



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION



UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**High Commissioner Structured Dialogue on UNHCR-IFRC-NGO Partnership
San Salvador Mission Report
With the support of PRM
9 November 2016**

Executive Summary

On November 9th 2016 a joint ICVA and UNHCR follow-up mission looking at the implementation of the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue with NGOs, took place in El Salvador, taking advantage of a sub-continental meeting. More than 40 organizations, part of the Regional Working Group for the Brazil Plan of Action, *GAR-PAB* (*el Grupo Articulador Regional del Plan de Acción Brasil* in Spanish) from Central and Latin America and the Caribbean, had gathered to strengthen civil society ability to lead processes and advocate to government representatives and decision makers for the implementation of the Brazil Plan of action and changes in the legal framework in the region, to strengthen the protection of the Persons of Concerns (PoC).

GAR-PAB rose as an initiative to articulate the position of civil society on the state of international protection and promote the implementation and follow-up of the Brazil Plan of Action. *GAR-PAB* defines itself as a network of civil society experts and key actors in the field of international protection in the region whose objective is to promote the human rights of refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and migrants, strengthen the dialogue among intergovernmental organizations at regional, national and local levels, especially UNHCR, as well as to include the priorities and needs of Persons of Concern (PoCs) in regional and global agendas.

All workshop participants showed great commitment in enhancing partnership.

Recommendations per priority areas were identified and the following actions have been agreed upon to be taken forward:



Overall recommendations for improved partnership in Central and Latin America and the Caribbean:

- UNHCR and NGOs should strive to work under a **common vision** that applies to and is agreed by all parties, over the objectives, priorities, roles and responsibilities;
- UNHCR should, whenever possible, maintain its **partnership with national actors**, particularly when this partnership is long-standing, if no serious and unjustified problems were identified. This is in line with UNHCR's Grand Bargain Commitment in favor of localization ("*More support and funding tools for local and national responders*");
- Communications should be transparent and timely, particularly when referring to partnership termination and decisions related to 'appeals for expression of interest';
- UNHCR, when establishing its presence in a new operational context, should rely on and trust local civil society expertise, knowledge and *modus operandi*. This is particularly true in the field of **advocacy**, where UNHCR and NGOs can play a complementary and mutually reinforcing role, in line with the Principles of Partnership and the recommendations of the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue.

Specific GAR-PAB-UNHCR recommendations for improved partnership:

- *GAR-PAB* should share with UNHCR the documentation related to their structure, functions, objectives to facilitate the identification of priorities at regional and global level and a common agenda;
- UNHCR should share, in the same way, timely information, to allow for better coordination mechanisms between the two identification of channels of opportunity for joint work. This will help *GAR-PAB* to further position itself as a key civil society consortia and a relevant UNHCR counterpart at regional and global levels for the follow-up of the implementation of the Brazil Plan of Action;
- *GAR-PAB and UNHCR* could formalize their relationship and make it visible through clear ToRs and jointly developed working plans that take into account mutual expectations on the roles and responsibilities of *GAR-PAB* at regional and global levels and how it relates with local realities;
- *UNHCR* should internally define an interlocutor for the *GAR-PAB* for Latin America and the Caribbean issues for improved and institutionalized consultations and information-sharing.



1. Background Information

The Structured Dialogue held in San Salvador in November 2016 is part of the follow-up to the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on partnership with NGOs and the Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement, initiated in 2014 with joint UNHCR-ICVA and -InterAction missions.

The goal of these consultations is to facilitate a discussion among partners on their experiences working together, to review partnership approaches, strengthen mechanisms and identify opportunities for better collaboration. Since the launch of the Structured Dialogue process, seven country specific monitoring missions were organized, in DRC, Pakistan, Kenya, Chad, Myanmar, Lebanon and Tanzania. ICVA has also organized and facilitated 3 regional follow ups in West Africa (Dakar) and twice in South-East Asia (Bangkok).

This was the first dialogue to take place in the Americas. It followed the meeting organized by the Regional Working Group for the Brazil Plan of Action, *GAR-PAB (el Grupo Articulador Regional del Plan de Acción Brasil* in Spanish). *GAR-PAB*, composed by more than 40 NGOs, was created after the 2015 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations with the aim of promoting the implementation of the programs and proposals from the Brazil Plan of Action by the States and joint efforts between civil society organizations and international organisms that work in international protection. Moreover, *GAR-PAB* wants to strengthen dialogue among civil society, intergovernmental organizations, and national and local governments in order to implement the best possible solutions and mechanisms, nationally and regionally. In this regard, *GAR-PAB* also aims at promoting itself as an intermediary in the region, seeking the development of a common viewpoint on international protection.

