

NGO Statement on Africa

Dear Chair,

This statement was drafted through a wide consultation with NGOs and reflects a diversity of views.

Forced displacement remains a fundamental challenge to the international system across Africa. Populations facing conflict and climate-related shocks will continue to pick themselves up and move – in most cases to more urban environments with greater economic opportunities – because they have few alternatives. All forecasts suggest that such movements will only increase in the coming years, particularly as a result of the climate crisis and its political impacts, demonstrated by the current drought facing the Horn of Africa – raising the prospect of famine once again – and floods across West and Central Africa.

In many cases, new displacements come on top of decades of previous ones, and the responses of the national, regional, and international system have, in too many cases, created nodes of extreme poverty in the camps and informal settlements of the region. Worse, these settlements are too often heavily securitized, not only limiting freedom of movement but making humanitarian action harder and harder.

The impact of these challenges reaches far beyond just those identified as forcibly displaced, affecting a wide range of host communities and other populations. We must make more progress and become more agile in the coming years if we are not to remain trapped in humanitarian cycles that look the same today as they did fifty years ago. There is a direct connection between these dynamics and the far too regular tragedies occurring in boats in the Mediterranean and English Channel, as desperate people take their lives in their hands in ever more dangerous ways.

This will require a clear-eyed reflection on the successes and failures of past policy efforts. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, for example, has created real opportunities, most evidently in the form of legislation in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Cameroon that provide more rights and freedoms for refugees. Uganda has demonstrated what is possible in terms of creating a more enabling environment for the integration of refugees with host communities and enabling freer movements and exchanges of resources. There has been a renewed focus on programming seeking to help displaced people enter 21st century economies, including taking advantage of new technologies.

In parallel, concerted durable solutions efforts in Somalia have focused on providing greater land tenure security to internally displaced persons (IDPs), helping them end the cycle of poverty, exploitation, and displacement. Liberia enacted nationality law reforms to remove all gender-discriminatory provisions, meaning Liberian women and men now hold the equal right to confer nationality on their children and spouse – a notable step in the effort to end statelessness in Africa and ensure that all nationality laws uphold women and men's equal citizenship.

Leadership from regional bodies, particularly IGAD, has also created spaces for regional exchanges about tackling the challenges of displacement, and practical steps such as the EAC/IGAD roadmap on strengthening child protection systems. Many regional bodies have also successfully advanced efforts to combat statelessness and address discriminatory provisions in nationality laws, in partnership with UNHCR. We urge regional bodies and affected States to build on this momentum and share concrete plans to advance gender-equal nationality rights at the June 2023 High-Level Global Summit on Achieving Gender Equality in Nationality Laws, co-sponsored by UNHCR and others.

In relation to IDPs, governments in Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Ethiopia are also making progress on ratifying and domesticating the Kampala Convention.

However, **fundamental challenges remain**. Apart from the new policy directions aspired to, the reductions in funding for long-standing humanitarian operations across the continent are raising concerns about the quality of services being provided, not least the multiple cuts that NGOs have seen to rations across Africa's regions. At a time of significant drought and hunger across the Horn of Africa, this is deeply concerning. We can also not underestimate the ongoing protection challenges displaced people face, particularly in Ethiopia, where conflict dynamics have contributed to the destruction of refugee camps in different parts of the country.

In Kenya, there are continued concerns about the functioning of refugee registration processes and the potential for highly vulnerable people to fall through the gaps.

In Nigeria, organized returns and relocations in areas that are still under attack by non-state armed groups have exposed communities to harm and compounded access challenges. Nigerian refugees have also been repatriated from Niger to Nigeria in the absence of a tripartite agreement providing a protective framework.

In Somalia, the nationality law denies Somali women's right to confer nationality on their children, resulting in a heightened risk of stateless children – particularly amongst those displaced – and further exacerbating families' vulnerabilities. It is important to note that women and children tend to be disproportionately negatively affected by the dynamics around forced displacement.

In many African countries, **access to the most vulnerable** has continued to be a major concern for humanitarian actors. If aid agencies cannot access vulnerable people freely, then the prospects for policy and programming being driven by communities themselves becomes ever weaker. Managing these risks requires concerted and coordinated efforts on all parts of the aid system to engage political actors coherently and swiftly, but too often this does not happen. UNHCR should promote the respect of international standards and IDP, stateless people and refugee protection, and work with governmental and non-governmental actors to ensure that national laws and policies provide an enabling environment for displaced people to claim their rights from the appropriate authorities, including through participating in the planning of humanitarian action.

