

## 2023 Regional Consultations with NGOs

### Summary report

Date	13 – 15 June 2023
Session Title	Regional NGO Consultation for East and Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes (EHAGL) Region
Speakers	<p><b>Solutions and Inclusion into National Systems</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mohamed Hassan, Research Assistant, Refugee-Led Research Hub</li> <li>• Amina Abdulla, Regional Director, Concern Worldwide, Horn of Africa</li> <li>• Leila Muriithia Simiyu, Acting Executive Director, Refugee Consortium, Kenya</li> <li>• Uwezo Ramazani, Refugee Researcher, formerly of Resilience Action International, Tanzania</li> <li>• Juliette Murekeyisoni, Deputy Representative, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), South Sudan</li> <li>• Freddie Carver, Regional Manager, Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS), Kenya</li> </ul> <p><b>Livelihood and Resilience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hamelmal Getachew, Regional Livelihood and Food Security Advisor, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), East Africa and Yemen</li> <li>• Okeria Jude, Program Director, Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), Uganda</li> <li>• Mahlet Seifu Woldeabraham, Director for Inclusive Economic Growth, Mercy Corps, Ethiopia</li> <li>• Benjamin Ng'aru, Chief of Party NGO Refugee Group (NRG) Representative, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Kenya</li> <li>• Yom Sarafina Tingkuei, Entrepreneur of Welding Business, South Sudan</li> </ul> <p><b>Gender Equality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everjoy Mahaku, Regional Gender in Emergence Technical Advisor, CARE, East, Central and South Africa</li> <li>• Foni Joyce, Refugee Youth Advisor, Program Coordinator, Refugee-Led Research Hub, Kenya</li> <li>• Angelina Nyajima, Founder and Executive Director, Hope Restoration, South Sudan</li> <li>• Noreen Nampewo, Women's Rights Defender, CARE International, Uganda</li> <li>• Lilian Matemu, Gender Specialist, Plan International</li> <li>• Stella Suge, Executive Director, FilmAid, Kenya</li> </ul> <p><b>Climate Change and Displacement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ayla Bonfiglio, Head of the Mixed Migration Centre, East and Southern Africa, Egypt and Yemen</li> <li>• Harriet Holder, Regional Head of Program, DRC, East Africa and Great Lakes</li> </ul>

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- Tania Marcello, Regional Protection Coordinator, NRC, East Africa and Yemen
- Angelina Nyajima, Executive Director, Hope Restoration, South Sudan
- Joselyne Namukhula, Program Manager, Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID), Uganda
- Gawaar Juich, Climate and Environmental Activist and Co-Founder of Refugee Coalition for Climate Action
- Markus Topp, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR Regional Bureau for EHAGL

#### **Localization and Meaningful Refugee Participation**

- Stella Ogunlade, Chief of Section of the NGO and Civil Society Unit of the Partnership and Coordination Service, UNHCR Geneva
- Amin Bolis, Founder and Executive Director, Initiative for Nurturing Vulnerable and Empowerment for Resilience (INVER)
- Daniel Mekonnen, Head of Advocacy, COHERE, Geneva
- Julia Zahreddine, Advocacy Advisor, COHERE, France

#### **UNHCR Reform and Partnership**

- Katharina Thote, Head of Operational and Partnership Management Unit, Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR), Implementation Management and Assurance Service (IMAS), UNHCR Geneva
- Robert Hurt, Deputy Director Head of Service, DSPR IMAS, UNHCR Geneva
- Addis Tesfa, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) Representative, East and Southern Africa
- Grace Wagutu, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Girl Child Africa Foundation, South Sudan
- Gideon Mwawasi, Localisation and Partnership Specialist, The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

#### **Executive Summary**

The second EHAGL Regional NGO Consultation took place from 13 to 15 June 2023. The event brought together 535 participants from NGOs, Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs), and civil society partners. The participants included 100 UNHCR staff from different countries in the region and a total of 34 NGOs represented.

The main topics of the consultation were solutions and inclusion into national systems, livelihoods and economic inclusion based on the outcomes of a survey conducted by UNHCR and ICVA in 2022. Other topics included climate change and displacement, localization and meaningful refugee participation, and gender equality.

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The consultations provided valuable insights and recommendations addressing displacement challenges, climate-related vulnerabilities, livelihood support, gender equality, and local involvement in humanitarian efforts. The discussions and resultant recommendations from each session emphasized the importance of meaningful participation, durable solutions, and multi-stakeholder coordination.

