

## UNHCR Dialogue with NGOs

8 December 2020

Organised by UNHCR, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), regional Dialogues with NGOs aim at ensuring regular and two-way communication between UNHCR and NGOs in Europe on topics of common interest, as well as to identify areas for joint/complementary engagement.

Agenda	Participants
<b>Item 1: 2021 Europe Regional Consultations from NGOs:</b> Feedbacks from NGOs and way forward	- <b>16 NGOs:</b> Amnesty International; the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe; Danish Refugee Council; the Dutch Council for Refugees; ECRE; the European Network on Statelessness; the Global Refugee-led Network; Handicap International; Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; ICVA; the International Catholic Migration Commission; Islamic Relief Worldwide; Jesuit Refugee Service; Doctors without borders; Oxfam; and Save the Children
<b>Item 2: Greece situation:</b> situation, needs and gaps	
<b>Item 3: Q&amp;A</b>	- <b>UNHCR (Greece, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, UNHCR Representation for EU Affairs)</b>

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**Item 1: 2021 Europe Regional Consultations from NGOs – Moderated by Florent Marty, Senior Partnership Officer, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe**

- The 2021 UNHCR Consultations with NGOs will be organized on a regional basis.
- If the seven regional Bureaux are invited to select context-specific topics of discussion, a common thread will also be identified, including to ensure a cross-regional and harmonized reporting at ExCom. This cross-cutting topic could touch upon refugee inclusion, climate change, localization or other areas.
- The UNHCR Partnership and Coordination Service, together with ICVA, is planning to hold monthly online consultations with NGOs in 2021.
- NGOs have shared their feedbacks on topics of interest and their preferred consultation methodology on a regular basis throughout 2020, including via online registration surveys prior to each event and via a dedicated questionnaire shared this week.

### Recap of feedbacks

<b>What should we consult about?</b>	Access to territory and asylum; post-COVID-19 situation; implementation of the Global Refugee Forum and High-Level Segment on Statelessness pledges in Europe; protection provided by organisations led by displaced and stateless communities; and a focus on specific country operations and situations
<b>How should we consult?</b>	Concrete actions and follow-up; no conference, briefing or Q&A style; a series of consultations; possible preparatory thematic working groups; mix of in-person and online events; two-way communication, including with our persons of concern
<b>What do we expect from these Consultations?</b>	Joint and/or complementary advocacy; identification and dissemination of good practices; support to the monitoring of the implementation of Global Refugee Forum and High-Level Segment on Statelessness pledges; enhancement of partnerships with organisations led by displaced and stateless communities

**NGO feedback:** Several topics of interest, and not only one, could be selected to be discussed in the framework of these Regional Consultations. A combination of in-person and virtual events would seem relevant. The representation of our persons of concern is crucial. However, the cross-regional fertilization could be missing.

**NGO question:** Will high-level UNHCR representatives participate? What timing is being considered?

→ **UNHCR, ECRE and ICVA:** With ExCom taking place in October, a key landmark in June, potentially together with the ECRE General Conference, along with a final consultation in September could be considered. 2021 will offer plenty of opportunities to network, including with high-level representatives, such as monthly dialogues or events pertaining to the anniversary of the Refugee Convention.

### Action points

- A common thread to today's exchange may be the need to hold these Regional Consultations around several key consultative landmarks throughout the year to ensure interactivity and provide room for concrete outcomes. This process could combine virtual and in-person events if the pandemic allows.
- Based on NGO feedbacks and discussions with ECRE, ICVA and the UNHCR Partnership and Coordination Service, a final approach will be adopted by the UNHCR Regional Bureau and announced by January 2021.