2. Methodology & Participation

The Structured Dialogue gathered 26 NGO participants working in 13 different countries, as well as one UNHCR representative, Juan Carlos Murillo, UNHCR's Senior Legal Officer based in Costa Rica. Despite very limited UNHCR participation (the conference took place while the annual UNHCR planning meeting was happening in Panama), Mr. Murillo's presence was very useful in the conversation thanks to his collaborative attitude and deep knowledge of the operational and legal contexts in the America's region.

This mission was different from previous ones for two reasons: first, it was not focused on a country or a region, but embraced an entire continent (with the exception of USA and Canada) and second, it had a limited UNHCR participation. It was, nevertheless, a golden opportunity to reach out to different NGOs – to further strengthen their interface vis-à-vis UNHCR, but also and foremost, to support the consolidation of a Central, Latin and Caribbean network for regional and global protection issues.



The mission team members – Jerome Elie and Sophie Helle from ICVA and Tiziana Clerico from UNHCR’s Partnership Section – attended the two and a half days discussions that preceded the Dialogue, to get acquainted with the partnership challenges, progresses and gaps in the region and in the recently born alliance, *GAR-PAB*. In addition, bilateral meetings with all the participants, organized the days prior to the Structured Dialogue workshop, helped the team in understanding the operational context and frame the Dialogue accordingly.

Given the diversity of contexts in which the NGO members of *GAR-PAB* and UNHCR operate, as well as the diversity of partnership experience in the room, and *GAR-PAB* aspiration to become a key interlocutor also at global level, the facilitators decided to focus on the partnership between UNHCR and the *GAR-PAB* as the overarching umbrella network of the regional *GAR-PABs* composing it.

3. Plenary Sessions

The pre-workshop questionnaire, in line with the results of previous missions, revealed a limited knowledge, among the participants about the Structured Dialogue, its 10 Recommendations and the Principles of Partnership. Overall, the questionnaire highlighted a strong commitment and desire, from participants, to improve partnership with UNHCR with some work still strongly needed in the areas of **complementary advocacy, joint planning, and information sharing and grant management**.

UNHCR’s Senior Legal Officer, Juan Carlos Murillo focused his opening remarks on the importance of complementarity between NGOs and UNHCR and the respect of each other’s mandate/mission. A strategic partnership and collaboration in this region is key. It started with the Cartagena Declaration when civil society began playing a central role, which increased with subsequent important declarations (Cartagena +30; San Jose). According to Mr. Murillo, civil society organizations are UNHCR’s conscience: they help to remind UNHCR what it does well, what it does not do well, and what it should do. Criticisms are always constructive and UNHCR looks forward to continuing this partnership with NGOs.

ICVA and UNHCR presented the goals of this Structured Dialogue, namely ensuring awareness of the 10 Recommendations developed to improve and strengthen collaboration between NGOs and UNHCR, as well as having an open discussion about how we are working together, what is working and what could work better in different regions.

The workshop was also the opportunity to go through the Structured Dialogue history, present the [Principles of Partnership](#), as well as the [10 Recommendations for Strengthened Partnership](#). Based on the latter, participants identified key priority areas to focus on for the rest of the workshop, which they considered as the most relevant to *GAR-PAB*'s work. The following section is a compilation of the identified challenges in those different areas, as well as practical ways to address those challenges.

Participants chose to focus on the following areas: **Complementary advocacy; joint assessment and analysis, prioritization and strategic planning; problem resolution and capacity strengthening.**

4. Discussion on priority areas and proposed actions

4.1. Lack of common vision between UNHCR and its partners

Challenges and gaps identified

- NGOs in the region expressed concerns about the lack of a common understanding on how to handle a new phenomenon (e.g. new influx and attention to displaced populations from Northern Triangle of Central America, Venezuela, Haiti, Colombia), and what partnering entails in those cases. This lack of common vision impacts UNHCR's and NGOs' ways of responding to a crisis. UNHCR and civil society need to compare the different interpretations and understandings of a giving context.

Proposed actions:

- NGOs would appreciate the launch of a common assessment exercise for UNHCR and *GAR-PAB* to ensure a common vision that applies for everyone and that is agreed by both, at local, national and regional levels.
- UNHCR and *GAR-PAB* could have annual meetings to evaluate the state of partnership.

