

Note on Europe Regional NGO Consultations held on 21-23 September 2021

UNHCR, ECRE, ICVA and NGOs underline the importance of refugee-led organizations and access to social protection schemes in Europe

On 23 September, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe concluded consultations with some 86 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people in Europe. The three-day event focused on strengthening partnerships, empowering local actors and ensuring effective integration and access to social protection for all persons of concern to UNHCR in the region.

The consultations, co-hosted by UNHCR, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) brought together some 130 representatives from international and local NGOs across Europe, several refugee-led organizations, as well as academia and faith-based organizations.

“We have been witnessing worrying developments and practices over the past years, which have effectively undermined refugee protection in the region. In this context we need to reinforce our collective efforts to protect and find solutions for refugees, internally displaced or stateless people. This work starts at the grassroot levels, with local actors and together with the people we work for,” said UNHCR’s Regional Director for Europe, Pascale Moreau, in her opening remarks.

Catherine Woollard, Director of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) stressed the key role of people with a refugee background and stateless persons in accomplishing this mission. She also underlined the importance of ensuring a rights-based approach to inclusion, meaning both a focus on inclusion through respect for human rights of the people concerned and a commitment to inclusion in organizations’ own work.

Among the main outcomes of the consultations is the set of joint recommendations to national authorities, EU institutions, NGOs, civil society organizations and UNHCR to enhance civic engagement, refugee leadership, access to social protection and labour market inclusion.

“ICVA truly values the safe space for dialogue fostered by these consultations, including on sensitive topics such as externalization, and welcomes the focus on social protection. ICVA encourages all participants to move forward with the implementation of these concrete recommendations that should inform UNHCR’s planning and programming”, said Jerome Elie, Head of Forced Migration at the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

All key recommendations from these consultations will be conveyed to the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme (4-8 October 2021). Conclusions from the consultations will also help guide UNHCR’s regular regional dialogues with NGOs, launched by the Regional Bureau for Europe with ECRE and ICVA in July 2020, as well as the 2022 UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs.

For more information on these Regional Consultations, please contact Jérôme Elie, Head of Forced Migration with ICVA (jerome.elie@icvanetwork.org), Florent Marty, Senior Partnership Officer with the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe (marty@unhcr.org), and Catherine Woollard, Director of ECRE (cwoollard@ecre.org).