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**2023 UNHCR Regional Consultations with NGOs**  
**Review of the consultations with non-governmental organizations**

Speech delivered by Ms Mirela Shuteriqi, Ad Interim Executive Director at ICVA

**Dear Chair, Excellencies, UNHCR and NGO colleagues,**

I am delighted to report on behalf of NGOs and UNHCR on the seven regional consultations that took place from June to September this year. The consultations are jointly organized by UNHCR and NGOs and aim to continually strengthen the partnership between them and with other civil society organizations.

The common themes for this year's regional consultations were **Gender Equality and Solutions, with a focus on Inclusion**. These themes were selected by NGOs and UNHCR together. Sessions were well attended with a large number of diverse NGOs. In particular, there was an increased participation **of local organizations, especially those led by forcibly displaced and stateless people**. Consequently, the regional consultations focused a lot on how to strengthen partnerships with these organizations and entities on an equal basis. We also organized specific sessions on GRF preparation and UNHCR's Partnership reforms, which generated a lot of interest from participants.

On the **gender equality theme**, the regional consultations recognized that, despite progress made, challenges persist across regions. In many contexts, women and girls and people of diverse identities face heightened protection risks, particularly of gender-based violence. It is clear and regretful that we need to continue strongly advocating for the rights of women and girls.

During the regional consultations, several recommendations were made to move us closer to achieving gender equality. I will cover a few of them:

First, recommendations to UNHCR, NGOs but also other stakeholders, in a whole-of-society approach:

1. We need to step up joint advocacy to recognize the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by individuals with diverse identities, including gender, age, disability, etc.
2. We need to invest further in effective services that address the intersectionality between these various vulnerabilities and challenges. We see for example how often the care role that is covered by one of the parents, in the absence of support services hinders that parent's inclusion, including in the labour market. This is linked to gender dynamics and inequality, and it gets even more challenging to address in displacement contexts.
3. There is still a need to provide gender-sensitive training, technical assistance, and capacity building support to government officials, NGOs including local organizations, and the private sector, and to share good practices to build knowledge and skills to address gender issues effectively in humanitarian and development interventions.
4. We should ensure the meaningful participation of women, girls and others in programming cycles, and ensure that their voices guide the drafting and implementation of strategies and programmes. Working more with men, youth and children is also necessary to address the current gender gaps.

Specific recommendations to *Member States and donor agencies*:

1. Stronger and ongoing, unconditional commitment and leadership to gender equality.
2. Regularly assess laws and policies and initiate reforms that ensure gender issues are addressed; when we strengthen asylum systems, laws, policies and practices that have impact on displaced and stateless persons we also need to do so also from a gender perspective and with a gender-sensitive approach.
3. Increase funding and resources for actions against GBV and supporting gender equality initiatives. While the focus should be on prevention and GBV risk mitigation, the consultations also recognized the limited services available in many contexts for survivors of GBV and their dependents and the need to address urgently the gap in services and their quality.

4. Support women-led organizations with funding but also by prioritizing equal partnerships with them.

The other topic of the regional NGO consultations was **Solutions, with a focus on inclusion of displaced and stateless people in national systems.**

Participants identified as some of the main barriers to inclusion, long delays in asylum processes, lack of access to documentation (e.g. birth registration), restrictive policies and administrative hurdles, inadequate access to social protection, limited access to basic services (e.g. healthcare and education) as well as to few employment opportunities. Protection risks, such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation, also hinder effective inclusion.

To address these challenges, UNHCR and NGOs developed the following recommendations:

*For Member States to:*

1. Support local authorities in their role as first responders to refugee emergencies. They play a central role in providing protection and assistance to refugees (e.g. housing support in various municipalities in Europe).
2. Apply national safety-nets also to refugees and displaced people. This would address immediate needs and promote socio-economic stability in the longer term.
3. Ensure regularization of documentation as well as access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for refugees and displaced people. Member States should view displaced people as contributing to society instead of burdening it.
4. Include civil society and refugees in decision-making processes on policies and programmes to support solutions. They know the best ways to help solve their situations.
5. Provide flexible and sustainable (quality) funding that allows organizations to maintain their support for refugees and host communities.

Member States can rely on the support of UNHCR, NGOs and other civil society actors to implement these recommendations, in line with the GCR and the SDGs.

Recommendations for UNHCR, NGOs, and other civil society actors are to:

1. Advocate for the inclusion of refugees into national policies and protection systems from the onset of an emergency. Contingency plans should consider inclusion as part of the emergency response.
2. Support local authorities through capacity sharing and technical assistance for their response to displacement.
3. Adopt Market System Development approaches in their work: displaced people can act in market systems as workers, producers, entrepreneurs and consumers, and it is important to support them in these roles, which benefit the national economy as well.

Linked to this point, there were also some good discussions on how to strengthen partnership with the private sector, partnership that are beneficial to forcibly displaced/stateless people as well as private sector and economy.

Some of these recommendations are based on existing good practices, such as:

- The inclusion of displaced, and stateless people by some Member States in national statistics and socio-economic surveys.
- The UNHCR-World Bank collaboration on the IDA “Window for Host Communities and Refugees” supporting countries to create development opportunities and sustainable solutions for refugees and host populations.
- The EU’s immediate provision of temporary protection for people fleeing war in Ukraine, and the contribution of civil society to this response.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all participants for their active engagement in the regional consultations, especially the NGO colleagues. The results of the consultations will feed into the global NGO consultations next year.

Thank you.