4.2. Transparent and agreed process and mechanism for handling issues of concern/capacity strengthening

Challenges and gaps identified

- NGOs expressed their concern about the recent tendency, in some UNHCR offices, to end the partnership with long-standing local partners, in favor of international organizations. Although, the rationale behind can be understood, it is not clear to

them why local partners with deep knowledge of the operational, legal and political contexts and with decades of partnership with UNHCR are trumped by international NGOs, some of them, without prior experience and/or presence in Central and/or Latin America.

- Moreover, UNHCR does not always communicate its decision in a transparent and timely manner.

Proposed Actions:

- UNHCR should strengthen capacities (human, technical and financial) of its civil society partners to ensure they can face administrative and policy challenges coming from new policy requirements or expectations;
- The capacity strengthening process should be two ways. UNHCR should respect, learn and benefit from the experience and expertise of local organizations, which are present and working in a given context prior to UNHCR's arrival;
- Communications and decisions on termination of partnership should be discussed with the concerned partner in a transparent and timely manner (e.g. with regard to selection or termination of implementing partnership).

4.3. Joint assessment and analysis, prioritization and strategic planning:

Challenges and gaps identified

- *GAR-PAB* can already count on an important pool of expertise and experience from different segments of civil society, working in different areas of protection and search for solutions for persons in need of international protection. In its short life, it has already progressed a lot, regionally and at a country level as well as in its internal organization, strategic planning and prioritization. However, the role of *GAR-PAB* as a global actor needs further strengthening.
- *GAR-PAB*'s search for a global identity, beyond the regional one, is still "a work in progress". *GAR-PAB* has an open and horizontal structure and trust among members. However, few capacitated members are embodying and performing tasks required and expected from the entire network because of the lack of clear direction and action plan as a global actor.
- From UNHCR's perspective, it is needed to know *GAR-PAB*'s processes, objectives and structure to reach out to *GAR-PAB* and include it in various processes.

Proposed Actions:

- ***Between GAR-PAB and UNHCR:***
- *GAR-PAB* as a network, with global reach, would benefit from consolidating its position as a relevant and independent interlocutor, if it can better show it feeds on the regional constituencies and reflects the needs and priorities of all its members on an equal and autonomous basis. Better communication, to UNHCR, about its inclusive governance structures, methodology and work-plan would improve its appeal for and capacity to engage with other actors;
- This will also help clarifying expectations of UNHCR and those of *GAR-PAB* individual members, on the roles and responsibilities of *GAR-PAB* as a network at regional and global levels. It could then be the basis for more formal forms of partnership between *GAR-PAB* and UNHCR.

4.4. Complementary advocacy

Challenges and gaps identified

- The Brazil Plan of Action lacks visibility and momentum in different countries in the region and globally, particularly after the 19 September UN Summit, which might have further diverted attention (and funds) from sub-continental objectives. This, despite the fact that States' commitments reveal many similarities (and sometimes stronger commitments) with those in the New York Declaration. Based on this context, *GAR-PAB* is not seen yet as a strategic interlocutor at the global level.
- For its part, UNHCR does not fully include civil society in its advocacy strategy, particularly vis-à-vis governments, where a complementary and mutually reinforcing role could be developed.
- Moreover, the complexity of relationship, lack of clear decision-making lines, between UNHCR's offices at the local, regional and HQs level, particularly in the more recently opened offices, does not always ensure a good coordination, timely information sharing, clear roles and responsibilities and expectation particularly in advocacy-related matters. This creates confusion, mixed messages and frustrations from both sides.

Proposed Actions

- **From GAR-PAB's side:**
- To avoid heavy and costly processes and ensure quick visibility, it was recommended that GAR-PAB looks into existing processes and initiatives at regional and global levels to follow up on the implementation of the Brazil Plan of Action. Those processes could also be the place to present GAR-PAB's reports, once ready, as well as particularities of the region and evidence of good practices. Integrating existing processes could also enhance GAR-PAB chances of becoming a relevant interlocutor.
- Different channels should be used to push the Brazil Plan of Action and the priorities and protection needs identified in the continent, such as the *Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework* (a way to bring visibility and momentum back to the Brazil Plan of Action?); *ExCom, Standing Committee* (Global processes to formally exchange with Member States); *GRULAC* (A platform to use for interaction with Member States at a regional level?); *UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations* (A space to exchange and reconnect with UNHCR HQs and consult with other NGOs?) *Side-events* (an easy format to link with an existing initiative?); *ICVA* (an institution to facilitate the entry into global processes?).
- **From UNHCR's side:**
- The advocacy-side of work could be jointly planned between GAR-PAB and UNHCR, so that when UNHCR interacts with governments, messaging could be coordinated, coherent and complementary with the civil society one.
- UNHCR should facilitate space for GAR-PAB to engage with other relevant actors, including governments, on relevant issues.

