

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Advisory Board of Organizations led by Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons 2026-2028

Background



Organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons play a pivotal role in addressing the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. These organizations operate at all levels. At the local level, they are often the first responders in humanitarian emergencies, providing lifesaving assistance and services, mobilizing communities, and promoting social cohesion in the communities they work in. At the regional and global level, they engage in areas of advocacy, strategic litigation, research, and policy development.

Individuals with lived experience and their associated organizations have specific insights that make them ideal contributors in the development and implementation of responses and solutions. It is, therefore, necessary that humanitarian actors and policy makers understand, engage, and partner with these organizations to ensure that interventions are created and implemented in a way that best matches the needs of refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers and stateless individuals (see *section 17 for a note on terminology*).

The UNHCR [Strategic Directions 2022–2026](#)¹ commit to including communities in decisions about their future, and engaging them in designing and implementing programs building on their capacities and resources. The UNHCR [Policy on AGD](#)² calls for effective engagement of individuals from different age, gender and diversity (AGD) groups in UNHCR programmes, including women, children, LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, minorities, and indigenous peoples. Through the [New York Declaration](#),³ [Grand Bargain](#),⁴ the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee](#),⁵ and the [Global Compact on Refugees](#)⁶ (GCR), UNHCR committed to meaningfully engage with local actors and to establish and support equal partnerships, to advance the localization of humanitarian action. The ongoing IASC “Humanitarian Reset” process also emphasizes the importance of equitable partnership and increased support to local partners⁷. UNHCR also co-convened, together with ICVA, the [Multistakeholder Pledge on Advancing Localization in Displacement and Statelessness Responses](#) which was launched at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. Engaging meaningfully with Community-Based Organizations, including organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons, is also a critical aspect of UNHCR’s accountability to affected population and is rooted in UNHCR’s [Community-Based Protection approach](#).⁸

The Advisory Board of Organizations led by Displaced and Stateless persons:

The Advisory Board of Organizations Led by Displaced and Stateless Persons (hereafter “the Advisory Board”) was established in 2022 as an advisory body to [UNHCR’s Task Team on Engagement and Partnership with Organizations Led by Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons](#) (“the Task Team”). It provides strategic and policy advice rooted in lived experience of forcible displacement and/or statelessness and technical expertise.

The Advisory Board amplifies the perspectives and expertise of organizations led by displaced and stateless persons. While it offers valuable insights, it is not a representative body of all forcibly displaced and stateless persons worldwide.

The Advisory Board is composed of a maximum 18 members representing organizations, networks, and coalitions led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Each member organization is represented by a designated focal point (hereafter “the representative”).

Membership of the Advisory Board is limited to organizations, networks, and/or coalitions that are led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons, are legally registered in their country of operation, and are vetted as per UNHCR partnership due diligence process.

¹ UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/strategic-directions-2022-2026>

² UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD): <https://www.unhcr.org/media/policy-age-gender-and-diversity-accountability-2018>

³ New York Declaration: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/new-york-declaration-refugees-and-migrants-0>

⁴ Official website of the Grand Bargain: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

⁵ Inter-Agency Standing Committee: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>

⁶ Global Compact on Refugees: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/about-digital-platform/global-compact-refugees>

⁷ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/statement-emergency-relief-coordinator-tom-fletcher-humanitarian-reset-phase-two>

⁸ Understanding Community-Based Protection: <https://www.refworld.org/policy/opguidance/unhcr/2013/en/109544>

1. Roles and responsibilities

The Advisory Board:

- Providing advice to UNHCR on defining, promoting and implementing meaningful participation of displaced and stateless people in global processes;
- Providing advice on areas of improvement regarding partnership with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons, highlighting gaps and identifying promising practices;
- Acting as a two-way channel to share perspective from their networks on areas related to the meaningful participation of displaced and stateless persons, and partnership with organizations led by them;
- Advocating for the meaningful participation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons within processes related to the Global Compact on Refugees;
- Supporting UNHCR with the identification and preparation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons and/or representatives of organizations led by them, to meaningfully participate in and contribute to strategic events and policy discussions, when requested; and
- Participating and contributing with inputs to consultations on policy and strategic areas of work, mostly with regards to the above-mentioned areas of engagement and when requested by UNHCR.

