

2021 Regional Consultations with NGOs in Europe 21-23 September

Concept note

1. Introduction

The decentralization process undertaken by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, created new or strengthened Regional Bureaux in the respective geographic regions. This decentralization has provided opportunities for UNHCR to engage more directly with partners, including civil society actors, at the regional level. In light of this, UNHCR's Partnerships and Coordination Section at Headquarters has recommended that regionalized consultations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) take place to complement the long-running Global NGO Consultations, as a way of enriching these discussions within regional operational contexts.

At the same time, the most recent Global NGO Consultations, which took place virtually in September 2020, resulted in key recommendations that were presented at the 71st session of UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom). Among these recommendations was that global and regional consultations take place on alternating years and complement each other. As such, this year's consultations with NGOs will take place for the first time at the regional level, organised by UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe (UNHCR RBE) in coordination with International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE).

2. State of play – Regional NGO dialogues in Europe

In 2020, the UNHCR RBE, ECRE and ICVA decided to hold regular exchanges in a small and focused fashion, which have strengthened and systematized existing regional communication channels between the Bureau and NGOs.

Specifically, UNHCR RBE, ECRE and ICVA sought to launch and maintain a regular dialogue with NGOs to ensure two-way **information-sharing**, including on the situation of refugees and others of concern to UNHCR and NGOs across the region, as well as on needs, challenges and gaps on the ground; guarantee **complementary monitoring** of the situation depending on the presence, activities and capacities of each actor; and **identify opportunities for joint and complementary NGO-UNHCR advocacy** using existing advocacy initiatives whenever possible to avoid duplications, including between Geneva-based and Brussels-based actors.

Between July 2020 and June 2021, seven regional dialogues have been organized on a range of topics and have informed both the objectives and agenda of this September's sessions. For further information on agendas and notes of these meetings, please consult the dedicated website on the [UNHCR - 2021 Regional Consultations with NGOs in Europe](#).

3. Format and objectives of the 2021 UNHCR Regional Consultations with NGOs in Europe

Building on the 2020 regional dialogue experience, largely guided by COVID-19 restrictions, as well as previous regional events, it was suggested to depart from the traditional one-off event format. UNHCR RBE, ECRE and ICVA have therefore planned NGO Consultations for Europe to take place as a series of events, ensuring constant dialogue and space for concrete outcomes, adopting the following three-tier approach:

1. **Regional Dialogues with NGOs (including ad hoc thematic meetings - ongoing)**: These are organized during the year and held virtually, in line with COVID-19-related restrictions. They lay the groundwork and provide concrete outcomes/recommendations to be discussed in plenary during one of the next events. Such meetings include both UNHCR RBE and NGO representatives.
2. **An EU-dedicated session (6 July)**: In recent years, the ECRE annual General Conference has been held together with the UNHCR-NGOs Europe Consultations in the context of a UNHCR-ECRE Strategic Partnership managed by the UNHCR Representation for EU Affairs. In 2021, this event was organized under the umbrella of the Regional Consultations, with a specific focus on EU Affairs (agenda and notes available on the [UNHCR - 2021 Regional Consultations with NGOs in Europe](#) website).

3. **Final Consultations (series of sessions, 21-23 September)**: This final event will be held prior to UNHCR's Executive Committee in October 2021, which the Regional Consultations will feed into, and will allow for the identification of key recommendations on the common issue that all seven UNHCR Regional Bureaux are expected to address: **localization of humanitarian action and engagement with communities in a post-COVID-19 context**.

Through the 2021 Consultations, the UNHCR RBE, ECRE and ICVA intend to:

1. Provide a safe **space for dialogue** and networking between UNHCR and NGOs on the selected topics of discussion, in which NGOs are able to share activities, results, challenges and lessons learned;
2. Identify concrete ways to jointly overcome obstacles and challenges in the European context.
3. Identify **key advocacy messages**, including to States and the EU, on the selected topics of discussion. Where possible, develop complementary advocacy strategies taking into account existing advocacy mechanisms.
4. **Map existing NGOs and NGO initiatives** to enhance networking and synergies between UNHCR and NGOs, including at country level.