5. Closing and Next Steps

After participating in the workshop all participants indicated that they felt more knowledgeable about the Structured Dialogue and dedicated to improving UNHCR-GAR-PAB.¹

ICVA and UNHCR Partnership Section Geneva will consult with participants, UNHCR Regional Legal Hub, UNHCR Regional Hubs and the Americas Bureau on the most appropriate way of following up on progress made in implementing the actions identified by the different working groups. Given the geographical spread of the participants, a survey, mid 2017, seems the most effective and appropriate means to follow-up on the state of partnership.

¹ More details of the workshop evaluation findings can be read p.14

Final considerations from the mission

The mission had the privilege of being invited to attend the first two meeting's days, and this allowed us not only to confirm the impressive, innovative work civil society has been carrying out for decades, but also to know better the individual members of *GAR-PAB* and *GAR-PAB* as an entity. Given the unusual format of the mission, ICVA and UNHCR Partnership Section would like to make some final considerations, highlighting some of the recommendations identified during the workshop. These final suggestions are based on their observations and analysis during *GAR-PAB* conference:

- **To *GAR-PAB*:**
- To consolidate its role as a key strategic actor *GAR-PAB*, as a global interlocutor, could learn from good partnerships developed by the regional and national *GAR-PAB* with UNHCR.
- To ensure a better understanding/development of UNHCR-NGOs advocacy strategy, an exchange of strategies and mapping out of complementarities would help in making the advocacy work more impactful at regional and global levels.
- **To UNHCR:**
- UNHCR could work with *GAR-PAB*, to define options for complementary advocacy, information exchanges and work-plan, especially with reference to the follow-up to the Brazil Plan of Action.
- UNHCR should appoint a main referent to strengthen *GAR-PAB* positioning on continental and global issues. Considering the aspirations of *GAR-PAB* to become an interlocutor for regional issues at continental and global level and given the already solid collaboration between the different UNHCR offices and regional *GAR-PAB* members, the Bureau for the Americas may be recommended to become this main referent.

6. Annexes

Annex I: List of participants

NAME	POSITION	ORGANIZATION	MAIL ADDRESSES
Karina SARMIENTO	Directora	Asylum Access America Latina (Regional)	karina@asylumaccess.org
Rochelle NAKHID	Coordinador	Living Water Community (Trinidad)	lwcunhcr@gmail.com
Miriam I. Reyes RUIZ	Responsable Legal Atencion	SJM Nicaragua (Nicaragua)	atencionlegalsjm@uca.edu.ni
Jose ZAMBRANO	Programme Coordinator	APUVIMEH (Honduras)	renacerhsh@yahoo.com
Monica SALMON	Regional Coordinador de Gestion de Conocimiento y Redes	Asylum Access America Latina (Regional)	monica.salmon@asylumaccess.org
Mariana Chavez FERNANDES	Coordinadora Area Legal	ACAI (Costa Rica)	nana.ch.fe@gmail.com
Juan Carlos MURILLO	Jefe de la Unidad Regional	ACNUR	murillo@unhcr.org
Lisa DIEZ	Director, Latin America	HIAS (Regional)	lisa.dietz@hias.org
Irazu GOMEZ	Coordinadora Incidencia	Sin Fronteras	igomez@sinfronteras.org.mx
Piero CHIARA	Coordinador de Incidencia y Comunicacion	Servicio Jesuito para los Refugiados Ecuador (Ecuador)	pchiara@sjr.org.ec
Alejandra MACIAS DELGADILLO	Coordinadora Asylum Access	Asylum Access Mexico	alejandra.macias@asylumaccess.org

