

REGIONAL NGO/UNHCR CONSULTATIONS FOR WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA 12-13 SEPTEMBER 2023

BACKGROUND

In June 2023, the West and Central Africa region had 13.3 million forcibly displaced and stateless people, a number that has nearly doubled since 2018. Unfortunately, the current context does not suggest any future improvement. The region continues to grapple with general instability, including political, security, and communal unrest. Other factors such as the impact of climate change exacerbating food insecurity and poverty, as well as global inflation and the effects of the war in Ukraine, continue to devastate already fragile economies, intensifying insecurity and driving population displacement. In this socio-economic and security context, where budgets are decreasing, humanitarian actors struggle to meet the constantly growing needs. Much of the burden falls on host communities, which themselves are experiencing deteriorating living conditions. Collaboration and partnerships between humanitarian actors and civil society remain central to addressing the needs of forcibly displaced populations and the communities that host them.

UNHCR, which has a long history of collaboration with NGOs and other civil society organizations, recognizes their essential role in protecting, promoting inclusion in national systems, and seeking solutions for forcibly displaced and stateless individuals. Regional consultations between UNHCR and NGOs at both regional and global levels are crucial moments for discussing these issues. These gatherings provide an opportunity to assess the current state of partnerships and collaborations between UNHCR and NGOs, as well as to identify future directions and opportunities. The conclusions and recommendations that emerge from these consultations will guide the collaboration between UNHCR and NGOs in the region, contribute to the 2023 Executive Committee meeting in October, the high-level meeting on the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, and the Global Consultations with NGOs in June 2024.

The issues identified this year (solutions, inclusion in national systems, and gender mainstreaming) stem from an online survey conducted last year among partners of each Bureau and are in line with the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and [UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2022-2026](#).

The objectives of the 2023 regional consultations are as follows:

- Identify common regional priorities for UNHCR and NGOs, taking into account the specific challenges and opportunities of the region.

- Identify various ways of joint and individual mobilization in the preparations for the second Global Refugee Forum.
- Develop regional recommendations that will inform the global consultations and contribute to the overall efforts of UNHCR and its partners in the discussed thematic areas.

These consultations are intended for UNHCR's main NGO partners, members of ICVA, and organizations led by the populations we serve, both at the regional and national levels. The moderators and speakers will be a mix of UNHCR staff, NGO representatives, and experts in the field from other organizations, at both regional and national levels.

Discussions will be conducted in both French and English and will be accompanied by interpreters.

AGENDA

(Dakar time)

Tuesday 12, September 2023	
9:00-09:15	Welcoming Remarks Abdouraouf Gnon-Konde, Regional Bureau Director WCA, UNHCR Adeline Benita, ICVA Representative for WCA
09:15-10:45	Towards the second Global Refugee Forum (GRF) Paul Absalon, Snr Development officer and GRF focal point, UNHCR Rakesh Gupta Nichanametla Ramasubbaia, Policy Officer DIP Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR Gabriela Miranda, Senior Policy Officer Forced Migration, ICVA
10:45-11:45	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11:15-13:15	Inclusion of forcibly displaced people in Social Protection System Georgia Christina Kosmida Bradley, Snr Livelihood & Economic Inclusion Officer, UNHCR Jacques Mekok, ICLA (Information, counselling and legal assistance) project coordinator in Batouri (East Cameroun), NRC Junior Joseph, Regional Economic Recovery Coordinator, DRC
13:15-14:00	<i>Lunch</i>

