Beyond Tokenism:
Displaced Persons' Participation
in the Community Engagement Forum

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CE	Community Engagement
CEF	Community Engagement Forum
CFM	Complaints and Feedback Mechanism
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CMT	Camp Management Toolkit
CoP	Community of Practice
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FDPs	Forcibly Displaced Persons
GRF	Global Refugee Forum
GRLN	Global Refugee-Led Network
HLP	Housing, Land, and Property
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
LERRN	Local Engagement Refugee Research Network
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
RLO	Refugee-Led Organisation
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents findings from a global research consultancy examining the value, accessibility, and inclusiveness of the Community Engagement Forum (CEF) for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs). The study responds to growing global commitments such as the Grand Bargain[1] and the Global Compact on Refugees[2] urging humanitarian platforms to shift from tokenistic engagement toward authentic inclusion of crisis-affected populations. It assesses the extent to which displaced persons can access and meaningfully participate in the CEF's current platforms and 2025 strategic initiatives, and provides practical recommendations to strengthen their voice, leadership, and influence within the Forum. Importantly, this study does not evaluate the utility, design, or effectiveness of CEF platforms for international humanitarian practitioners or coordination actors. Rather, it centres on the lived experiences, needs, and perspectives of refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and their representative organisations, groups often underrepresented in global decision-making and humanitarian discourse.

Methodology

Using a mixed-method approach, the study combined desk reviews of CEF digital tools, walkthroughs of core platforms (e.g., Groups.io, CEF Platform under the CCCM Cluster website, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and CEF Coffee and Chat Webinars), and 25 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with refugee leaders, IDP leaders, and practitioners across Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide (Annex I: Data Collection Tools)[3] that allowed respondents to reflect on their experiences with CEF, the perceived barriers to participation, and suggestions for improvement. Thematic analysis was used to triangulate findings across interviews and secondary sources, focusing on accessibility, governance, participation quality, and enabling practices.

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[1] The Grand Bargain Official Website: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/group/19568

[2] https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/global-compact-refugees

[3] However, it became evident during the interview process that most Forcibly Displaced Persons had never interacted with the CEF. Consequently, their interviews were conducted with a flexible approach, drawing on their general understanding and intuition about online engagement, rather than strictly following the pre-defined semi-structured guide.

Key Findings by Objective

Objective 1: Accessibility and Usefulness of CEF Platforms

- The CEF's platforms were found to be technically rich but not designed with FDPs in mind. The **Groups.io** listserv is heavily text-based, English-only, requiring high digital literacy. Platforms like **LinkedIn** and **YouTube** serve awareness-raising functions but are inaccessible to many due to data limitations, registration barriers, and complex content. **Instagram**, **Telegram and TikTok** were cited as more accessible among youth but are underutilised by the CEF if employed at all. **The CEF Coffee and Chat webinar series**, while rich in practitioner knowledge, remains largely inaccessible to FDPs due to low viewership, limited captioning, complex content, and digital access barriers. Despite their potential, the webinars risk reinforcing top-down information flows unless adapted with localised, co-designed, and multilingual content formats.
- Most forcibly displaced respondents across Uganda, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Romania, Lebanon, South Africa, Rwanda, Netherlands, Nigeria, Kenya, Lebanon, and Iraq had either never heard of the CEF or struggled to access its materials. Even when accessed, the dense format and practitioner-oriented language deterred engagement. Only a small number of forcibly displaced respondents, mostly practitioners already linked to international NGOs or based in Europe, reported positive experiences navigating the platforms.

Objective 2: Participation in CEF's 2025 Priority Initiatives

- Displaced persons have had **minimal involvement** in shaping CEF's 2025 priorities, which include:
    - **Donor advocacy on Community Engagement (CE)**: Currently led by practitioners, with no structured input from displaced persons, IDP organisations or refugee-led organisations (RLOs).
    - **CE in CCCM trainings**: While some displaced persons serve on the Advisory Board, they were not substantively involved in content design or testing. Trainings remain tailored to agency staff, not community leaders.
    - **E-learning module development**: While the development of the e-learning module had initially been paused, due to funding constraints, budgets have now been confirmed for 2025, and the activity is being reinstated. However, the initial design phase did not include FDPs. This presents an opportunity for CEF to course-correct by integrating displaced persons especially, FDP educators and IDP-led organisation/RLO members into the co-design and content development process moving forward.

Respondents expressed willingness and capacity to contribute to these areas but expressed concerns of being excluded from design, implementation, and evaluation stages. Several cited concerns about tokenism and symbolic inclusion.