Fabricio T. SOUZA	Coordinador Proteccion	Caritas Rio de Janeiro (Brasil)	fabriziotsouza777@gmail.com
Celia MEDRANO	Oficial de Programas	Fondacion Cristosal (El Salvador)	cmedrano@crystal.org
Martha CRANSHAW	Coordinadora	Nicasmigrante	nicasmigrante.liderazgo@gmail.com
Gabriela CORTINA	Coordinadora general	SEDHU Uruguay (Uruguay)	sedhu@adinet.com.uy
Brenda PEREZ	Directora del area de desplazamiento interno	CMDPDH (Mexico)	desplazados1@cmdpdh.org
Gabriela LIGUORI	Coordinadora general	CAREF (Argentina)	gabriela@caref.org.ar
Sergio BLANCO	Oficial de Incidencia	Consejeria en Proyectos (PCS)	sblanco@pcslatin.org
Jose Luis LOERA	Coordinador general	Casa Refugiados (Mexico)	iloera@casarefugiados.org
Javier MARTINEZ	Coordinador Proteccion	Casa Migrante Saltillo	juridico@cdmsalt.org
Larissa LEITE	Coordinadora Proteccion	Caritas San Paolo (Brasil)	Larissa.casp@gmail.com
Billy NAVARRETE	Secretario Ejecutivo	CDH (Ecuador)	bnavarrete@cdh.org.ec
Enrique Oves MAYON	Coordinador nacional	Asylum Access Ecuador (Ecuador)	enrique.oves@asylumaccess.org
Diana MARTINEZ	Consultora	IDC (regional)	dmartinez@idcoalition.org
Monica PORTILLA	Oficial regional	AFSC	mportilla@afsc.org
Gloria Rosales PENA	Coordinadora Programa El Salvador	AFSC	grosales@afsc.org



