

**93rd Meeting of the Standing Committee, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
17-19 June 2025**

NGO Statement on Community-Based Protection

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates,

This statement was developed in consultation with a broad range of NGOs to reflect the diversity and common purpose of the NGO community.

In today's humanitarian landscape, marked by protracted crises, violence and impunity, rising authoritarianism, aid weaponization, the climate emergency, and shrinking funding, the case for investing in community-based protection (CBP) has never been more urgent. CBP refers to both survivor- and community-led protection activities and external support that enhances communities' self-protection capacity. It sees crisis-affected people not just as recipients of aid, but as key agents in their own protection.

CBP is not only ethically imperative but also operationally necessary. As funding dwindles and access to communities becomes more restricted, CBP offers a timely, adaptive, and locally grounded response that strengthens self-reliance.

Communities are often the first, and even only, responders. Community actors are trusted, culturally aware, and often more agile and responsive than external actors. They are already identifying risks, negotiating with armed actors, and mobilizing protective responses despite limited resources.

CBP affirms the right of forcibly displaced and stateless people to define their own protection priorities. It can also be a tool to advance gender, economic, and environmental justice; for forcibly displaced and stateless women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups to lead protection efforts.

However, supporting CBP requires moving beyond tokenism and must strictly avoid replicating existing power imbalances. And crucially, CBP does not absolve international actors or states of their legal protection responsibilities. Instead, it complements them: communities lead, and international actors must support, advocate, and mobilize resources.

In contexts of conflict, violence, and displacement, CBP is often an organic expression of local solidarity. Hence, it's not about starting from scratch, but recognizing and supporting what already exists, without imposing a one-size-fits-all model.

Yet, community-led initiatives and efforts to support them remain underfunded and overly burdened, for instance, by organizational administrative requirements or by compliance barriers in sanctioned environments. If these local actors cannot continue, we risk losing the very foundation of community-based protection.

Dear Chair,

We welcome UNHCR's sustained attention to CBP. To advance CBP we urge UNHCR and Member States to:

Firstly, deepen CBP, as the central pillar of protection strategies, using community-led analysis in planning and linking it to long-term development and peacebuilding goals and linking it to localization and locally led action.

Secondly, increase flexible, multi-year funding specifically for CBP, while also advocating to remove administrative and bureaucratic barriers to access funding for local groups and initiatives.

Thirdly, build equitable partnerships based on mutual learning, not one-way capacity building. Support community actors with technical guidance, referral systems, and decision-making platforms in line with commitments in the Grand Bargain and the Global Compact on Refugees. Community actors cannot be expected to immediately shoulder gaps left by the reducing presence of UNHCR and other international actors. UNHCR and Member States must continue supporting community actors in their protection work.

Finally, use political leverage to engage duty bearers to uphold their protection responsibilities, ending any sense of impunity, and advocate for the preservation of civic space and where necessary recognize community actors as human rights defenders, rather than dismissing their activism.

The current humanitarian environment demands new paradigms of protection – ones that are agile, grounded, and led by those closest to the risks. Community-based protection is not just an effective way to respond to today's challenges; it is also an ethical, sustainable, and inclusive way forward. Supporting it is both a humanitarian imperative and a strategic investment in dignity, safety, and justice for forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

NGOs, including organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons, stand ready to work with and support UNHCR in this important work.

This statement is available on icvanetwork.org.

Thank you.