Objective 3: Enabling Meaningful Participation[4] Without Burden

- A consistent theme was the **emotional, financial, and logistical burden** associated with engagement. Displaced persons reported:
  - **High data and transport costs** (especially in Uganda and Rwanda).
  - **Lack of stipends or compensation** for participation in CEF activities.
  - **Emotional fatigue** due to lack of feedback and perceived tokenism.
  - **Psychological safety concerns**, particularly for women and youth, about whether their input is taken seriously or could expose them to risk.

- Despite these challenges, many expressed strong interest in sustained participation if meaningful opportunities were provided and supported. Trust, consistent communication, and logistical support were highlighted as prerequisites for safe and empowering participation.

Objective 4: Best Practices from Other Networks
- Promising practices emerged from regional initiatives:
  - **WhatsApp groups** for localised learning and coordination (Kenya, Uganda).
  - **Peer-led training** and storytelling hubs via partnerships with IDP-led organisations and RLOs, e.g., FilmAid Kenya[5], and Jesuit Refugee Services[6].
  - **Targeted in-person engagement models** (e.g., data hubs in refugee camps, local advisory panels).
  - **Eviction monitoring tools** in Nigeria and **refugee-led advocacy** in South Africa were cited as examples of co-designed tools with measurable community impact.

These approaches demonstrate that when displaced persons are empowered as designers, facilitators, and evaluators, not just contributors, engagement becomes more meaningful and transformative.

Conclusions

CEF's current structure and digital architecture fall short of enabling equitable participation by FDPs. Its platforms are poorly adapted for low-resource users, its governance lacks clear mechanisms for representation, and its initiatives often exclude displaced persons from key decision-making stages. Regional disparities further complicate participation, with European-based refugees reporting symbolic inclusion and FDPs in Africa and the Middle East citing structural exclusion. Yet, widespread interest and localised success stories show that inclusive, co-designed engagement is not only possible but essential to advancing equitable participation, amplifying the voices of crisis-affected populations, and strengthening community-led humanitarian practice.

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[4] The report uses the following definition of meaningful participation: **"Participation that leads to project changes that align with the stakeholders' inputs".** From 'How much participation is enough?', a collaborative article by the CEF, https://reliefweb.iuch-participation-enough

[5] https://www.filmaid.org/kenya/

[6] https://jrs.net/en/home/

Key Recommendations for the CEF

Platform Design and Accessibility
Use alternative, multilingual platforms, and develop visual and audio summaries of key documents.

Governance and Advisory Board Inclusion
Include quotas and support for representatives from FDP on the CEF Advisory Board and introduce a rotating FDP consultative panel at local levels to inform global strategy.

Capacity Strengthening and Mentorship
With input from FDP representatives, create simplified training and e-learning content versions for FDPs and build regional resource hubs to deliver the trainings. Offer mentorship programmes for FDPs.

Compensating and Supporting FDP Participation Budget for structured FDP participation that is rewarded, publicly recognised and facilitated to meet their availability.

Focus on topics that improve service delivery for FDPs rather than online tools for project design and delivery
Co-facilitate discussions with FDP representatives and professionals on topics highlighting the benefits of FDP participation and employment in displacement projects.

Suggested Tools and Engagement Models
Partner with local organisations including RLOs and IDP-led organisations to gather structured insights on regular basis into global CEF discussions, co-facilitate local discussions and trainings and increase outreach through popular digital platforms used by FDP communities.

Relevant and Service-Oriented Topics to Attract and Empower FDP Participation
To meaningfully engage FDPs in the CEF and ensure their sustained interest, the platform should curate and prioritise discussion topics that resonate with their immediate needs, long-term aspirations, and lived experiences.

Section 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of an independent consultancy commissioned to assess the value added, accessibility, and inclusiveness of the CEF for FDPs. Established as a global inter-agency Community of Practice (CoP) under the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, the CEF was primarily designed to support humanitarian practitioners - some of whom are FDPs themselves, by providing a space for humanitarian actors to share knowledge, tools, and practices related to community engagement in displacement contexts.

The CEF was not intended to serve as a universal engagement mechanism for all displaced individuals, but rather to equip and connect professionals including those with lived displacement experience working on community engagement.

While the Forum has grown in reach and reputation, there is increasing recognition that it must better reflect and respond to the voices and needs of those it ultimately seeks to serve: crisis-affected populations, particularly refugees and IDPs. This study, therefore, explores whether and how FDPs particularly those engaged in community-facing roles or leadership within refugee- and IDP-led initiatives can meaningfully participate in the CEF's current platforms and 2025 strategic initiatives. The objective is not to evaluate the CEF as a service-delivery platform, but rather to identify opportunities for enhancing the Forum's relevance and accessibility to displaced professionals and amplifying their voices within humanitarian policy and practice.