14:00-16:00	<p align="center">Against the odds: Advancing Gender Equality</p> <p align="center">Nfomi Laura Berka, Director of COMUCEID, Cameroun Clarisse Ntampaka, Snr Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Officer, UNHCR Yolande Flore Longang tchounkeu, Technical Adviser for the Protection and Empowerment of Women for West Africa, IRC</p>
<p align="center">Wednesday 13, September 2023</p>	
8:45-10:45	<p align="center">Protection monitoring and community-based data collection</p> <p align="center">Antoine Jean Thomas Ellias, Projet 21 Coordinator, Burkina Faso, UNHCR Elmehdi Ag Wakina, AMSS Director and President of PONA (plateforme des ONG actives dans l'humanitaire), Mali Frederic Baele, Regional head of programs and Mairama Cissé, Cluster protection Co-lead, Burkina Faso, DRC</p>
10:45-11:00	<p align="center"><i>Coffee Break</i></p>
11:00-13:00	<p align="center">Return and reintegration in conditions that meet international standards</p> <p align="center">Abdouraouf Gnon-Konde, Bureau Director for WCA, UNHCR Patrick Andrey, Humanitarian expert (Consultant) Abdel Hakim Tahir, General Director of l'ADES</p>
13:00-14:00	<p align="center"><i>Lunch</i></p>
14:00-16:00	<p align="center">UNHCR programme reforms and partnerships: Where We Stand Today</p> <p align="center">Jacopo Segnini, Deputy Regional Director West Africa, INTERSOS Clare Askew, Snr Programme Management and Support Officer, DSPR, UNHCR Yves Ouoba, Director of TINTUA (Burkina Faso) and Vice-President of SPONG (Secrétariat Permanent des ONG au Burkina Faso)</p>
16:00-16:15	<p align="center">Concluding remarks UNHCR-ICVA</p> <p align="center">Abdouraouf Gnon-Konde, Regional Bureau Director WCA, UNHCR Adeline Benita, ICVA Representative for WCA</p>

Towards the second Global Refugee Forum (GRF)

The Global Refugee Forum (GRF) is a central piece of the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2019. Every four years, states and other stakeholders come together to share best practices and contribute to achieving the objectives of the GCR through financial support, technical expertise, and policy changes. The next Global Refugee Forum will take place from 13 to 15 December in Geneva.

The Forum will be an opportunity to showcase the progress made by governments and other stakeholders in implementing pledges and initiatives announced since the first Forum in 2019. It will also provide participants with a space to announce new pledges, share best practices, and assess upcoming challenges and opportunities.

Paragraph 40 of the GCR emphasizes the role and importance of civil society, "including those that are led by refugees, women, youth or persons with disabilities, and those operating at the local and national levels", in realizing the Compact and their contribution to assess "community strengths and needs, inclusive and accessible planning and programme implementation, and capacity development."¹ This role is translated into action through pledges made during the GRF, and during the first forum in 2019, nearly a quarter of all pledges were submitted by NGOs.

Furthermore, NGOs have played a crucial role in ensuring meaningful participation and leadership of refugees and other marginalized groups, a core aspect of the Global Compact - both during the event itself and as partners in the implementation of pledges.

In preparation for the 2023 GRF, this session aims to inform NGOs about the preparations made to date and engagement opportunities, including practical support for the development and submission of pledges. It will also be an opportunity to hear from NGOs about the progress they have made in implementing past pledges and their plans for the upcoming GRF.

Objectives

- Inform participants about the importance and impact of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF), lessons learned, and preparations for the upcoming Forum in December 2023.
- Discuss/exchange ideas on opportunities for NGOs to engage in the GRF process (e.g., through the NGO Reference Group, GRF initiatives, and multi-stakeholder groups and pledges).
- Listen to and engage with NGOs regarding their pledges in the region.

Moderator

¹ [Global Compact on Refugees – Booklet | UNHCR](#)

Adeline Benita, Representative for West and Central Africa, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

Speakers

- Paul Absalon, Snr Development officer and GRF focal point, UNHCR
- Rakesh Gupta Nichanametla Ramasubbaia, Policy Officer DIP Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR
- Gabriela Miranda, Senior Policy Officer Forced Migration, ICVA

Inclusion of forcibly displaced people in Social Protection System

Social protection can be defined as "the set of policies and programs aimed at preventing and protecting all individuals against poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion throughout their lives, with a focus on vulnerable groups."²

The inclusion of forcibly displaced individuals in social protection systems and programs serves not only as a humanitarian imperative (as these individuals often lack access to basic services) but can also improve social cohesion, reduce inequalities between host communities and forcibly displaced individuals, and greatly contribute to improved protection and solutions outcomes, all while avoiding the creation of parallel systems. Therefore, it is a key strategy for addressing needs in a more predictable manner and promoting the autonomy and resilience of the targeted populations. The success of this approach depends not only on each country's institutional context but also on the level of social cohesion, a major challenge in a context where resources are limited, and ethnic, civic, or religious differences can lead to serious hostilities between communities.

