

2019 UNHCR SOUTHERN AFRICA CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS

‘Whole of Society Approach- Working Better Together’

Johannesburg, South Africa

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), civil society and refugees, themselves are the most important partners of the United Nations, and in particular the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in responding to the phenomenon of mass forced displacement. We are never so effective as when we work together in bringing compassion, resources and expertise to respond to humanitarian and development situations.

Starting this year, UNHCR is moving closer to the point of delivery, through a decentralization and regionalization that places resources and decision making power closer to the field. This provides us with a remarkable opportunity to take a locally contextualized whole of society approach to the protection and inclusion of refugees and other displaced people, and the communities that host them. This consultation will encourage lively discussions amongst UNHCR’s new southern Africa region: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Kingdom of eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo overseeing an overall 6.1 million refugees.

The world is currently facing the highest levels of displacement ever in history, with 70.8 million people forced from their homes by war, internal conflicts, drought or poor economies. Among these are 25.9 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18; the rest are economic migrants and internally displaced persons. People are forcibly displaced at a rate of 34,000 per day due to conflict or persecution. We are seeing a shrinking of asylum space. As part of mixed migratory flows, asylum-seekers are crossing several country borders before formally seeking asylum and in response asylum countries are increasing their rejection rates on unjustifiable grounds, including the inappropriate use of the first country of asylum principle. A sharing of responsibility is needed to help relieve the capacity placed on local authorities. The key protection challenges and priorities outlined by UNHCR in the region has been responding to protection needs in mixed migration movements; eradicating statelessness; ensuring continuous bio-metric registration and mainstreaming the Comprehensive Refugee Response within each of the operations in the region in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. Freedom of movement and access to formal and informal sectors of livelihoods vary across the region. Providing life-saving assistance, prevention and response to SGBV/SEA and building fair and efficient asylum systems needs to be strengthened. And with climate change a daily reality, we will discuss how we understand climate change to impact the current and future flow of refugees and displaced persons and how we respond. Appalling scenes of refugees and migrants originating from places like Africa and Syria drowned in the Mediterranean Sea are repeated over and over without addressing roots causes and triggers of displacement and stand-offs on asylum and resettlement policies.

While European and North American nations seek to limit the “economic” refugees as opposed to asylum seekers, DRC for example, hosts over 4.5 million IDPs and over 530,000

refugees and asylum seekers as of 2019. Inadequate attention is given to the tremendous efforts of African countries also grappling with refugee emergencies and balancing host economies and societies.

Intensifying displacement pressures present many African societies with major policy dilemmas; most countries in Africa are becoming more multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual. These changes challenge governments, private sector and civil society to accommodate and gain from this diversity in ways which promote shared values and not as threat. Close to 70% of African migration is intra-African. We seek innovative solutions to communication with communities, the promotion of social cohesion and self-reliance to counteract xenophobic violence. This is everyone's business: UN, Governments, I/NGOs, private sector, community leaders, the media, and other stakeholders to seek understanding of and effective measures against racism, xenophobia and discrimination against foreigners. We note with concern that space for civil society is shrinking in parts of the world. Shrinking space for civil society takes many forms, especially in highly polarized political environments and due to financial constraints.

There is, of course, no way to undo the abuses experienced by refugees or reclaim the time they spend in displacement. But we can ensure that we help people to try to recover from their experiences, obtain information about their legal rights and options, and receive the type of respectful and culturally appropriate services they deserve. Too often those who have suffered the greatest pain due to conflict, persecution and natural and man-made disasters face the greatest obstacles accessing justice and social and economic opportunities.

Diversifying actors are testament to what can be achieved when the UN, I/NGOs, Foundations and civil society, Governments, International Financial Institutions and the private sector pool their experience and expertise to make sure those get the support and assistance they need. This support can be in terms of protection, access to documentation, livelihood opportunities, education, health and other services in a dignified manner. Not just the UN, furthermore, I/NGOs also have a role to ensure equal partnerships is conveying their approaches to accountability to affected people. All actors will respect understand and respect each other's contributions while acknowledging the comparative advantages and mandates, especially in implementation and advocacy.

The UNHCR Africa Consultations with NGOs and Multi-Stakeholders will seek opportunities and work off major progress in bringing in solutions to refugee situations. We will explore how multi-partnerships at the regional and national levels can contribute to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) to be held in Geneva in December. Actors will explore how regional and local actors and refugees themselves can help design appropriate responses.

The first day will bring together multi-stakeholders from UNHCR, the Nelson Mandela Foundation (co-organizer), I/NGOs, refugee led-organizations, World Bank and private sector. Dedicated sessions will explore:

- 1) protection challenges- economic and social inclusion, education, asylum processes, documentation, registration and data;
- 2) enhancing operational partnership - multi-year funding agreements, new UNHCR partnership integrity support to local and national NGOs, management of partnership agreements, risk management and ethics, and
- 3) new partners- mapping of development partners, new partnership consortiums which includes the UN, I/NGOs, World Bank and private sector and civil society; a high-level dialogue on resilience and livelihoods with the Nelson Mandela Foundation, World Bank, I/NGOs and a refugee entrepreneur is planned.

The second day is envisaged for I/NGOs only to continue a more focused conversation on the regionalization, GRF and also partnership issues with UNHCR. Implementation of the GCR and Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in country contexts will be shared. Discussions will address lessons learned of policy and their application on the ground. The half day will provide a unique occasion for I/NGOs (in the room and through the pigeonhole on-line platform) to highlight issues of concern with UNHCR Geneva and the changes in partnership modalities expected from the decentralisation of the Regional Bureaux. Dialogue will continue on responsibilities in respect to combating fraud and other forms of misconduct, and developments with regard to simplification, efficiencies, and localization implemented through the “grand bargain”.

The expected outcome is a final report with concrete recommendations while identifying stakeholders who could contribute to that particular goal, including under the Global Compact on Refugees. The report will be taken into consideration with the annual UNHCR NGO Consultations and shared with the Global Refugee Forum secretariat.

The Consultations will allow for feedback on the principles of partnerships, sharing of good practices and identifying ways I/NGOs and partners can organize towards the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees.

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