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Annex II: The agenda

Structured Dialogue between UNHCR and the NGOs

Wednesday 9 November
HOTEL TERRAZAS, San Salvador

10:00 – 12:30 | Bilateral discussions with NGOs

12:30 – 13:30 | Lunch

13:30 – 14:00 | Registration

14:00 – 15:00 | HC Structured Dialogue: Introduction, history and objectives

Welcome words from UNHCR and PRM

Introduction, objective of the meeting of agenda

History and objectives of the HC Structured Dialogue

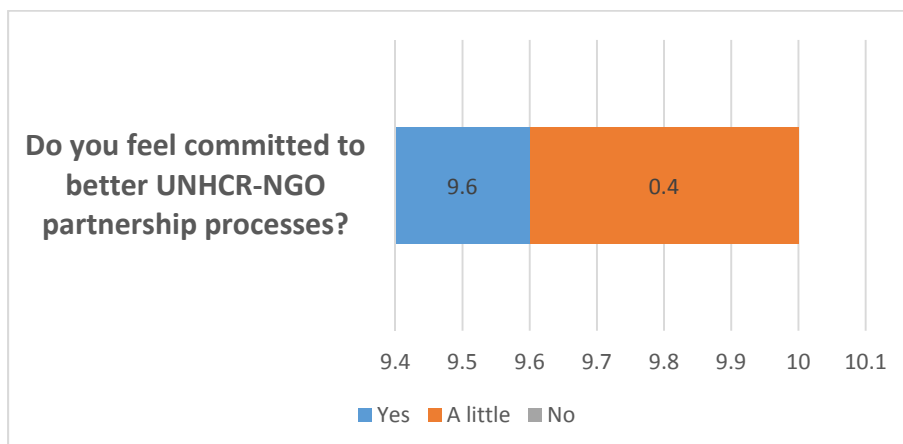
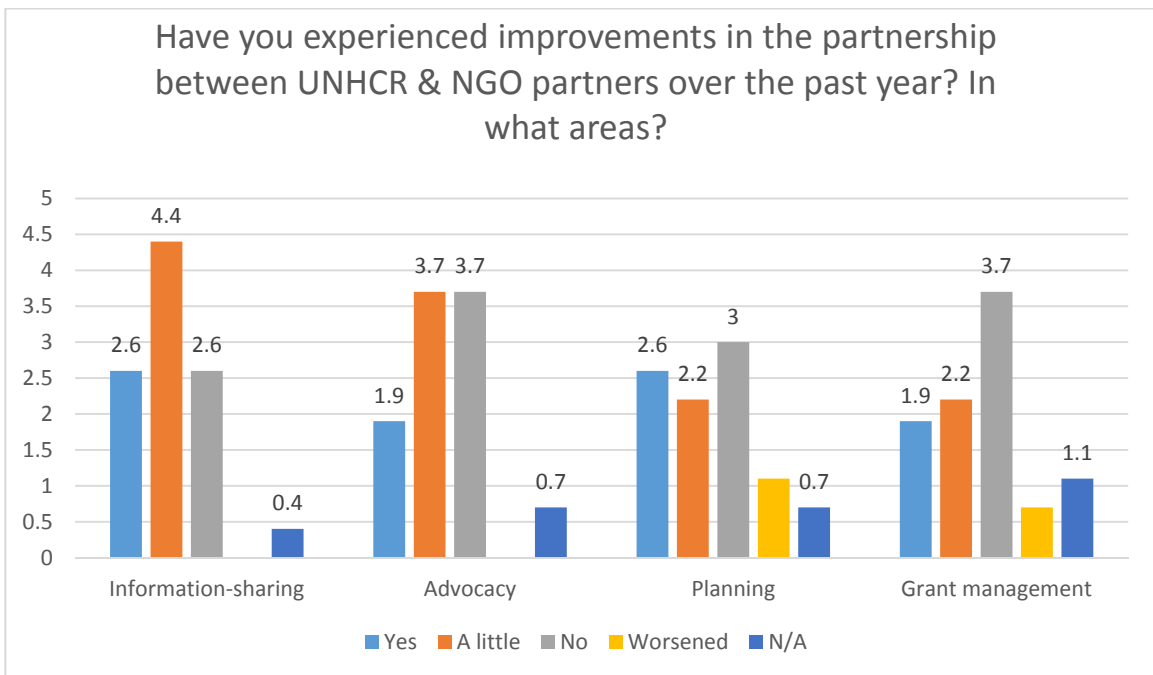
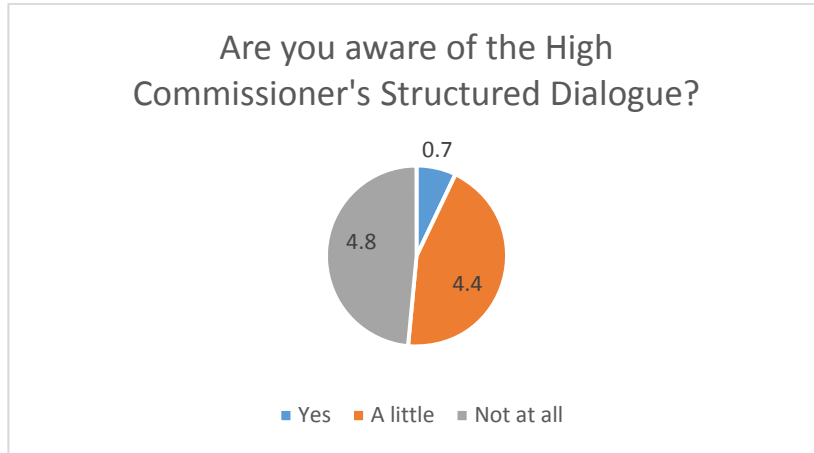
15:00 – 15:15 | Coffee break

15:15 – 16:45 | Group work

16:45 – 17:30 | Report back in Plenary

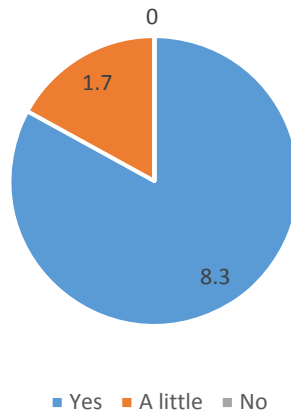
17:30 – 18:00 | Conclusion and next steps

Annex III: Pre-workshop questionnaire:

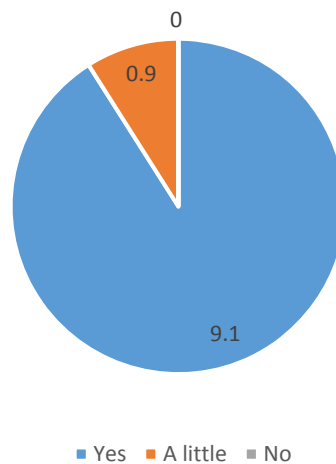


Annex IV: Workshop Evaluation

Do you feel more knowledgeable about the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue?



Do you feel more committed to better UNHCR-NGO partnership processes?



Main qualitative comments:

- Participants appreciated the methodology of the workshop;
- The workshop helped revealing the richness of the group and its potential as a global network;
- The workshop was relevant in highlighting new ways for GAR-PAB to be articulated at the global level, through joint strategic planning and collective activities;
- Participants appreciated the workshop but wished there was more UNHCR staff for the discussion and some additional information on UNHCR internal procedures.