UNHCR and civil society work with governments and development actors to promote opportunities for the inclusion of displaced populations in national services. This approach aims to ensure more cost-effective investments in national systems that will also benefit host communities by increasing the quality of services and investments in key sectors such as education, health, social protection, and employment. NGOs and civil society partners support this approach by developing projects in line with the host country's inclusion plan, addressing existing gaps without creating parallel systems, and facilitating the transfer of responsibilities to government structures.

Since the 2000s, and with the support of development partners, new social protection policies and programmes have emerged, including long-term, regular cash transfer programmes for extremely poor

² This definition comes from the Social Protection Interagency Coordination Board and is co-chaired by the ILO and the World Bank and includes representatives from IMF, UN-DESA, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, WFP, Regional Development Banks and Regional Economic Commissions.

households; seasonal cash transfers; long-term labour-intensive public works programmes; school feeding programmes; health fee waivers; and initiatives to set up general health insurance. Humanitarian and development donors are progressively providing additional direct resources to governments. For example, the World Bank IDA 18 and 19 Regional Sub-Window funding is supporting twelve social protection projects across ten countries to do this.

As the alignment of social protection systems and humanitarian cash transfer programs progresses, more opportunities are arising to discuss and engage in the broader topic of integrating refugees and internally displaced persons into social protection.

Objective

The objective of this session is to identify and collectively seize these opportunities to ensure the development and implementation of inclusive policies and programs that address the unique challenges faced by refugees and other forcibly displaced populations.

Guiding questions

- In existing practices, what are the key factors and innovative approaches that have improved the inclusion of refugees and internally displaced persons in social protection systems?
- How can civil society organizations and UNHCR contribute to the design and implementation of inclusive and sustainable social protection systems that meet the specific needs of refugees and forcibly displaced persons?
- How can alliances with local and national stakeholders, including those led by forcibly displaced individuals, be strengthened, and expanded in the long term?

Moderator

Fatoumata Konate, Deputy representative for West and Central Africa, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

Speakers

- Georgia Christina Kosmida Bradley, Snr Livelihood & Economic Inclusion Officer, UNHCR
- Jacques Mekok, ICLA (Information, counselling, and legal assistance) project coordinator in Batouri (East Cameroun), NRC
- Junior Joseph, Regional Economic Recovery Coordinator, DRC

Against the odds: Advancing Gender Equality

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a major concern in the West and Central Africa region. More than 6.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless individuals are women and girls, and they face an increased risk of GBV, including sexual and gender-based violence, rape, physical assault, sexual abuse, and exploitation by humanitarian workers, among other forms of violence. They also bear the consequences of conflicts. Over the years, UNHCR and civil society organizations have worked to prevent gender-related risks and address gender-related needs, while intensifying efforts to ensure that forcibly displaced individuals and stateless persons are included at all stages of programming. While there has been progress in mainstreaming gender issues into various humanitarian and development interventions, some challenges persist, such as gender data collection, assessing specific needs, and mainstreaming gender in programs and sectors unrelated to GBV (such as education, health, and nutrition). Moreover, despite increased funding for gender-specific initiatives, many actors report the lack of flexibility.

Beyond these aspects, another alarming observation is that the region reports the highest rates of GBV in the world. Among the top ten countries globally with the highest rates of child marriage, six are located in West and Central Africa, and twelve are among the top twenty countries globally with the highest rates of female genital mutilation. Some countries even show regression in gender-related issues. GBV reflects deeply rooted structural gender inequalities and harmful traditional practices that persist at various levels of society. In this context, how can humanitarian actors respond to growing needs while contributing to the necessary societal transformative change to prevent GBV and advance gender equality?

