

### **NGO statement on the General Debate**

Dear Chair, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

This statement was prepared in close consultation with a wide range of NGOs and reflects their diverse views.

#### **We must not fall back on the hard-won gains on refugee's rights, particularly on gender equality.**

The COVID-19 pandemic and other emerging crises in 2021 worldwide showed how progress achieved over the last decade for forcibly displaced people continue to be at risk of major setbacks. Among them, hard-won progress on gender equality and the rights of children, persons with disabilities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+). The accelerated climate crisis is also a major concern. It has already had disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations and is likely to trigger more displacements and worsen living conditions for forcibly displaced persons.

In many countries, lockdowns, as well as conflicts and natural disasters, have taken their toll on refugees and internally displaced persons, stateless, in particular women and girls, many of whom face increased violence, struggle to find employment, are burdened by unpaid care work of family or community members and might never get back to education.

However, despite existing progress in ensuring gender equality and the protection of diverse populations of refugees, support for and implementation of age, gender, and diversity (AGD) programmes and policies at the community and national level has been chronically underfunded and not systematically addressed. According to a 2021 report<sup>1</sup> from CARE International, seven of eleven top donors allocate barely two per cent of funds to targeted gender equality programming in humanitarian settings.

When we look back to the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, we see a similar picture. Despite commitments to ensuring that age, gender, and diversity approach is fully integrated as a cross-cutting issue, an analysis of the pledges made for the AGD stocktaking event<sup>2</sup> earlier in the year reveals that a staggering 70% of the pledges did not mention age, gender, and diversity in any form.

Yet, where challenges exist, opportunities might be unlocked if there is a political will to take action. We must urgently ensure that all refugees and people in crisis-affected communities, particularly women and girls, can equitably access COVID-19 vaccinations through their inclusion in national vaccination plans and through the tackling of informal barriers to access. However, beyond this, the international community must also ensure that women, girls, and children in all their diversity can access protection,

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<sup>1</sup> CARE International, Time for a better bargain: How the aid system shortchanges women and girls in crisis, 28 February 2021: [https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report\\_4.7.21\\_updated.pdf](https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report_4.7.21_updated.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For more information, the Summary Report of the AGD stocktaking event is available [here](#).

education, health, and economic opportunities. In this regard, we would like to welcome UNHCR's and a few Member States' efforts to adapt, ensure visibility, protect, and empower refugee women, girls, and children in all their diversity. We welcome UNHCR's increased leadership in advocating and adapting operations to reflect age, gender, and diversity considerations during the COVID-19 emergency, including its renewed efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence and to support refugee women and girls' leadership.

The following years are key to ensure that we support inclusive responses for and with refugees in all their diversity. UNHCR and Member States, should accelerate the integration of age, gender, and diversity in their operations and policies and ensure participation in protection, assistance, and solutions. We call on them to:

- Ensure the inclusion and meaningful engagement of all persons of concern to UNHCR in decision-making that affects their lives. This needs further investments, to be more regular and systematic going beyond consultations, to be fully integrated throughout the programme cycle.
- Ensure a strong commitment by UNHCR senior leadership to mainstream AGD in the oversight of all refugee operations and internal displacement situations.
- Enhance the joint collection and analysis by UNHCR and partners of data disaggregated by age and sex and by other diversity considerations, as contextually appropriate as possible. Data collection and analysis must go beyond the assessment stage and be followed by concrete action to mainstream AGD considerations into collective response plans.
- UNHCR and donors should strongly advocate for the development of national refugee response plans that are responsive to the needs of women, children in all their diversity, people with disabilities and diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.
- UNHCR and donor countries should ensure robust investments to accelerate progress on gender equality, particularly to support the active involvement of women and girls and their representative organizations in monitoring, designing, and responding as well as supporting their meaningful participation and leadership.

### **We must ensure that political momentum is sustained for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).**

Furthermore, we are witnessing a key moment for internally displaced persons, as the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement released its final report<sup>3</sup> to the UN Secretary-General. We would like to congratulate the High-Level Panel and its Secretariat for a process that was inclusive of civil society and internally displaced communities, and for its recommendations, which we believe have the potential, if implemented, to become a game-changer for internally displaced persons. Hence, we would like to emphasize that the international community has a responsibility in advancing prevention, protection

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<sup>3</sup> High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, Shining a light on Internal Displacement, a vision for the future, 29 September 2021: <https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/>

and solutions for internally displaced persons, by ensuring financial and political support to the implementation of the Panel's recommendations.

In this regard, UNHCR has an important role to play as one of the agencies engaging in situations of internal displacement, in pushing for the implementation of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement's recommendations. In particular, UNHCR could play a leadership role in catalyzing action in the short, medium, and long-term, including by stepping up its advocacy to ensure enhanced political will at the global, regional, and local levels for IDP protection and solutions.

UNHCR could also play an important role in adjusting and aligning the Panel's recommendations with its policies notably its Policy on UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement<sup>4</sup>, the Guidance Package for UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement<sup>5</sup>, UNHCR Emergency Handbook<sup>6</sup> and UNHCR Strategic Directions for 2022-2026.

Responsibility for internal displacement across all the UN system must also be outlined. For its part, the NGO community stands ready to support the implementation of the High-Level Panel's recommendations, particularly in supporting the meaningful participation of IDPs themselves.

Thank you, Chair.

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<sup>4</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement, 18 September 2019, UNHCR/HCP/2019/1: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5d83364a4.html>

<sup>5</sup> Guidance package for UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement, September 2019, Version 1: <https://www.unhcr.org/5d9cab727>

<sup>6</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Emergency Handbook, Third edition, February 2007: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/46a9e29a2.pdf>