**Item 2: Greece situation** –Moderated by Catherine Woollard, Director, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

**UNHCR**

- Following the September fires on Lesbos which destroyed the Moria Registration and Identification Center, nearly 7,300 asylum-seekers and refugees are now sheltered in a new site (Mavrovouni).
- Under the coordination of the Greek authorities, UNHCR is supporting the shelter, WASH and health responses on the site. UNHCR and partners have set up a new referral pathway system to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.
- Preparatory work has been initiated ahead of planned drainage, electricity provision and water supply projects, requiring largescale adjustments, such as the removal and reinstallation of tents.
- To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR has installed two containers to be used for security and reception. UNHCR also began technical works to enhance the quarantine area for new arrivals. Groundwork, such as levelling, is ongoing and will be followed by installation of temporary shelter, hygiene facilities, shading structures and solar-powered streetlights. Works will also be undertaken to enhance the area's water, sewage and power capacity.
- In addition to the planned technical interventions to improve living conditions in Mavrovouni, UNHCR continues to advocate for a comprehensive and long-term reception solution.
- UNHCR firmly advocates against any practice that may involve informal returns of people to Turkey after they have reached Greek soil or territorial waters. There is an abundance of well-evidenced information pertaining to forced returns, received by many actors, which should be appropriately evaluated and examined by the national judicial or administrative authorities.
- UNHCR is working closely with NGOs on the issue of forced returns, including as co-chair of the Frontex Consultative Forum. UNHCR has shared a series of letter addressing problems in the HR and accountability framework in Frontex and advocated in that sense during management board meetings.
- The Frontex Consultative Forum is currently addressing the needs to revise the serious incident reporting mechanism and the individual complaints mechanisms; establish a procedure for the implementation of article 46 of the Frontex Regulation on the decisions to suspend, terminate or not launch activities; and capacitating the Fundamental Rights Officer.
- UNHCR runs the EU-funded ESTIA accommodation and cash assistance programmes in cooperation with the Government, municipalities and NGOs. UNHCR works closely with staff from State agencies for the transition of these programmes to the Greek authorities in January 2021.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on 3 December 2020 between the European Commission, European agencies and the Greek Government to outline the respective responsibilities and areas of cooperation in the establishment and operation of a new reception and identification center on Lesbos. It is not yet clear how this MOU fits with the propositions contained in the Pact on Migration and Asylum. Of note, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain have recently expressed their concerns over the Pact, including the lack of mandatory solidarity mechanism and the principle of compulsory border procedures.

**NGOs**

- The propositions laid out in the Pact on Migration and Asylum does not seem realistic. There is an absence of systematic report mechanism pertaining to pushbacks.
- Research by ECRE shows that the Greek authorities are not using EU funds towards integration<sup>1</sup>.

Questions	Exchange
Does UNHCR believe the Greek authorities will be able to manage the ESTIA programmes by January? To which extent does UNHCR have the ability to influence these Programmes?	→ The Greek authorities are responsible for the reception and protection of refugees in Greece. The ESTIA programmes were built as a model in collaboration with the authorities, with the deadline of January 2021, and should be integrated into the national system. Capacity

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ecre.org/greece-joint-recommendations-for-the-best-use-of-eu-funds-for-integration>

	<i>building of the partners have been undertaken by UNHCR.</i>
Given the overcrowding and the weak healthcare services, what is the status of the COVID-19 prevention and response?	<i>→ There are challenges. Healthcare actors are currently participating in the relevant national working group and contributing to a mapping of existing gaps.</i>
Is there information available on the EU task force for Greece?	<i>→ The EU Commission and the Greek authorities have established a taskforce to improve the situation on the island in a durable way. As a result, a detailed plan was agreed between the Greek authorities and EU agencies to establish a new reception center on the island of Lesbos by early September 2021. The corresponding MOU was just released (see above).</i>
What is the status of the discussions pertaining to vaccination and the access to vaccination for refugees and migrants?	<i>→ Persons residing in registration and identification centers are included in the national plan presented by the Ministry of Health.</i>

**Item 3: Q&A** - Moderated by Jérôme Elie, Head of Forced Migration, ICVA

- Is UNHCR planning to celebrate the anniversary of the Statelessness Convention? → *To be followed-up with the relevant UNHCR colleagues and addressed in bilateral and during the next Regional Dialogue.*

*ICVA, ECRE and UNHCR RBE – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020*