Objective

While recognizing that progress towards gender equality is slow, this session aims to take stock of our partnerships and strategies aimed at improving the quality of our tools and interventions for the prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV), while also contributing to the necessary structural changes required to reduce gender inequalities sustainably.

Guiding questions

- From humanitarian response to durable solutions, what is our assessment of the impact of our interventions, tools, and partnerships on reducing structural gender inequalities in the region?
- Where are the opportunities for collective action to enhance the protection of women and girls in the region?
- What recommendations can we make to enhance partnerships between UNHCR and civil society on these issues and make them more strategic?

Moderator

Anne Bathily, Snr Inter-Agency Coordination Officer, WCA, UNHCR

Speakers

- Nfomi Laura Berka, Director of COMUCEID, Cameroun
- Clarisse Ntampaka, Snr Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Officer, UNHCR
- Yolande Flore Longang tchounkeu, Technical Adviser for the Protection and Empowerment of Women for West Africa, IRC

Protection monitoring and community-based data collection

The region, characterized by immense protection needs for its populations, urgently requires strengthened data collection and monitoring. However, challenges in accessing populations affected by conflicts due to volatile security conditions pose a major challenge to the accuracy and credibility of collected data. Additionally, the complexity of needs and contexts requires a multi-stakeholder approach (UN agencies, international NGOs, governments, and local actors), which further complicates increased coordination and data harmonization.

The role played by local NGOs is central. Partnerships with these organizations, whose informants are often part of the communities and are directly based there, strengthen local capacities, contribute to building trust, improve information coverage in hard-to-reach areas, enhance the quality and quantity of data, and reduce operational costs.

A recent example of this collaboration is Project 21 (P21), a regional protection monitoring system launched in 2020 to address data and analysis gaps in West and Central Africa. This inter-agency project mobilizes partners to collect data sets with harmonized tools and a common methodology to generate joint analyses of the protection situation. Project 21 is now fully deployed in the Central Sahel and Lake Chad region. In 2022, P21 monitors conducted nearly 15,000 interviews with key informants and household heads in 2,500 localities.

In the implementation of Project 21, local NGOs and civil society have become key partners in data collection. In Burkina Faso, more than a dozen organizations, already active in the areas of social cohesion, child protection, and prevention and response to gender-based violence, are now federated under the supervision of experienced international NGOs and contribute fully to the collection and analysis of protection data. In Burkina Faso, P21's efforts to strengthen local partnerships have also contributed to training and equipping protection data collection agents from the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), an independent administrative authority created by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

Objective

The session will draw on the experiences and lessons learned in Burkina Faso to discuss best practices in local partnerships in protection monitoring and community-based data collection and explore ways to improve data collection in hard-to-reach areas.

Guiding questions

- After 2 years of implementing P21, what lessons learned and best practices can be relied upon, and what are the key recommendations for improving protection monitoring and community-based data collection?
- How can working with local actors be an opportunity to enhance data collection on protection in inaccessible areas?
- What is the role of protection cluster leads/co-leads in improving data visibility in contexts with high political sensitivities?

Moderator

Adeline Benita, Representative for West and Central Africa, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

Speakers

- Antoine Jean Thomas Elias, Projet 21 Coordinator, Burkina Faso, UNHCR
- Elmehdi Ag Wakina, AMSS Director and President of PONAHA (plateforme des ONG actives dans l'humanitaire), Mali
- Frederic Baele, Regional head of programs and Mairama Cissé, Cluster protection Co-lead, Burkina Faso, DRC

Return and reintegration in conditions that meet international standards

The West and Central Africa region continues to be characterized by general security instability combined with multidimensional crises that often prevent most forcibly displaced individuals from exercising their right to return in safety and dignity. Consequently, the vast majority of refugees and internally displaced persons remain displaced for extended periods, primarily because the root causes of their displacement have not been resolved.