UNHCR will provide support to the work of the Advisory by:

- Sharing information about engagement opportunities, including for partnership or funding, as available;
- Providing regular updates on issues of relevance, e.g., GRF and its Progress Review;
- Providing regular feedback to the Advisory Board on how their strategic inputs were incorporated in relevant UNHCR policies, guidance and processes;
- Facilitating direct engagement with UNHCR leadership, country operations and partners as relevant;
- Supporting professional development as jointly identified with the Advisory Board and facilitates access to capacity strengthening opportunities; and
- Providing secretariat support to the Advisory Board (See section 13).

2. Composition and Representation

The composition of the Advisory Board reflects the rich diversity among forcibly displaced and stateless persons and their experiences. The Advisory Board consists of organizations that reflect a balance in geographical region, population groups (refugee, IDPs, Stateless), and AGD representations (Youth-led, women-led, LGBTIQ+ -led, led by persons with disabilities, etc.). To the extent possible, the Advisory Board is composed of organizations with expertise in various thematic areas, e.g., protection, education, economic inclusion, gender equality (see section 18 for Note on Terminology).

3. Advisory Board Organizational Profile

- The member organization must be led by refugees, IDPs, or stateless persons, i.e., the leadership (Director, board, senior staff) should be at least 50% forcibly displaced and stateless persons.
- The member organization demonstrates the following:
 - Commitment to inclusion and meaningful participation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons;
 - Deep knowledge and understanding of the interests and concerns of diverse forcibly displaced and stateless populations;
 - Experience in consulting and engaging with diverse forcibly displaced communities;
 - Engagement in policy and strategy development related to forced displacement and statelessness at local, national and/or global level; and
 - Experience engaging in advisory groups, committees, or similar structures.
- Contributes to the Advisory Board's demographic, regional, age, and gender diversity.

4. The role of the representative of the member organizations to the Advisory Board

- The selected organization will identify one primary representative and one alternate to represent the organization in the Advisory Board for the duration of the appointment.
- The representative of a member organization to the Advisory Board is appointed by the leadership of the member organizations. Any changes in the representation must be communicated in writing to the Secretariat by the leadership of the organization.
- The representative presents the views of their respective organizations.
- The representative commits to regularly consult and share updates within their organization, and where relevant the wider network of the organization, to ensure transparency and effective representation.
- The representative must have the ability to communicate in English at a working-level.

5. Support Persons

Persons with disabilities may have a support person attending meetings to support their meaningful participation. Such arrangements will be agreed with UNHCR in advance.

These support persons will not have any direct contribution to Advisory Board discussions and will not have voting rights.

6. Terms of Engagement

- The tenure of the Advisory Board is two calendar years.
- No organization will serve more than two consecutive terms for a total of four years.
- The member organization commits to participate fully in the Advisory Board activities and processes, i.e., a minimum of 75 hours per year (6-7 hours a month).
- Unless exceptional circumstances arise, the representative nominated by the member organizations must maintain that role for the duration of the tenure.

- No organization shall sit on another global UNHCR advisory body⁹ of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. If a member organization chose to join another global UNHCR advisory body, they will forfeit their membership in this Advisory Board.
- Individual representatives that sit on another global UNHCR advisory body in a personal capacity or representing different entities (irrespective of affiliation to the member organization) will be replaced with another representative of their organization.
- If the representative of a member organization relocates out of the country where the organization operates (e.g., in the case of resettlement), the organization will appoint a replacement to represent them in the Advisory Board within 30 days. If the organization is a regional or global organization, this may not apply and will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- UNHCR may exceptionally extend the tenure of an Advisory Board for a third year, in case of which Advisory Board Members may opt out.

