

NGO Statement on Europe

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

Last month marked one year since the escalation of international armed conflict in Ukraine, which has had a profound and enduring impact on Europe and worldwide. The humanitarian toll of this conflict has been grave, with nearly one-third of the pre-conflict population being forcibly displaced, thousands of deaths and untold destruction of Ukraine's civilian infrastructure.

European States have simultaneously grappled with questions around security, energy, and economic implications, whilst quickly mobilising to address an unfolding humanitarian crisis. The resulting response was effective and proactive, with UNHCR, EU States, and NGOs allocating capacity and resources to meet the most pressing humanitarian needs. Activating the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time was also a historic step allowing Ukrainian refugees access to status and rights.

Looking ahead, we propose four key recommendations to UNHCR and States to extend the many good practices implemented for Ukraine to *all* people experiencing forced displacement or seeking international protection.

First, ensure sustained support for people affected by the Ukraine conflict.

We encourage European States to sustain their support to people displaced and their host communities, as long as needs persist. This includes investing in integration and protection solutions beyond the expiration of TPD next year, as well as sustainable economic and social inclusion. Appropriate resourcing of domestic refugee hosting costs must not come at the expense of the aid budget for other displacement crises.

The facilitation of UNHCR partnerships will continue to be critical to sustain this solidarity. Yet, based on lessons from Ukraine, these partnerships are not always accessible for NGOs. Several challenges have at times hindered NGOs' ability to operate efficiently, such as siloed approaches in Ukraine's neighbouring countries and cumbersome, top-down partnership requirements that have limited the ability for funds to reach partners, particularly local NGOs leading the first response. We recommend developing a leaner process for partnership in acute emergencies, one that aligns with partners' abilities to absorb risk and better support locally-led initiatives, and we welcome further dialogue with UNHCR and donors on its operationalisation. This could be achieved through an NGO taskforce outlining practical commitments donors should adopt to guarantee that partners are adequately resourced with quality funding to work safely and in a principled way.

Second, uphold human rights law for *all* seeking international protection in Europe.

Over the same period in which immediate assistance was offered to Ukrainians, other people seeking protection in Europe continued facing an opaque and under-resourced asylum system, alongside violations of their rights through pushbacks, indeterminate detention, and abuse at border crossings. 2022

saw another 2,023 dead and missing people from attempted Mediterranean crossings, whilst States at Europe's external borders imposed further measures against NGOs, effectively preventing humanitarians from saving lives. This includes legislation aimed at curtailing search-and-rescue missions, forcing NGOs to choose between leaving people stranded at sea or risking hefty fines and impoundment of vessels. Likewise, recent attempts to put humanitarian search-and-rescue workers on trial is a concerning step towards criminalising lifesaving aid.

More than two years since the New Pact on Migration and Asylum was unveiled, negotiations remain ongoing as political will wavers. Meanwhile, States continue seeking ways to externalise their protection responsibilities by offshoring asylum procedures to third countries. NGOs call on States to respect their obligations under the Refugee Convention and commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees, recalling our core recommendations made in the last Standing Committee.

Third, demonstrate stronger humanitarian leadership in the world's most severe crises.

Beyond Europe's borders, crisis-affected people are grappling not only with material impacts of the Ukraine conflict such as food shortages and soaring prices, but also decreased attention and resources. Needs are growing, both in scale and severity, in many crises worldwide. In 2022, forced displacement reached unprecedented levels, with multiple disease outbreaks, and a global food crisis.

Therefore, NGOs call for evidence-based prioritisation and allocation of humanitarian funding, to ensure adequate resourcing of responses according to the level of need rather than geopolitical priorities. We urge the EU and individual States, in their capacity as aid donors, to deliver lifesaving support to the world's most vulnerable people. People should not be forgotten simply because they are not close to donor countries.

Fourth, strengthen efforts to address statelessness.

Over half a million stateless people are in Europe today, often living in the margins of society and denied access to their fundamental rights. NGOs are concerned by the absence of an adequate policy response, most of whom lack dedicated procedures to enable the identification and protection of stateless people on territories. Equally, some children born in Europe to migrant or refugee parents are currently exposed to a risk of statelessness.

NGOs call on European states to implement their international obligations to ensure that all stateless children born on their territory acquire a nationality. This and next year offer a pivotal window to garner momentum towards meeting UNHCR's #IBelong campaign, including critically to implement the 40 statelessness-related pledges made by European states.

In conclusion, European action and leadership on refugee resettlement, protection, and integration, and a fair and equitable humanitarian response, remains critical. As noted by the High Commissioner, Ukraine has shown "Europe's capacity for an organised and workable approach to asylum – one that benefits States and safeguards the rights of refugees."

The solidarity Europe has shown to Ukrainians should now be the new benchmark of solidarity extended to everyone who needs lifesaving support. To reiterate, we urge States to:

1. Maintain urgent assistance to people forcibly displaced from Ukraine as long as needs are present,
2. Offer aid and legal support to all displaced and stateless people seeking protection in Europe,
3. Show leadership outside Europe's borders in all crises where urgent needs exist, and

4. Demonstrate greater urgency in addressing statelessness.

Further details are available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.