4. Participation and overview of each session of the Final Regional Consultations

Participation: A wide variety of NGOs have been invited to participate, including refugee-led organizations as well as civil society actors at regional, country and local levels (including funded UNHCR partners and organizations based outside the EU), considering diversity, expertise and geographical scope to ensure the sessions allow for dialogue and identification of concrete recommendations.

Each session seeks to be interactive and include speakers with diverse views and backgrounds. The first part of each session will consist of an introduction of concepts, information and objectives through short panel discussions or presentations. A structured exchange with the audience will then take place, followed by a wrap-up of the session and summary of the main conclusions and recommendations.

The sessions will be in English with simultaneous interpretation in Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish.

Overview

• **Day 1 (Tuesday, 21 September) – Opening of the Regional Consultations by Pascale Moreau, UNHCR Regional Director for Europe**

• **Day 1 (Tuesday, 21 September) – Session 1 on inclusion in Europe through organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons:**

- **How can NGOs and UNHCR support organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons to enhance inclusion in Europe?**

This session will examine localisation as it relates to the engagement with and support of local actors in favour of refugee protection and solutions. Community-based organizations, local NGOs and local organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons are key actors in Europe. They provide support and services, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, to reach people in need and have unique situational knowledge and experience to support forcibly displaced persons, notably in terms of their inclusion.

Taking into account the range of experience shared by participants, this session seeks to identify context-specific avenues to improve collaboration with organizations led by refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people and stateless persons in favour of their inclusion.

• **Day 2 (Wednesday, 23 September) – Session 2 on access of forcibly displaced and stateless persons to social protection schemes in Europe through local actors and initiatives**

- **How can NGOs and UNHCR join forces to enhance the access of forcibly displaced and stateless persons to social protection schemes in Europe through local actors and initiatives?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted the socioeconomic fabric of societies in every corner of Europe and underscored the paramount importance of access to social safety nets, particularly among the most vulnerable. Refugees across Europe have been disproportionately impacted. They were among the first to lose their jobs and small enterprises, and often found themselves at greater risk of infection as a result of precarious living conditions, irregular employment and reliance on public transport. With integration processes interrupted, many found themselves unable to cover their basic needs or, in some cases, at risk of homelessness. In such circumstances, access to national social protection systems is vital, and the response by many States in Europe has been mixed.

This session will help to review the current state of play regarding refugees' ability to access social protection systems in Europe, to compile promising practices facilitating the access of refugees and

stateless people to social protection schemes via local actors and, most importantly, to jointly identify recommendations for regional NGOs, local NGOs, UNHCR, municipalities and other relevant stakeholders to enhance the effective access of refugees and stateless people to social protection schemes in Europe. These recommendations will feed into the 2021 ExCom reporting on UNHCR's Consultations with NGOs and UNHCR's planning.

• **Day 3 (Thursday, 23 September) – Side event on issues and reforms related to funded partnerships between UNHCR and NGOs:**

- **Update on UNHCR's framework for implementing with partners in the wider context of ongoing transformation and change processes, including Results-Based Management (RBM)**

Partnership is essential to delivering on UNHCR's mandate and critical for the inclusion of persons of concern. The importance of the multi-stakeholder approach has also been highlighted by the Global Compact on Refugees. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted rapid and innovative adaptation, as UNHCR and NGO partners stayed and delivered throughout. In that context, it was deemed as important to reflect on how partnerships have been transformed since the onset of the pandemic, what has been enhanced and what more could be done. This session will seek to reflect on challenges, opportunities and progress made since 2020 to simplify partnership management processes and tools, particularly against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will provide an overview of UNHCR's partnership management framework in the context of ongoing change and transformation processes, including COMPASS/RBM, and offer space for discussion and exchange on these issues.

Follow-up: The 2021 Europe Regional Consultations will feed into several processes, including the Executive Committee sessions in October 2021, the High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021 and the Global Consultations with NGOs in 2022.

A report with key recommendations from the substantive sessions will be jointly developed by UNHCR RBE, ICVA and ECRE. In addition, UNHCR, ICVA and ECRE will continue to organize **regular thematic dialogues** after the September consultations to ensure follow up on recommendations and discussion of other key topics/issues of relevance.