7. Leave of Absence

- Attendance by the designated members at the bi-monthly Advisory Board meetings are mandatory.
- Where the representative is unable to attend a meeting, they should notify the Advisory Board Secretariat in advance, stating the reason for the absence. In this case the alternate may join to represent the organization.
- If the primary representative fails to attend three (3) consecutive meetings, UNHCR and the organization will meet to discuss circumstances and address concerns. If warranted, the member organization will be invited to nominate a new representative or otherwise membership may be revoked.

8. Resignation

Member organizations may resign from the Advisory Board at any time provided they notify the Secretariat in writing, stating their intention to resign from the Advisory Board, at least 30 days prior to the date of resignation.

9. Termination of Membership

UNHCR Task Team may temporarily or permanently suspend a member from the Advisory Board if unexpected circumstances warrant, such as a failure to disclose a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality (see section 16), violations of the code of conduct, failure to adhere to the leave of absence policy (see section 7), legal matters that affect the members ability to perform its role safely, and other conditions that are within the discretion of UNHCR.

UNHCR retains the discretion to terminate an individual member's role or an organization's membership on the Advisory Board immediately, or with an advance notice of 30 days, depending on the reason. Where the reason of termination is limited to the individual representative and does

⁹ Examples include the Refugee Advisory Group to the CRCP, and the IDP Advisory Group on IDP solutions

not compromise UNHCR's engagement with the organization itself, UNHCR may request the organization to nominate a new representative to continue its participation on the Board.

10. General Meetings

- The Advisory Board meets six times per year (bi-monthly meetings). Additional ad-hoc meetings may be organized, as necessary. Ideally, tentative dates for bi-monthly meetings should be communicated early in the year.
- In principle, meetings are held through two time slots to accommodate different time zones and work exigencies of the members.
- A draft agenda will be developed prior to each meeting by the Secretariat in consultation with the members.
- The agenda and related material are to be circulated to members no less than one week prior to the meeting.
- Meetings are chaired by an Advisory Board member on a rotational basis. In the absence of a designated chair, UNHCR will chair the meeting.
- Whenever possible, decisions of the Advisory Board are to be made by consensus, or if consensus cannot be reached, by a majority vote of those members present (see 12. Quorum).
- The Advisory Board may establish time-bound working groups to advance specific deliverables or address defined tasks within a set timeframe.
- A member who abstains from voting or dissents from the opinion expressed by the majority of the members can request to have their action recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- At each meeting, Advisory Board members may provide briefings on relevant consultations they have attended or held, report on engagement role in their capacity as Advisory Board member, and provide updates on progress made by thematic working groups.
- UNHCR Task Team may invite other members from UNHCR or other stakeholders, as relevant to the agenda of the meeting.

11. Quorum

For decisions to be made at meetings a quorum of at least half of the total current members plus one is required. When meetings are held in split sessions (AM/PM), these are treated as a single meeting. The number of participants across both sessions is combined when determining quorum and recording decisions.

12. Out of Session Matters

The Advisory Board may address matters outside of general meetings, including follow-up on action points from and emerging ad-hoc tasks. To support internal coordination and continuity, the Advisory Board will appoint two members to serve as Advisory Board Coordinators. These Coordinators will be selected on a rotational basis for a maximum term of six months and will work closely with the Secretariat for effective collaboration and support.

When a time-sensitive response is required from Advisory Board members between meetings, the

Secretariat must endeavor to alert members to the relevant issue via established communication channels (email, WhatsApp, or other appropriate means), providing a clear timeframe for response.

13. Secretariat Support

UNHCR Task Team Assistant provides secretariat support to the Advisory Board. The Secretariat is responsible for:

- Co-Developing agendas for Advisory Board meetings in consultation with the members.
- Distributing relevant documentation ahead of meetings, in appropriate formats and in a timely manner.
- Preparing meeting notes within two weeks following an Advisory Board meeting.
- Monitoring action items arising from Advisory Board business and assisting in their follow up, including through liaising with the Advisory Board Coordinators, or between the Advisory Board and other relevant teams.
- As relevant, supporting logistics related to Advisory Board activities, including travel and accommodation arrangements within determined administrative instructions.
- As necessary, supporting the engagement of the Advisory Board with UNHCR leadership, Divisions, partners, and other stakeholders both internally and externally.
- Co-developing initiatives for professional development training/capacity that may support the Advisory Board in undertaking their role.
- As necessary, adjusting the Terms of Reference, following consultation with the members. UNHCR retains discretion to amend the Terms of Reference as necessary.