- The **Solutions and Inclusion into National Systems** session highlighted the need for rights-based frameworks and mechanisms that involve displaced persons in decision-making processes.
- The **Climate Change and Displacement** session emphasized understanding the interlinkages between climate and conflict, adapting programs to local contexts, and integrating urban programming.
- The **Livelihoods and Resilience** session underscored the importance of psychosocial support, private sector engagement, and diverse approaches to refugee integration.
- The **Gender Equality** session emphasized prioritizing women's and girls' needs, increasing resources for education and livelihoods, and ensuring their meaningful participation in program design.
- The **Localization** session stressed the inclusion of displaced persons in project design and decision-making,
- The **UNHCR Reform and Partnership** session emphasized continued engagement and strengthening multi-year agreements.

#### Major Points Arising from Speakers

The Solutions and Inclusion into National Systems session highlighted that durable solutions are necessary to address the recurrent crises caused by climate and conflict-induced displacement in the region. Actors need to plan beyond providing humanitarian protection responses, instead focusing on a comprehensive rights-based approach that includes economic participation, housing and land rights, social considerations, the right to work, and legal interventions with a long-term solutions perspective. There is a need for coordinated engagement by a diverse group of stakeholders, including governments, with refugees leading to a comprehensive understanding of refugee priorities and needs, which range from socioeconomic to mental health. As an example, the 2023 Sudan crisis, which exhibits the features of a protracted crisis, presents an opportunity to adopt a different approach, emphasizing solutions and a comprehensive rights-based approach from the outset.

The Gender Equality session discussed the ongoing marginalization of displaced women, who often lack meaningful participation in conflict resolutions, including in ongoing conflicts in Somalia, DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), and Sudan. Women's rights organizations are not inadequately included within cluster structures, coordination meetings, networking events, or meetings. Gender equality remains insufficiently addressed in the humanitarian response, and it is often the first aspect to be negatively impacted during financial reductions. Further, gender-based violence (GBV) persists with impunity due to weak legislative frameworks. The integration of refugees into communities, facilitated by policy changes from camps to settlements (e.g., Kenya), offers an opportunity for sustainable solutions and improved participation of women through area-based approaches. To overcome some of these challenges, humanitarian actors must prioritize the voices of women leaders and engage men in gender programming. When agencies seek partnerships, women's rights organizations should be prioritized. All these changes require heightened advocacy and shifts in perception within the humanitarian space. Best practices for the protection of women and girls in humanitarian settings include integrating joint Rapid Gender Analysis and GBV risk

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assessment into contingency and response plans. Additionally, direct consultation with adolescent girls using tools like the Adolescence Programming Toolkit is a recommended practice that enables the assessment of service relevance, identification of gaps, and understanding of necessary actions for ensuring sufficient, safe, age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, and inclusive services for adolescents. Case management, including Best Interest Assessments (BIA) and Best Interest Determinations (BID), is also recommended. Furthermore, participation and localized approaches to humanitarian response, socio-economic empowerment for transforming women and communities, as well as ensuring accountability, community engagement, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), are considered best practices.

The Climate Change and Displacement session discussed climate-related vulnerabilities, drivers of displacement, and analysis-based integrated climate programming. Displacement related to climatic factors has more than tripled over the past decade with environmental factors interacting with pre-existing drivers of displacement, such as conflict. Therefore, all stakeholders, including the UN, NGOs, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), need to strengthen efforts to identify, understand, and target highly vulnerable profiles for tailored programming. The organizations presented a range of best practices to mitigate climate-induced displacement. These practices included data collection on vulnerabilities and drivers, support for both host communities and displaced individuals, alignment of activities with national climate change policies, promoting meaningful community engagement, involving youth and local community leaders, promoting tree planting and the adoption of fuel-efficient stoves, and providing training in sustainable agriculture alongside business skills development. They emphasized the importance of recognizing the pre-existing multidimensional vulnerabilities of people before climate-induced displacement, as the protection needs of those displaced by conflict and those displaced by climate change are not homogeneous. In each case, there is a different set of human and social mobility and social capital.

