

UNHCR 97th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
8-9 September 2026

Programme Budgets and Funding

Collective NGO Statement

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates,

This statement was drafted in consultation with NGOs, including those led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

We will focus our statement on two points:

First, on the protection impacts of reduced funding and field presence:

NGO partners have documented the devastating impacts of last year's cuts on referral pathways, legal assistance, disability inclusion, statelessness work, child protection, GBV and PSEA capacity, staff safety, civic space, and the continuity of essential services.

UNHCR's 2027 proposed budget is nowhere near what is required to meet the needs. We are concerned about the combination of rising needs and declining resources, and the imbalance between reductions at operational level and headquarters.

Protection must be safeguarded, and UNHCR's shrinking footprint should not create protection vacuums, weaken asylum, or reduce access to international protection. Reductions should not disproportionately impact women and girls, children, people with disabilities, older persons, LGBTIQ+ individuals, stateless persons, and survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence.

We ask for greater transparency on how funding reductions are being made and implications for communities that remain on the ground. Protection and human rights impact assessments before significant reductions will be essential, and, where field presence is reduced, clear protection-continuity and localisation plans should be put in place.

Second, on tracking progress with localisation efforts:

We welcome UNHCR's commitment to shift decision-making power and resources to local and national actors, including refugee and women-led organisations. However, we are concerned that the way progress is currently reported does not reflect the full picture. In its financial report, UNHCR reports on funding reaching local or national actors, a category including both national NGOs and national governments. We urge UNHCR to publish a disaggregated section in its financial reporting relating to partnership funding covering funding allocated to national, refugee-led, community-based, women-led organisations breakdowns, so that aggregate figures cannot obscure sub-group disparities. Beyond quantity, we ask for transparency on *quality*, on how much funding reaches local organisations directly rather than through intermediaries, and whether grants are flexible and multi-year with risk genuinely shared.

Finally, localisation and UNHCR's evolving operational role should not replace States' primary responsibilities under international refugee and human rights law. Member States must uphold access to asylum and international protection, respect non-refoulement, maintain functioning national protection systems and strengthen responsibility-sharing.

To conclude, we present the following recommendations to UNHCR and member states:

- We ask UNHCR to meaningfully engage partners – particularly organisations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons – through early consultation and co-design before funding decisions are made, accounting for protection consequences and the resources needed for responsible transitions.
- We join UNHCR in calling on Member States to provide predictable, flexible and multi-year funding. We urge UNHCR to pass that same flexibility down, including through higher overhead allowances that enable national and local partners to sustain strong, accountable organisations.
- We urge UNHCR to ensure equitable and direct access to funding for national, local, refugee, women, and disability-led organisations, by adding minimum direct-funding targets and scaling up the Refugee-Led Innovation Fund and Grant Agreement Frameworks. In this way, those closest to the response are resourced as leaders, with no transfer of responsibilities and risks without corresponding resources and capacities.

NGOs, in all our diversity, continue to support UNHCR's efforts to fulfil its protection mandate.

The full statement is available at icvanetwork.org.

Thank you.