Addressing **the resource constraint** will be a requirement for real change moving forward, as donor fatigue for funding endless humanitarian operations sets in ever more deeply. Alongside the efforts already being made to deploy IDA resources through the World Bank and unlocking the potential of markets and the private sector to invest in displacement-affected settings, new resources must be found. There are opportunities available by breaking down the silos that the international system tends to create. For example, making better use of new funding streams tied to climate adaptation, urbanisation, and resilience. Additionally, there is a need for creativity and intentionality on the part of donors to get the right kinds of resources to the right actors at the right time to focus on solutions as early as possible – the

drought response has too often been characterized by donors pushing large amounts of funding on a small number of partners in a quest for speed. Crisis modifiers have made it easier for funds to be flexibly deployed towards drought response in Somalia, and such approaches should be developed further across the continent.

We also need to be realistic about the likely prospects of self-reliance programming if displaced people are held back from making the most of the resources, they do have access to, particularly through restrictions on freedom of movement. It is well documented that displacement-affected communities rely primarily on networks of mutual support and social capital that provide them with access to the resources they need to move forward. Yet these informal networks tend to be invisible to aid actors, or even worse, framed as illicit – if we do not understand and cannot engage with them, we struggle to go with the grain of how these communities operate and even to know who the most vulnerable really are. We need to do more to understand how policy and programmatic shifts can unlock these networks and enable genuine self-reliance, while also protecting those at most risk of exploitation.

The **political challenges of increasing freedom of movement** are well understood, particularly in environments where security is a concern. Advocating for this must continue to be central to all policy dialogue efforts if we are to move beyond the traditional humanitarian model. These dialogues need to ask challenging questions of both donor and host governments – it is not enough just to focus on movement within the continent, as essential as this is. There needs to be a greater understanding of the psychological impact of the recent reductions in resettlement programmes on displaced people, in particular, and the extent to which the idea of resettlement continues to drive decision-making amongst Somali or South Sudanese communities that now understand themselves to be part of globalised networks. While a major expansion of resettlement programmes may not be realistic, there is a moral obligation on the part of the governments of the traditional countries of resettlement to engage with displacement-affected communities about likely future trends and their implications. Addressing resettlement more directly should also enable more realistic discussions about prospects for integration and return. For both refugees and IDPs, all organised movements that do take place must do so in a voluntary, safe, and dignified manner based on meaningful consultations.

Most fundamentally, **there is a need to recognise that every displacement context is different**, as are the aspirations and desires of every displacement-affected community and the individuals within them. While regional and global policy frameworks play a critical role – for example, regional frameworks such as the Kampala Convention, or the new focus being given to the situation of IDPs by the recently appointed Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement. Local actors will be the determining factor in whether real progress is made. Additionally, communities need to be seen as actors with agency and status in these discussions.

The success and learning of Southern NGOs from other parts of the world, such as Grameen and BRAC, not only in driving their own development, but also in becoming significant global social development actors should be carefully reviewed and its implications for Africa be considered. Local governments and municipal leaders in towns such as Bossaso in Somalia, Lodwar in Kenya, or El Jeneina in Sudan need to be given the support and resources to provide integrated leadership to meet the needs of all of their people. While key common principles can be determined, solutions will look different in every context and hybrid, bespoke programmatic arrangements are likely to be the most successful. Each of these arrangements needs to be backed by evidence and data to track progress and course correct in real time.

Finally, **external actors need to work harder to act more coherently**. The UN system has a critical leadership role to play, but this is too often undermined by internal organisational politics and

competition for resources. UNHCR's role in the system also needs to be better elaborated and more consistently implemented.

The coming years in Africa will be shaped by the need to deal with the impact of recent shocks, while undoubtedly new ones will emerge – this will demand agility on the part of the aid system to support national and local authorities to help protect the most vulnerable while also looking to the future. The NGO community welcomes leadership from the top of the UN system that better links the development and humanitarian systems, and recognises the important contribution that NGOs are already making on the ground, beyond just being implementing partners. This should be about NGOs being close enough to local communities to help governments and the UN develop fully rounded aid responses that truly leave no one behind – for our part, this requires us to continue to make progress on localisation to ensure we are as representative as possible of those we seek to serve.

Thank you.