

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs  
28 – 30 JUNE 2011, International Conference Center Geneva**

**Background Paper  
Europe Regional Session**

*Tuesday 28 June 2011, 16:15 - 18:00, Room 3*

**Empowering National NGOs – Role of UNHCR and International NGOs**

UNHCR's work in Europe covers diverse situations with high numbers of asylum-seekers arriving in mixed migration flows; integration challenges for refugees; protracted refugee and internal displacement situations as well as assistance and reintegration of returnees and work to prevent and reduce statelessness. To this end UNHCR works in partnership with a wide range of government and civil society actors.

National NGOs (NNGOs) across Europe have been recognized as the key responders in refugee and displacement situations. They are at the forefront in addressing the various challenges facing their societies and they persevere in their efforts to raise public awareness, advocate for policy change and improve internal governance. They also deliver services and are often able to operate in environments where humanitarian space is restricted for international actors. National NGOs play a critical role in the continuum between humanitarian and development responses. Even more than international NGOs and UN agencies, NNGOs face considerable challenges in securing stable sources of funding and can be subject to considerable pressures and criticism by Governments and other actors.

Partnering with NNGOs is essential in humanitarian response. Despite sincere efforts by the international actors, these partnerships have often been characterized by an inequitable relationship and an 'asymmetry of power' and remained of a contractual nature. This is often related to the capacity of NNGOs to raise funds independently, their limited project management, administrative and reporting capacities.

The session will explore what measures can be taken in order to strengthen the role of NNGOs. The following is a list of questions intended to support the debate:

1. What resources and/or mechanisms are currently available to UNHCR and INGOs to strengthen the capacity of NNGOs implementing projects / programmes together?
2. What constraints are faced by UNHCR in these capacity building efforts? Can UNHCR operate within these limitations and still meet its objectives? If not, what can/should be done? Are there gaps in the capacity of the UNHCR's field operations in assessing, monitoring and supporting its implementing NNGOs in various sectors?
3. What are the key challenges for NNGOs trying to work with UN agencies and INGOs (external and/or internal factors)?

4. How and to what degree do UNHCR and INGOs act as an advocate with potential donors to fund NNGOs? How can capacity building initiatives be made less vulnerable to financial cutbacks?

5. What have been the different practices in Europe (or indeed other regions) to empower NNGOs? Are there recommended models that could be further explored?

Capacity building initiatives seek sustainable change in institutional behavior and to share institutional responsibility and autonomy within partnerships. The objective of this session is to identify how to better “empower” NNGOS to become autonomous with their own vision and funding mechanisms, contributing to a national civil society that supports the country’s humanitarian and development objectives.