

Regional Update for Central and West Africa
NGO Collective Statement – Oral Statement

This statement was developed through consultations with a wide range of NGOs, including those led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

The humanitarian crisis in West and Central Africa has reached a critical inflection point that demands immediate and transformative action from UNHCR, member states, and the international humanitarian community at large.

- The region is experiencing a perfect storm of interconnected crises that exceed the capacity of fragmented, underfunded responses to manage effectively:
- Over 12.7 million people remain forcibly displaced or stateless, a 48 percent increase in recent years.
- Food insecurity has reached catastrophic levels - 13 million children are at risk of malnutrition, and over 3 million face emergency food insecurity.
- Over 8 million women and girls across West and Central Africa required support related to gender-based violence in 2024. The ongoing humanitarian crisis has increased incidents of GBV, and the crumbling humanitarian response capacity is leaving survivors without access to essential prevention, response, or support.

Local actors across the region, including civil society organizations, are working in contexts of insecurity, limited state capacity, and insufficient resources. They continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and expertise while operating with insecure, fragmented, project-based funding that prevents them from strengthening capacity, retaining skilled staff, or engaging in strategic planning beyond emergency response. Where national governments face budgetary constraints and weak administrative capacity, local humanitarian actors must fill critical gaps. However, the current financing architecture systematically undervalues their expertise while placing them in competition rather than collaboration.

These interconnected crises - displacement, hunger, gender-based violence, and underfunded humanitarian responses - cannot be addressed through incremental adjustments to existing systems. We recommend the following imperatives to guide collective action in the region:

First, we must champion locally-led coordination and the meaningful participation of national actors in all phases of humanitarian programming. Local organizations, including refugee-led, possess irreplaceable knowledge of their communities, existing capacities, and contextual realities that external actors cannot replicate. Elevating their leadership is not merely an ethical imperative but an operational necessity that strengthens the effectiveness, accountability, and sustainability of humanitarian interventions. When local actors lead coordination, responses are more rapidly deployed, resources are more efficiently allocated, and trust within affected communities is more readily established. We call upon UNHCR and member states to systematically invest in the capacity of local actors, establish equitable partnerships that recognize their expertise as foundational rather than supplementary, ensure that coordination mechanisms are designed with displaced populations and host communities, and remove the structural barriers that prevent local, national and refugee-led organizations from accessing direct funding and leadership roles.

Second, we need a fundamental transformation of the humanitarian financing architecture that has constrained effective response for too long. The current system of short-term, project-based funding fragments response, creates duplication, incentivizes competition rather than collaboration, and undermines the development of sustainable solutions. Organizations cannot build institutional capacity, retain skilled staff, or engage in strategic planning when funding is uncertain and episodic. We urge donor states and UNHCR to champion innovative financing mechanisms and policy frameworks that prioritize predictability, flexibility, and alignment with triple nexus objectives, including multi-year commitments with reasonable administrative overhead allocations.

Third, principled humanitarian action and protection must remain non-negotiable in all contexts and under all circumstances. The protection of all persons, including comprehensive gender-based violence prevention and response, must be embedded as a foundational principle across all humanitarian operations. Gender-based violence represents both a symptom of displacement and a barrier to durable solutions, requiring dedicated resources, specialized expertise, and survivor-centered approaches. We call on UNHCR and member states to ensure that protection standards are upheld without exception, that adequate resources are dedicated to GBV response and prevention, and that protection considerations inform all programmatic decisions from inception through evaluation.

As we mark the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, we thank those Member States of Central and West Africa for their conducive policy environments to welcome refugees. With more than 12 million displaced and stateless people in the region, we urge too that commitments are reaffirmed in practice, to guarantee access to asylum, prevent refoulement, and ensure protection.

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Thank you.