There are also cases where returns occur under unfavorable conditions, exposing populations to multiple risks, including threats to human dignity due to the lack of livelihoods and basic social services in return areas. Additionally, the risks of land conflicts remain particularly high, leading to ruptures in community

relationships, making the reintegration of displaced populations even more challenging. These situations in turn lead to new movements of displacement.

UNHCR has responsibilities for the protection and assistance of refugees in finding solutions to displacement, especially with regard to facilitated or spontaneous returns. This includes establishing and continuously documenting the factors motivating self-organized returns, as well as conducting regular protection monitoring in return areas in the country of origin to assess the challenges related to reintegration and protection. When returns occur under unfavorable circumstances, UNHCR maintains its duty to remain engaged in pursuing international protection and humanitarian assistance for refugees and, in partnership with governments, seeking durable solutions.

Ensuring that returns and reintegration are sustainable and take place under conditions in line with international standards requires a pooling of efforts in data collection, information sharing, and the commitment of all key actors, particularly the authorities of the host country and the country of origin, as well as humanitarian, development, and peace/security actors (at the international and local levels, including affected communities and populations). This involves identifying all available opportunities, even if limited, that provide a framework for voluntary return and reintegration aligned with international standards. The involvement of displaced populations in decision-making and return organization is essential.

Objective

Based on recent developments and existing projects (e.g., legal frameworks in Niger and Chad, the tripartite agreement between Nigeria, Cameroon, and UNHCR), the session's objective is to discuss opportunities for improving conditions that promote voluntary returns and the reintegration of forcibly displaced individuals in the region. The session will also explore possibilities and challenges of collaboration between UNHCR and civil society on these issues and draw concrete recommendations to strengthen this collaboration.

Guiding Question

- How can we collectively ensure that discussions and policies on return and reintegration issues are based on a rights-based approach?
- How can local actors and civil society be better included in advocacy actions on return and reintegration issues?
- Based on successful joint advocacy experiences, how can we build upon them to improve this type of action?

Moderator

Adeline Benita, Representative for West and Central Africa, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

Speakers

- Abdouraouf GNON-KONDE, Bureau Director for WCA, UNHCR
- Patrick Andrey, Humanitarian expert (Consultant)
- Abdel Hakim Tahir, General Director of l'ADES

UNHCR programme reforms and partnerships: Where We Stand Today

The regional consultations in 2021 resulted in several recommendations aimed at advancing the localization agenda and improving partnerships between UNHCR and civil society. In conclusion, participants emphasized the need for mapping local actors, the importance of mutual capacity strengthening, access to flexible and multi-year funding for local and national organizations, and the extension of the duration of established partnership agreements. They also highlighted the importance of including organizations, including those led by refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless persons, both at the level of consultative mechanisms and in programs and projects.

Two years later, with the region facing multiple and multidimensional crises that underscore the importance of localization, what is the status of these partnerships?

Objective

This session aims to provide an update from both UNHCR and civil society on the state of these partnerships, the progress made, the persistent challenges, and potential solutions. It will also be an opportunity to present the new Partnership Relationship and Operations Management System (PROMS), which will be available from September 2023 and will guide the development of new partnership agreements for 2024. In order to ensure a smoother transition to this new management system, UNHCR remains committed to supporting its partners, including governments, throughout this change.

Guiding questions

- Since the last consultations in 2021, what actions have UNHCR taken to address regional and global recommendations regarding partnerships?
- What are the persistent challenges faced by civil society and UNHCR in these partnerships, and how can improvements be made?
- How can partnership with organizations led by forcibly displaced individuals be enhanced?

Moderator

Anne Bathily, Snr Inter-Agency Coordination Officer, WCA, UNHCR

Speakers

- Clare Askew, Snr Programme Management and Support Officer, DSPR, UNHCR

- Jacopo Segnini, Deputy Regional Director West Africa, INTERSOS
- Yves Ouoba, Director of TINTUA (Burkina Faso) and Vice-President of SPONG (Secrétariat Permanent des ONG au Burkina Faso)