1.2 Structure of the Report

The report is organised into four main sections.

- Section 1 outlines the background, objectives, scope, and structure of the report.
- Section 2 describes the methodological approach, including data collection tools (desk review and key informant interviews), sampling, analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.
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- Section 4 summarises the main conclusions and offers practical recommendations for enhancing the CEF's design, governance, and support mechanisms to promote the meaningful and sustainable participation of FDPs.

1.3 Background and Context

The CEF was established to support CCCM and other humanitarian practitioners by fostering collective learning, knowledge sharing, and capacity strengthening around community engagement in displacement responses. The CEF builds on CCCM agencies' experiences, knowledge and resources developed over decades of working closely with displaced populations to ensure their engagement in emergency responses. It aims to support global, regional and field level CCCM and other practitioners through ensuring they have access to the necessary CE resources for their programming, and by connecting the practitioners to each other for continued cross-sharing and support among the CoP members.

Managed by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the CEF has grown into a dynamic platform bringing together over 290 humanitarian practitioners and thousands of LinkedIn members worldwide. Its activities include hosting knowledge exchanges, producing guidance materials, supporting peer-to-peer learning, and promoting best practices in community-led projects (CLPs), complaints and feedback mechanisms (CFMs), and other activities that improve accountability to affected populations.

Despite these achievements, a recognised gap persists in ensuring that displaced persons, particularly refugees, IDPs, and other marginalised groups have direct, meaningful, and sustained access to the Forum's platforms, decision-making structures, and advocacy spaces. Current participation tends to be mediated through humanitarian actors rather than enabling displaced persons themselves to engage directly and influence outcomes. The need for a more inclusive, accessible, and representative CEF has been increasingly emphasised by both CEF members and displaced community advocates. This assignment thus responds to the growing global consensus, reaffirmed in initiatives such as the Grand Bargain (specifically Goal 6 on Participation Revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives), and the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration[7] (GCM) under objective 16 emphasises meaningful engagement and participation of migrants and relevant stakeholders in migration governance through empowering them to realise full inclusion. These global policy commitments stress that those affected by crises must not only be consulted but be at the centre of shaping responses that affect their lives. In particular, the consultancy aligns with the evolving discourse on shifting power to crisis-affected persons, moving beyond tokenistic engagement towards structural transformation of participation frameworks and systems. With the ultimate realisation that FDPs' meaningful engagement enables progress, re-enforces sustainability and achieves optimal use of humanitarian response resources.

Against this backdrop, the consultancy sought to systematically review the accessibility and inclusiveness of CEF's platforms and advisory structures, identify enabling factors and barriers, and propose concrete recommendations to foster equitable participation by FDPs globally.

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[7] https://www.ohchr.org/en/migration/global-compact-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration-gcm

1.4 Objectives and Scope of the Assignment

The overall objective of the consultancy is to conduct a study on the value added for forcibly displaced community members in participating in the CEF. With the following specific objectives:

1) Assessing whether the CEF's current platforms, modalities and structure for interaction and sharing resources with the CoP can be accessed by and are useful to displaced persons.
2) Assessing if and how FDPs can meaningfully participate in CEF's priority initiatives in 2025.
3) Assessing if and how the CEF can support FDPs to participate meaningfully in the CoP, without burdening them.

The geographical scope of this study is global, drawing insights from refugee, IDP and practitioner experiences across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America[8].

1.5 Literature Review: Towards Meaningful Engagement and Inclusion of FDPs

1.5.1 Beyond Tokenism: The Imperative for Genuine Participation

Across contemporary humanitarian discourse, there is a growing recognition that traditional engagement mechanisms fall short of delivering meaningful participation for FDPs. Many inclusion practices are superficial in nature, viewed by many as tokenistic rather than transformative. This is in agreement with Caitlin et al (2023)[9] who equally points out that RLO experiences of receiving international funding arrangements remain performative and tokenistic, but further urges the international community to urgently start recognising RLOs as distinct and important actors within the localisation agenda and increase quality funding to RLOs. Pincock et al. (2022)[10] further illustrate how RLOs are structurally excluded from decision-making processes, despite being the closest to affected communities. The common rhetoric of a "participation revolution" has not translated into significant power redistribution.

