

UNHCR's Task Team on Engagement and Partnership with Organizations led by Displaced and Stateless People

Briefing Note



Young Venezuelan and Peruvian girls take part in a workshop run by Quinta Ola. © UNHCR/Sebastian Castañeda

BACKGROUND

Organisations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people, including those led by refugees (RLOs), internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless people, and other community-based organisations (CBOs) are often the first responders in humanitarian emergencies, caused by conflict, natural disasters and/or climate change, and can provide support and services from the early days of an emergency, including where UNHCR and partners have limited or no access. Community members are the most knowledgeable about their own needs, and the best advisers on what approaches are suited in their local area. It is, therefore, necessary that UNHCR, partners and other actors understand, engage with and support these organizations, allowing them to strengthen and/or expand their activities and support services to refugees, or other forcibly displaced and stateless communities.

In May 2016, UNHCR, with other United Nations (UN) agencies, donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society actors, made the commitment at the World Humanitarian Summit to “Empower national and local humanitarian action” and thus, to work towards greater localisation. Moreover, the [New York Declaration](#) and the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) both refer to the importance of engaging directly with forcibly displaced persons themselves. The [2019 Global Refugee Forum](#) (GRF) Pledges equally stipulate engagement and partnerships with forcibly displaced and stateless persons. [UNHCR's Strategic Direction 2022-2026](#) states that

these will be implemented in collaboration with a broad circle of stakeholders, including forcibly displaced and stateless people themselves, and commits to strengthening the engagement with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people. Engaging with CBOs is also rooted in [UNHCR's community-based protection approach](#) and the [Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\) Policy \(2018\)](#), which puts forcibly displaced and stateless people at the centre of decisions that affect their lives and ensures accountability to affected people.

GENERAL INFORMATION

UNHCR's cross-divisional Task Team on Engagement and Partnership with Organizations led by Displaced and Stateless Persons was created in 2020 to coordinate and align internal efforts and to support ongoing work related to UNHCR's engagement of and partnership with forcibly displaced and stateless people. The Task Team is led by the Division of Protection (DIP)/ Field Protection Service – Community- Based Protection (CBP) Unit and the Division of External Relations (DER)/Partnership and Coordination Service (PCS) – NGO and Civil Society Section. The Task Team is made up of members of other divisions and services in UNHCR Headquarters, including the Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR), the Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS), the GCR Coordination Team and the Innovation Service. The Task team is supported by a Refugee United Nations Volunteer (RUNV) and works closely together with the Regional Bureaux as well as with the Interim Advisory Group of Organizations led by Displaced and Stateless Persons (2020-2022), and now the Advisory Board of Organizations led by Displaced and Stateless Persons (December 2022 – December 2024).

From 2020 to 2022, UNHCR's Task Team worked closely with an Interim Advisory Group of organizations led by displaced and stateless people that provided advice and co-developed some of the Task Team's deliverables. The selection process and terms of reference of the recently established Advisory Board were co-designed with the Interim Advisory Group members. To ensure that the membership selection follows a fair and transparent process, a call for applications was launched in May 2022, and through a recruitment process involving the Interim Advisory Group and International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), 16 organizations led by refugees, IDPs and stateless people, including those led by women, LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, and other diverse groups were identified to be part of the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board will act as a representative body for organizations led by displaced and stateless people and will play a critical role in providing advice to UNHCR at the global level, based on their experiences and expertise. The Advisory Board was officially launched by UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection in December 2022, and the member organization representatives came together for an in-person induction workshop in Geneva in March 2023.

Objectives of the Task Team

The overall objective of this Task Team is to align internal efforts and develop a framework for UNHCR on engagement of and partnering with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons, while paying due attention that all deliverables are informed by the experiences, challenges, and opportunities of organizations led by displaced and stateless persons. The framework consists of the following outputs:



Objectives of the Advisory Board to the UNHCR Task Team

The Advisory Board will act as a representative body for organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people and will play a critical role in the development of the deliverables of the Task Team:

- defining the guiding principles for equal and meaningful participation at policy and strategic level;
- comment and input to guidance on meaningful participation;
- support the follow up on GRF pledges on meaningful refugee participation;
- highlight gaps and identify successful examples of partnerships, including the [Grant Agreement](#) funding mechanism;
- support the identification and coaching of refugees, IDPs and stateless people as representatives to global events and policy discussions; and
- contribute to the development of capacity building materials to strengthen meaningful participation.