In the Localization and Meaningful Refugee Participation session, there were discussions surrounding the commitment to promoting localization. UNHCR, in alignment with this commitment, has co-implemented various activities with partners. These encompass the introduction of flexible funding mechanisms for initiatives led by displaced individuals. During the session, the director of an organization led by a displaced person shared insights into meaningful refugee participation and recounted personal experiences as a displaced person leading an organization. The session underscored the significance of enhanced participation and inclusion of displaced individuals in programs, enabling them to have a sense of ownership, as well as including organizations led by displaced and stateless persons in project design from the initial stages to closing. Further, COHERE presented its report's findings on barriers to meaningful refugee participation, offering practical solutions. These solutions included addressing organizational obstacles to hiring and partnerships, implementing power-sharing mechanisms, and allocating dedicated funding for organizations led by displaced and stateless individuals. The need for a well-planned rollout of the new partnership management system through sufficient orientation of partners was encouraged.

During the UNHCR Reform and Partnership session, UNHCR explained the reforms undertaken in 2020-2021 aimed at making funding more accessible to RLOs. The grants provided to RLOs encompassed 100 agreements, covering community-based activities, and involving over 80 RLOs worldwide. These grants have reduced reporting requirements to overcome legal and financial barriers and enhance predictability. Other reforms are focused on simplifying document management, minimizing reporting complexities and

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delays, maximizing continuous partnerships, and monitoring efforts, simplifying financial planning, and reporting through the partner portal.

#### Major Points Arising from Discussions

- Greater efforts are needed to bridge the gap between refugee aspirations and the policies and practices of solutions. Understanding the contextual needs of refugees, mapping their resources, actively involving them in designing responses, and providing solutions to their challenges is essential. This can be achieved by removing legal barriers to self-reliance, including allowing qualified refugees to work in their host countries. Freedom of association and movement are critical for creating an enabling environment for self-reliance as a path to a durable solution while prioritizing mental health and psychosocial support as basic human rights.
- Aid actors need to deepen and strengthen multi-stakeholder coalitions. Aid actions must recognize that no single actor or program can guarantee access to the full spectrum of required rights. This requires mapping out all necessary actors, including national and local government authorities, for collective engagement. UNHCR must offer support and resources to advance this collective agenda, even if it's not always best positioned to provide overall leadership on longer-term approaches.
- Market assessments are crucial for aiding actors in designing progressive livelihood interventions and market-driven solutions. However, even though the opportunities exist, there is limited funding to scale up livelihood interventions and refugees remain on the periphery of the financial system. Challenges persist in accessing banking services due to refugees lacking recognized identification for banks. Efforts should focus on establishing refugees as creditworthy, enabling them to open savings accounts and, whenever feasible, providing grants to support refugees to start businesses.
- Greater support is required for refugees and host countries to enhance livelihoods through job-creating private investments and the introduction of high-value crops with the recognition that most refugees earn their livelihoods through small-scale agricultural and livestock businesses.
- Conducting more community awareness sessions on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is essential to alleviate associated stigma.
- Addressing psychosocial challenges within communities and engaging private sector actors in livelihood initiatives will not bring change in the short term. Support is needed with a focus on long-term impact. Multi-year programming integrating MHPSS into livelihood interventions is vital for establishing a solid foundation for self-reliance.
- Continuing efforts are necessary to change the attitudes of different stakeholders, including donors, partners, and the private sector, towards displaced individuals to view them not just as aid beneficiaries but as resourceful and skilled individuals. To complement existing expertise, more resources need to be allocated to education for refugees in returning countries and host communities.
- To foster collaboration with the private sector, data and resource papers should be shared with financial institutions and the private sector to enhance understanding of potential avenues for refugees to engage in productive employment and decent work that align with their business capabilities.
- In addressing gender dimensions and their interconnected drivers, partners should conduct joint participatory needs assessments (Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming) to tackle the protection and participation rights of displaced women, enabling them to make choices for livelihood activities. UNHCR and NGOs should also establish Rapid Gender Assessments as an

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institutionalized practice to support evidence-based programming and to prioritize GBV emergency response as lifesaving.

