

High Level Dialogue – UNHCR RBE and NGOs

24 November 2020

On 24 November 2020, UNHCR co-organised with the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) a second regional Dialogue with NGOs in Europe. Following a first regional Dialogue (6 July 2020) and two ad-hoc thematic groups on the Hungarian asylum system (26 August 2020) and on the situation in Greece (22 September 2020), this forum aims at ensuring a two-way information sharing and identify opportunities for joint/complementary advocacy.

Agenda

Item 1: UNHCR Annual global consultations with NGOs: key recommendations and follow-up

Item 2: The Nagorno-Karabakh situation: situation and needs

Item 3: Q&A

- **12 NGOs:** CARE International, Doctors without borders, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), the European Network on Statelessness, Global Refugee-Led Network, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), Menedek, Oxfam, Refugees International, Save the Children, Stichting Vluchteling, and Voice
- **UNHCR (Regional Bureau for Europe and UNHCR Representation for EU Affairs)**

Item 1: UNHCR Annual global consultations with NGOs – Presented by Jérôme Elie, Head of Forced Migration, ICVA

- Due to COVID-19, the traditional **UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs** were this year held online, on the theme “responding to pandemics” and three topics (protection considerations, resilience and inclusion, and climate action). A special session was held on Project Partnership Agreement.
- Based on feedbacks received, UNHCR and ICVA have sought to revitalize this consultation and move away from a conference format towards a results-oriented exchange. As a consequence, a smaller number of participants were convened and joint recommendations were formulated to feed into the **High Commissioner’s Dialogue** and **UNHCR’s 71th Executive Committee**.
- During the two-day consultations, discussions touched upon the ways in which UNHCR and NGOs can adapt to stay and deliver while facing a long-term funding crisis, including via enhanced partnership with communities and refugee and IDP-led organisations, through increasing recognition, resource and presence into partnerships and coordination structures.
- Among the joint recommendations available **online**, targeting States and stakeholders, some are of particular relevance to the Europe region, including those pertaining to an enhanced UNHCR-NGO partnership to advocate for economic inclusion of refugees or to support the crucial role of community-based protection.
- Beyond the HC’s Dialogue and ExCom, the joint recommendations aim at influencing various processes, at different levels, including Project Partnership Agreements, the Global Refugee Forum, Climate Action initiatives, ExCom conclusions and UNHCR regional consultations with NGOs.
- As a way forward, global consultations will alternate with regional consultations, starting from 2021. While global monthly UNHCR-NGOs meetings will be held in 2021 on ongoing policy development, the format of the 2021 regional consultations is currently under discussions. Following a bottom-up approach, UNHCR and ICVA intend to seek feedbacks from NGOs by/during the next and final regional Dialogue of 2020.

Feedbacks from the European Network on Statelessness: NGOs would be interested in taking part in the brainstorming on the format and content of the next global and regional consultations with NGOs, including by sharing lessons learnt.

Item 2: The Nagorno-Karabakh situation – Presented by Angela Li-Rosi, Deputy Director of the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, and Filippo Rossi, Senior Operations Coordinator, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe

- While the authorities have referred to the arrivals to Armenia from Nagorno-Karabakh as “*spontaneous arrivals*”, UNHCR considers these persons as refugees.
- Whereas the Armenian authorities have mentioned a figure of some 9,000 assisted persons, other sources are estimating the number of displaced persons to Armenia to stand at 90,000 or more.
- The Armenian authorities have not officially requested the support of the UN. Nevertheless, UNHCR and other international organisations have been invited by the local authorities on an ad hoc basis to provide complementary assistance in ten Armenian municipalities impacted by the arrivals. In

Yerevan, UNHCR is deploying staff to support the ad hoc coordination mechanism established under the supervision of the Armenian authorities to deal with the arrivals.

- While UNHCR is mentioned in the peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan as the supervisory authority of the returns of IDPs and refugees, UNHCR was not involved in the negotiations of the agreement. UNHCR will fulfil its role towards displaced persons, including returnees, in line with its mandated responsibilities.
- Voluntary returns to Nagorno-Karabakh are already taking place. These are spontaneous or facilitated by the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities.
- In the ten Armenian municipalities hosting arrivals from Nagorno-Karabakh, shelter and support to host families, food, clothing, non-food items as well as mental health and psychosocial support have been identified as the key needs.
- UNHCR and the UN in general do not have access to persons affected by the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. The opportunity of an inter-agency assessment mission to Nagorno-Karabakh is currently under discussion at the UN HQ.
- UNHCR is calling for an increasing role by local NGOs.
- The return of internally displaced people in Azerbaijan is hindered by the damages caused by the conflict. Shelter, clothing, household items and other non-food items are in need.

Question from ICVA: Has bordering Iran been impacted by this conflict?

Most affected persons fled to Armenia and not to Iran because of cultural ties.

Question from ICVA: What kind of winterization program is considered?

In Armenia, more than 20 NGOs are currently delivering non-food items. In Azerbaijan, the authorities are still in the process of assessing the needs. As UNHCR has no access to Nagorno-Karabakh, the winterization program in the area is limited. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is distributing blankets.

Question from Doctors without borders: Doctors without borders, with a presence in Armenia, is aware of the existence of a responsive local network. How are international organisations interacting with this network?

In the first few weeks of arrivals to Armenia, the local network was the first responder. International

actors have since supported local organisations by establishing referral pathways, including towards organisations with specific capacities.

Question from Doctors without borders: How is COVID-19 impacting the situation?

The overcrowding in host families and shelters have negatively impacted the transmission of the virus.

Question from Save the Children participant: Is there a plan to bridge the existing gap in terms of data? What are the challenges?

The gap in data is linked to the lack of access to populations affected. As no official statements have been made by the authorities about the displacement, the UN and other actors are relying on various reports from the authorities, NGOs and other partners. The UN is advocating at the highest level for an increasing access to those who have been displaced.

Item 3: Q&A - Moderation by Catherine Woollard, Director of ECRE
EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

- ECRE is concerned over the proposals of the EU Commission as the approach seems to remain one of prevention of arrivals to the EU, based on the assumption that most are not in need of international protection, which is not in line with available data. Under the current framework, a lot of resources would be dedicated to returns. On the other hand, the establishment of independent monitoring mechanisms is positive.
- **Question from Doctors without Borders: What is UNHCR's position with regard to the proposed Pact on Migration and Asylum?** UNHCR supports the introduction of border procedures observing international standards to ensure the credibility and integrity of asylum systems, including through the return of those found not to be in need of international protection who, according to data, constitute the majority in the current mixed flows. UNHCR also welcomes the establishment of independent monitoring mechanisms and the focus on integration. However, UNHCR is concerned over the absence of a mandatory solidary mechanism between Member States prior to situations of pressure or crisis.
- **Observation from the European Network on Statelessness:** Statelessness should be included in the screening procedure.

Other

- **Question from the European Network on Statelessness: Is UNHCR starting to plan its advocacy with regard to the COVID-19 vaccine and the inclusion of persons of concern?** The High Commissioner has started to advocate at his level in favour of the access to the vaccine for first-line respondents.

- **Feedback from the Global Refugee-led Network:** The participation of refugees and migrants as partners in such dialogues should be increased.

Follow-up:

- The next and final regional Dialogue is to be held in December, tentatively on December 8 or December 10. The format and content of the 2021 regional Consultations with NGOs will be discussed.
- Prior to the next meeting, a survey is to be disseminated to seek feedbacks from NGOs on the format and content of the regional Consultations with NGOs and on existing dialogue mechanisms.

ICVA, ECRE and UNHCR, 17th December 2020