger timely, proportionate action (including adaptation) and investment. To fund such investments, additional resources for preparedness are needed, as well as Climate Financing, and should prioritize fragile contexts, especially those with large scale protracted displacement. It is important to prevent the politicization of risk analysis.

## **14) \*\*\* Increase inclusive engagement in early warning and preparedness mechanisms.**

UNHCR, NGOs and affected communities should proactively participate in coordination mechanisms, specialized networks and initiatives engaged in early warning and preparedness, including local, regional and global anticipation of sudden- and slow-onset disasters. This includes local, regional and global level platforms acting in support of national governments, local authorities and communities. Local perspectives should inform preparedness and anticipatory actions on a "No regrets" basis and guide data-driven advocacy for climate-smarter humanitarian response.

## **15) \*\*\* Integrate displacement considerations into disaster preparedness strategies, in consultation with at risk communities.**

Member States, with support from UNHCR and NGOs, should integrate displacement and protection considerations into disaster risk reduction, preparedness, adaptation, and resilience strategies. This may include the planned relocation of communities unable to adapt to due to their heightened exposure and vulnerability, which should be fully consulted and involved in the planning. The selected relocation areas should not be particularly climate vulnerable and attention should be paid not to disrupt the ecological balance and social harmony of the pre-existing host community.

## **16) Strengthen the data used for forecasting.**

UNHCR and NGOs should work (including through advocacy) to improve data standardization, coordination, and collection of high-quality quantitative and qualitative data. Data access should be

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facilitated and analysis of the linkages between the impacts of climate change and other drivers and triggers of displacement further explored to improve the usefulness of forecasting models.

## B. Greening operations

### **17) Reduce environmental degradation in displacement settings**

UNHCR and NGOs should develop clear steps to reduce the impact that humanitarian responses have on the environment, including by decreasing emissions across the end-to-end supply chain of relief items. They should ensure that all new projects incorporate environmental sustainability components to reduce the environmental footprint, aiming for carbon neutrality.

### **18) Design and build sustainable infrastructure to achieve protection outcomes.**

UNHCR and partners should adapt physical infrastructure to increase protection of vulnerable groups whilst reducing environmental impact (such as solar streetlamps, or distribution of solar / wind-up torches to enhance safety at night).

### **19) \*\*\* Promote sustainable disaster risk reduction and climate change adaption.**

Member States should build awareness of and promote the use of sustainable Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation methodologies such as Nature based Solutions (NbS), and Eco-DRR and Ecosystem based Adaptation (EBA), which use ecosystem-based approaches to reduce disaster and climate change related risks, boost community resilience to adverse events and increase the efficacy and resilience of local livelihoods.

## Session 4. Panel on Climate Action: Protection through Law and Policy

### A. For UNHCR and NGOs:

### **20) \*\*\* Use legal protection expertise and experience to support stakeholders when laws and policies on climate change and disasters related displacement are developed at different levels**

This can be done by promoting existing guidance such as UNHCR's 'Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters' legal practitioners and other stakeholders. Another example of such support would be for UNHCR to operationalize the legal considerations' paper by creating a guidance for refugee status determination officers and other relevant adjudicators.

### **21) \*\*\* Support the establishment of frameworks to mitigate and respond to displacement in the context of climate change and disasters.**

UNHCR and NGOs should promote climate change related human mobility frameworks and processes to contribute to climate change adaptation and prevent displacement whenever possible – such as the IGAD Free Movement Protocol or the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP). It is important for decision- and policymakers to understand where migration is a response to a failure to adapt versus migration as successful adaptation, and to prevent the former while facilitating the latter. In complement, whenever displacement occurs, existing legal and normative instruments for the protection of displaced people in need should apply.

### **22) Provide regular progress updates on UNHCR's Regional Plans of Action with NGOs, including the ways in which Pillar I on policy and protection is specifically incorporated.**

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## B. For Member States:

### **23) Apply existing refugee and human rights instruments to displacement across borders in the context of climate change and disasters.**

Member States should apply refugee and human rights instruments wherever there may be need for international protection when cross-border displacement occurs in the context of climate change impacts and effects of disasters. Member States should develop guidelines for relevant adjudicators to extend international protection where needed for people displaced in the context of disasters and climate change.

### **24) \*\*\* Use national policies and international frameworks to protect those at risk of displacement within national borders in the context of climate change and disasters.**

Member States should mainstream climate change and disaster related displacement and related protection considerations into national development plans, using a whole-of-government approach to climate action. Member States should integrate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Nansen Principles, and relevant regional instruments, such as the Kampala Convention, into national policies and legal frameworks.

### **25) Support enhanced cooperation between humanitarian, development, peace, and climate change actors at all levels to ensure a holistic approach to climate change-related displacement crises.**

### **26) Invest in adaptation for at-risk communities.**

Member States should take steps to support the sustainable adaptation of vulnerable communities based on their specific needs, and to sufficiently protect populations affected by adverse effects of climate change, including through strengthened legal frameworks and proper implementation of these in practice.

### **27) Ensure that people are at the centre of all climate action.**

Member States should ensure that all climate action is people-centred, gender, age and diversity responsive, and adopts a human-rights based approach. This includes ensuring meaningful, informed, voluntary participation in timely planned relocation schemes as a measure of last resort; evacuation and other relevant measures; and, ensuring the dignity, safety, and rights of those displaced in the context of climate change, including in hard-to-reach areas.

## C. For all partners

### **28) Promote knowledge exchange to improve climate change-related policy development.**

The UN and NGOs should seek synergies and exchanges on research projects that may support law and policy development to strengthen the protection of displaced people in the contexts of adverse effects of climate change and disasters. This includes the use of peer-to-peer exchange mechanisms and platforms, and efforts to promote green-legacy and related mobilization efforts.

### **29) Document and share information on protection issues related to displacement in the context of climate change and disasters.**

The UN and NGOs should document and share their evolving understanding of protection-related issues in relation to displacement occurring in the context of climate change and disasters based on their

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respective mandate and expertise, *inter alia* through joint events/messages in all appropriate formats, and conferences.

### **30) Promote existing environmental principles and standards**

The UN and NGOs should promote the use and application of general principles and standards of international environmental law arising from international treaties, agreements, and customs to enhance the protection of the environment, including the effects of climate change, and affected people. Examples include Principles of good neighborliness and international cooperation, Principle of Preventive Action, Precautionary Principle; and Obligation to compensate for damages, Principle of common but differentiated responsibility, Principle of Sustainability.

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