14. Conflict Resolution

Recognizing that organizations may hold differing opinions and perspectives; it is essential to foster a culture of mutual respect and constructive dialogue among Advisory Board members. In the event of disagreements, members are encouraged to resolve issues bilaterally in a spirit of collaboration. Where needed, the Advisory Board Coordinators and the UNHCR Secretariat will support mediation to ensure that conflicts are addressed fairly and transparently, preserving the integrity and inclusivity of the Advisory Board's work.

15. Consultations with networks

The Advisory Board members are expected to undertake regular consultation within their constituencies/community networks to inform Advisory Board matters and seek feedback. The results of the consultations should be reported to the Advisory Board to inform the discussion.

16. Code of Conduct

Conflict of Interest and Code of Conduct

- Conflict of interest is defined as any instance where an Advisory Board member has a direct financial or other personal or professional interest in matters under consideration or proposed for consideration by the Advisory Board. A member must disclose to the Secretariat any situation that

may give rise to a conflict of interest, a potential conflict of interest, or a potential perceived conflict of interest. UNHCR will make the determination whether there are adequate grounds for excluding a member from any related discussion or decision making regarding a conflict-of-interest issue.

- Advisory Board members are expected to observe the highest standards of ethical conduct, as outlined in [UNHCR's Code of Conduct](#).

Confidentiality

- Unless indicated otherwise, all Advisory Board papers, documents, and minutes of meetings are considered confidential.
- Members may, on occasion, be provided with other confidential material, which they should not disclose to anyone outside the Advisory Board and should treat with the utmost care and discretion.
- Breach of these confidentiality requirements may result in termination of a member's appointment, at the discretion of the Secretariat.

Respectful Communication

- To promote a positive, inclusive, and safe environment for all, Advisory Board members are required to maintain respectful attitude and communication during meetings and in their interactions with each other and while engaging with UNHCR.

17. Note on Terminology

Organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons

The term *organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons* is not intended to replace any other terms with which various entities identify but should rather be seen as an inclusive umbrella term.

Organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons include the following organizations with leadership of refugees and asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and/or returnees:

- a) Refugee-led Organizations (RLOs) (see definition below)
- b) Stateless-led Organizations (SLOs)
- c) Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)
- d) Women-led Organizations (WLO / WRLO)
- e) Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD)
- f) Organization led by LGBTIQ+ persons
- g) Organizations of older persons
- h) Youth-led Organizations

Refugee-led Organization

UNHCR defines a Refugee-led Organizations as an organization or group in which persons with direct lived experience of forced displacement play a primary leadership role and whose stated objectives and activities are focused on responding to the needs of refugees and/or

related communities.¹⁰

Meaningful Refugee Participation

UNHCR defines participation as the “full and equal involvement of all members of the community in decision-making processes and activities that affect their lives, in both public and private spheres. The level of participation will depend upon how rewarding people find the experience and whether they gain something from the process.”¹¹

Age, Gender, and Diversity

UNHCR recognizes that each person has differing capacities and priorities and faces different protection risks. These protection risks may be heightened as a result of specific age, gender and diversity characteristics, and the intersection between those characteristics. The AGD approach recognizes individuals as unique in their needs, capacities and priorities, promotes opportunities to participate in decisions, and ensures access to rights for all without discrimination based on their age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other characteristics that shape their identities.

¹⁰ See full definition <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2023/en/89475>

¹¹ UNHCR Manual on a Community-Based Approach in UNHCR Operations:
<https://www.refworld.org/policy/opguidance/unhcr/2008/en/57074>