

UNHCR 96th Meeting of the Standing Committee Collective NGO Statement on International Protection

Dear Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

This statement was developed in consultation with NGOs, including refugee-led organisations (RLOs).

Today, the international refugee protection system faces intensifying pressure. Conflicts are raging and the failure to find peaceful solutions have pushed humanitarian responses to their limits, against a backdrop of ever-growing needs, and insufficient funding. We are seeing widespread and deeply concerning disregard for international humanitarian law, compounded by impunity for gross violations of human rights. This failure means that millions of people are being forcibly displaced both inside and outside their countries and international protection issues continue to rise

Since 1951, the Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol have saved countless lives, representing a monumental achievement in international cooperation. Safeguarding these protections requires equitable responsibility-sharing, particularly for those neighbouring states that host the vast majority of refugees.

Increasing restrictions on asylum—including pushbacks, detention, externalization, and refoulement—are systematically undermining international law. Protection must remain grounded in the principle of non-refoulement, ensuring access to territory and fair asylum procedures. We emphasize that fair decision-making requires robust due process guarantees and the right to appeal.

Furthermore, political efforts to weaken protection by making statuses increasingly temporary undermine the long-term security refugees need to rebuild their lives. We must also recognize expanding threats; climate shocks and disease outbreaks fall hardest on those already made vulnerable by displacement.

We are deeply concerned by humanitarian funding cuts, which have resulted in devastating consequences: increased child labour, exploitation, higher school dropout rates, and deteriorating mental health. Marginalised groups, including women-headed households, people with disabilities, older people, and LGBTQI+ individuals face increased protection risks as a result.

Local actors and refugee leaders hold unique expertise and should be included in formal coordination as named leaders with decision-making authority and can provide, not just anonymous implementing partners.

Recommendations to UNHCR:

- We welcome UNHCRs localization guidelines and look forward to seeing their implementation and achievement of equitable partnerships. In particular, the

transfer of resources and decision-making power to local and refugee-led organisations as part of holistic approaches to community-based protection.

- Ensure assistance models do not exclude vulnerable refugees from essential protection services.
- Solutions can also be protection. Prioritise socio-economic inclusion by expanding access to livelihoods, education, and decent work.
- Strengthen targeted protections for marginalised groups and address the implications of climate-related displacement.

Recommendations to Member States:

- Uphold non-refoulement and end practices that block or deter asylum seekers, such as pushbacks and externalised processing.
- Strengthen national asylum systems by ensuring properly funded, prompt, and fair procedures with due process guarantees and access to free legal aid.
- Move away from tightly earmarked funding so UNHCR can fulfil its protection mandate. Commit to providing at least 25% of humanitarian funding directly to local and refugee-led organisations through flexible grants.
- Sustain support for cross-border humanitarian operations, which are often the only lifeline for populations in conflict-affected regions where state protection is absent.
- Support durable solutions, including local integration and the expansion of resettlement, a lifesaving protection tool.
- Provide sustainable legal status without constant reviews, supporting refugee self-reliance and protection against refoulement.

As we mark the 75th anniversary of the Refugee Convention, we must reaffirm our commitment to its principles of international cooperation and protection. This is a key moment for strong, collective action to deliver practical outcomes that place displaced communities at the centre of all responses.

Thank you.