

**NGO Statement: virtual ExCom briefing on UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 pandemic,
3 June, 15:00 - 17:00**

- Thank you Mr. Chair and Mr. High-Commissioner for giving NGOs the opportunity to speak at this second ExCom Briefing on UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As the pandemic situation evolves and improves in some regions, refugees and other displaced populations continue to face serious threats to their health, livelihoods and rights.
- As [highlighted by the UN Secretary General in his Policy Brief](#) released today, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people on the move presents itself as 3 interlocking crises, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities: a health crisis; a socio-economic crisis; and a protection crisis.
- Since the first ExCom briefing, COVID-19 cases have been confirmed among refugee populations in Bangladesh and other locations. In the Sahel, violent attacks, insecurity, and restrictions severely limit humanitarian access critical to the COVID-19 prevention and response. Moreover, two recent major pledging conferences, highlighted that countries like Yemen are disproportionately affected and, with Latin America emerging as a new epicenter of the pandemic, Venezuelan refugees and migrants are particularly at risk and in need of additional support.
- More than ever, this situation calls for solidarity and strong partnership in action to assist, protect, and reach durable solutions for displaced populations, while facing the challenges of the COVID-19 situation.
- In this perspective, NGOs wish to express, again, their gratitude for the **open dialogue** UNHCR is fostering through weekly consultations at global level and other meetings organized by some of the UNHCR Regional Bureaus. Those have allowed to maintain close contact during difficult times, and address crucial practical parameters of our cooperation.
- We hope other UN agencies will follow your example by establishing similar opportunities for regular dialogue with NGOs and local partners in the coming weeks.
- Responsiveness and dialogue, however, need to go hand in hand with **adequate resources** made available at the right time and where they are most needed – on the ground. Four months into the COVID-19 humanitarian response, most NGOs are still having to face major funding challenges, affecting their capacity to deliver effective humanitarian action in response to COVID-19 on top of other, pre-existing crises. In this perspective, we wish to highlight that:
 1. Based on NGOs' initial feedback, there has been no significant increase in the amount received from UNHCR so far. We suggest that a more transparent and accountable process should be put in place to shed light, on an ongoing basis, on **how much of the GHRP funding pledged to UNHCR is allocated to NGO partners. We would also appreciate information about how much UNHCR is planning** to allocate to NGOs at this point in the process and how much of this additional funding is passed on to National NGOs?
 2. Moreover, the **speed of disbursements to frontline implementers is also critical**. NGOs are concerned that, unless changes made at global level are quickly reflected in-country, it will take weeks, if not months, to receive any funding allocated to them.
 3. Coming back to the two recent pledging conferences, NGOs are extremely concerned that the Yemen conference raised only half the amount it did last year despite increased needs and the impact of COVID-19. In extraordinary times, donors must continue to stand in solidarity. Failure to do so will cost lives. As to the Venezuela situation, NGOs are concerned by the fact that a large part of the over €2.5 billion pledged on 26 May were made through loans rather than grants as this may affect programming.
- Funding will be crucial to launching additional COVID-19 specific interventions to provide assistance and protection to refugees and other displaced populations. As highlighted in a

recent [UNHCR paper on the role of the Global Compact on Refugees in the COVID-19 response](#), it is also vital to keep regular programming on track in the current situation.

- With that in mind, we reaffirm the importance of working on solutions: the importance of keeping regular programming on track in the current situation is also valid for Durable Solutions. It is vital to continue, in parallel to preparedness and emergency response, to address long-term displacement issues and continue to invest in solutions processes and maintain momentum as well as stakeholder engagement.
- NGOs welcome the three key principles prioritized by UNHCR in its paper (burden- and responsibility-sharing, protection, and inclusion in national systems) and welcome the further highlighting of Durable Solutions in a forthcoming updated version of the paper, as called for by a number of NGOs. In particular, all efforts must be made to sustain resources throughout the crisis, so that resettlement and complementary pathways programs can resume normal processing as soon as possible, allowing refugees in need of solutions to travel as quickly as possible.
- Last but certainly not least, we reiterate [protection concerns voiced by NGOs at the first ExCom Briefing in April](#): border closures, risks of refoulements, suspended asylum procedures, restrictions of movements, social isolation, and xenophobia work to increase vulnerabilities among refugees and other displaced populations. We caution about the direct and potentially long-term effects on the lives of refugees and on international legal obligations. We also highlight the need to take action to prevent gender-based violence and support victims in the pandemic context, while prioritizing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in the COVID-19 humanitarian response.
- Thank you.