CURRENT STATUS

UNHCR's cross-divisional Task Team on Engagement and Partnership with Organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people continues to implement all five of its deliverables. To date, the following items have been completed:

- [The Grant Agreement tool](#) and the Standard Operating Procedures have been created (2020-2021), piloted (2021) and rolled out (2022). By December 2022, 71 Grant agreements were signed with a total budget of \$236K in 22 country operations; 49 in Europe, 17 in the Americas and 5 in Asia and the Pacific.

- A representative and inclusive Advisory Board is in place, composed of 16 organisations led by forcibly displaced people to ensure that the strategies, guidance and tools that the Task Team develops to strengthen predictable, meaningful engagement and partnership with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons address their actual needs and challenges.
- A [Refugee-Led Innovation Fund](#) co-designed with refugees, organisations-led by displaced people and UNHCR was launched, which champions innovation by organizations that are led by forcibly displaced and stateless people. The Fund provides a holistic support mechanism combining financial resources, mentoring and technical expertise to both registered and unregistered organizations. Financial support of up to USD \$45,000 per organization was provided to 17 awardees in 2022. The Fund will accept applications again in 2023.
- An analysis and review of all the GRF pledges related to meaningful refugee participation is carried out on a regular basis.
- An internal guidance on meaningful participation of RLOs in coordination mechanisms has been developed.
- A Congolese Refugee UNV recruited from Kenya in July 2021, is supporting the work of the Task Team.
- A global [mapping tool](#) for organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people was launched in October 2022. The mapping will facilitate the identification of such organizations operating at various levels (global, regional and country), and promote opportunities for meaningful engagement with them.
- A global internal database and a dynamic dashboard of organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people has been developed.
- An [information repository](#) was created for organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people to access training materials, guidance, tools, policies, and promising practices.
- Alternative terms were developed and reviewed by the Interim Advisory Group, to change the term “Persons of Concern (POC)”, and a note on language alternatives to POC was shared by the AHC-P with all Divisions in UNHCR HQ.
- An Internal repository of resources was created to enhance UNHCR staff engagement with local organizations.
- An internal checklist for representation of forcibly displaced and stateless people in regional and global events has been developed.
- In collaboration with organizations led by displaced and stateless persons, NGOs and academics, a definition of a "Refugee-Led Organization (RLO)" was developed and field-tested. It can be found on the [UNHCR Glossary](#), [Refworld](#), and the [information repository](#).
- A virtual side event on localization and climate change initiatives led by organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people was co-organized with the Interim Advisory Group, The Global Refugee-led Network (GRN), Oxfam, Independent Diplomat (ID), and other actors at the [UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs](#) in June 2022.
- An informal States meeting on meaningful participation, co-hosted by UNHCR and Canada was organized in November 2021, to take stock of progress towards implementing the GRF meaningful refugee participation pledges, to understand existing gaps and barriers, and identify opportunities to promote meaningful and inclusive participation in the lead-up to the next GRF in December 2023.
- A side-event fully dedicated to meaningful refugee participation at the margins of the [High-Level Official Meeting \(HLOM\)](#), in December 2021, was organised by the Task Team and the Interim Advisory Group of Organizations led by Displaced and Stateless Persons on December 13, 2021. On December 14, 2021, [a joint refugee statement](#), coordinated by the Interim Advisory Group and signed and endorsed by approximately 30 Refugee-led Organizations, was delivered at the opening of the HLOM.

NEXT STEPS

The Task Team will be following up on and implementing all five objectives to strengthen the meaningful participation of displaced and stateless people, including the following:

- Finalising an issue brief on engagement and partnership with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people.
- Supporting the preparation of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF), including the development and presentation of a Refugee Statement and selection and coaching of organizations led by displaced and stateless representatives, who will attend the event.
- Providing access to learning platforms and systems to local partners, including organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.
- Supporting the development of a multi-stakeholder, multi-sector, localisation pledge with a component on meaningful refugee participation, for the GRF 2023.
- Upon request and as relevant reviewing and providing input to other UNHCR guidance and policy documents.

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