- International organizations should fulfil their gender commitments. They should continue to prioritize the needs of displaced women and girls' needs, involve them in program design and implementation, and promote women in leadership.
- Data management gaps persist due to inadequate documentation tools that are hardly localized, as well as insufficient data backup measures.
- Increased investment in food security and livelihoods, particularly those affecting women and girls, is crucial.
- There is a need to provide flexible core financing directly to Women-Led Organizations (WLOs), aiming to reduce staff turnover and strengthen women leaders.
- There is a connection between conflict and climate. Pre-existing multidimensional vulnerabilities should be considered when providing support to communities affected by climate displacement. Collaboration with host communities, alignment of activities with a national agenda, adopting a household or family-centred approach in responses, and employing data collection and research-based approaches are critical for addressing climate displacement.
- Regarding localization, refugees should be recruited to support program implementation and design of pilot localization initiatives. Incorporating refugees on advisory boards will also provide a platform for their advice on refugee participation. The refugee advisory panel works with a board guide on refugee participation. To operationalize meaningful participation, organizations must change their policies. Additionally, like-minded organizations should partner and form working groups that can enrich meaningful refugee participation.
- Regarding UNHCR reforms and partnerships, changes have been initiated in the Project Reporting Oversight and Monitoring Solution (PROMS) platform, aiming to reduce paperwork, delays, and bureaucratic impediments. Changes to PROMS planned for quarter four (Q4) of 2023 will apply to agreements in 2024. Additionally, training sessions for PROMS are scheduled for September and October 2023. Further, UNHCR is committed to eliminating obstacles for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and local NGOs, including the introduction of a new grant for RLOs to support their community-based activities. While appreciating the efforts of simplification, partners noted that the process of partner assessment is still complicated and requested faster feedback on partners' proposals. It was further emphasized that while RLO funding is a positive development, WLOs face additional funding challenges and may require specific funding targeting WLOs.
- Partners applauded the shift to multi-year partnership agreements and encouraged the greater strengthening of the framework and its application to other partnership aspects.

#### Recommendations

- UNHCR and NGOs need to prioritize enhancing access to a broad range of rights by establishing well-defined frameworks which enable refugees to enjoy more than humanitarian assistance as this stand as the primary route toward achieving sustainable solutions. This requires engagement with governments as the primary duty bearers, to facilitate access to a full range of rights of refugees and donors should increase their investment in rights-based programming to achieve solutions for displaced individuals. This approach will also facilitate a more nuanced focus on individuals with specific characteristics that make them susceptible to marginalization and potential abuse. UNHCR occupies a unique position to catalyse change, as its mandate involves engaging with all relevant actors but would need coordination to implement this recommendation.

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- Mental health programming is critical within humanitarian programming and should be established as a foundational element in livelihood interventions.
- UNHCR and NGOs should advocate for and ensure the incorporation of private sector interests right from the initial design of strategies and programs for livelihood support for refugees. This approach will promote buy-in and ownership to attract the private sector to ensure continued support of refugees.
- UNHCR, other international organizations, and donors should work in partnership with NGOs and RLOs to increase funds and resources going directly to WLOs.
- Support data collection and research focused on addressing protection challenges arising from displacement linked to climate change including the impacts of climate change on urban areas. This effort aims to address gaps in evidence and develop a more nuanced and analysis-based understanding of vulnerability beyond the reliance on predefined vulnerability criteria. This entails analysing the multiple risks that individuals encounter, their coping mechanisms, and challenges.
- Strive for an enhanced and widely shared understanding of the concept of meaningful refugee participation by maintaining ongoing engagement with NGOs and RLOs. This engagement should ensure refugees' equitable and sustained access to decision-making forums and sustainable localization initiatives.

#### Background Documents/Reports/Guidance

[UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security \(WPS\) from 1325 \(2000\) to 2242 \(2015\),](#)

[The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\),](#)

[The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Roadmap \(2015\),](#)

[The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants \(2016\)](#)

[IASC Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Policy 2017.](#)

[UNHCR in its Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity \(2018\)](#) and [the Strategic Directions 2022-26](#)

[Human Mobility and Climate Change in the IGAD Region](#)

[2022 Annual Report to the UN General Assembly](#)

[Addressing five barriers to "Meaningful Refugee Participation" in the refugee response," 2022,](#)  
[https://www.wearecohere.org/static/media/Refugee\\_Participation\\_Report.e95dd36663810d1955f1.pdf](https://www.wearecohere.org/static/media/Refugee_Participation_Report.e95dd36663810d1955f1.pdf)

[https://www.wearecohere.org/static/media/Refugee\\_Participation\\_Report.e95dd36663810d1955f1.pdf](https://www.wearecohere.org/static/media/Refugee_Participation_Report.e95dd36663810d1955f1.pdf)