Jean Marie Ishimwe (2024) reinforces this critique by asserting that many global platforms claim to value refugee input but rarely transfer leadership roles or decision-making authority. His piece, *Let Refugees Lead*[11], stresses that meaningful participation must go beyond inviting refugees to sit at the table it must include trusting their leadership, investing in their institutions, and following their priorities. He urges humanitarian actors to see refugees not as passive beneficiaries but as experts in their own experience.

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[8] See Annex II List of Respondents for a detailed outline on countries represented in the study.
[9] Caitlin et al (2023). The failure to fund refugee-led organisations: why the current system is not working, and the potential for change. Available (Online)
[10] Pincock, K., Betts, A., & Easton-Calabria, E. (2021). The rhetoric and reality of localisation: refugee-led organisations in humanitarian governance. The Journal of Development Studies, 57(5), 719-734. Available (Online)
[11] Ishimwe, Jean Marie (2024),. Let Refugees Lead. Available (Online)

The CE Forum's own definition reflects this ethos, framing participation as "Participation that leads to project changes that align with the stakeholders' inputs" However, in practice, many engagement efforts remain bureaucratic and top-down, serving organisational accountability rather than community empowerment (CEF, 2024)[12]

1.5.2 RLOs as Catalysts for Inclusion

RLOs have increasingly been recognised as central actors in delivering localised, sustainable humanitarian responses. Yet the structural and financial barriers they face remain vast. The ODI publication *The Failure to Fund Refugee-Led Organisations* (2023)[13] documents how current funding mechanisms overwhelmingly favour large international NGOs, leaving RLOs underfunded, unsupported, and underutilised. Even in cases where RLOs demonstrate strong capacity, they are rarely treated as equal partners. This funding unevenness is not merely technical, it is political. RLOs operate closest to the needs of displaced communities, but their exclusion reflects an entrenched reluctance within the humanitarian system to relinquish control. The UNHCR's Global Compact on Refugees (2018)[14] calls for increased refugee participation, yet progress remains slow, and in some contexts, symbolic. Anderson (2023)[15] highlights that without dedicated support structures, these aspirations risk remaining rhetorical. Caitlin Sturridge et al (2023), argue that there are structural barriers that prevent RLOs from accessing adequate funding, thereby reinforcing dependence on international actors.

Moreover, the World Bank (2021)[16] warns that ignoring refugee economic inclusion leads to wasted human potential. Social inclusion, as theorised by Ager and Strang (2008)[17], is inseparable from agency and participation. Empowering RLOs, therefore, is not only a moral imperative it is a strategic necessity for effective programming.

At most, localisation should be re-imagined through the lenses of shifting power to sharing power. Efforts to "localise" humanitarian aid have gained momentum, particularly under frameworks such as the Grand Bargain[18]. However, as Baguios (2023)[19] argues, localisation has often been co-opted into procedural adjustments rather than fundamental change. This is because without shifting power and resources, localisation remains performative. Bennett (2023)[20] echoes this sentiment, asserting that local aid groups are not waiting for international approval, they are already responding. Yet their efforts are often invisible or unrecognised in global coordination structures. CLPs, promoted by the CEF and CCCM Cluster, offer an alternative by placing project design and implementation directly in the hands of communities[21]. These approaches emphasise inclusivity, mutual accountability, and sustainability principles many of

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[12] CEF Guidance paper on CE definitions (2024). Available (Online)
[13] Sturrige et al. (2023). The Failure to Fund Refugee-Led Organisations. Available (Online)
[14] UNHCR (2018). Global Compact on Refugees. Available (Online)
[15] RefugeePoint, 2023. The Importance of Meaningful Refugee Participation and Leadership in RefugePoint's GRF Pledges. Available (Online)
[16] World Bank, 2017. Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts. Available (Online)
[17] Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. J. Refugee Stud., 21, 166. Available (Online)
[18] IASC, 2023. About the Grand Bargain, Origin and concept of the Grand Bargain. Available (Online)
[19] Baguios, A. (2021). Localisation Re-imagined: Localising the sector vs supporting local solutions. Blog/webpage. ALNAP.
[20] Christina Bennett, 2023. Local aid groups are paving the way for progress on their terms. Internationals need to follow their lead. Available (Online)
[21] CEF, 2024. Community-led Projects in Displacement Settings. Available (Online)

which are already reflected in the CEF's on-site community engagement trainings and tools promoted on its platforms. However, despite these efforts, such principles remain inconsistently applied across the Forum's broader practices and platforms, particularly in terms of accessibility and co-creation with displaced persons.

Gumisiriza's (2025) [22] provocative essay, challenges the foundational assumptions of the humanitarian system. Drawing on the Ugandan context, he critiques how the international aid industry often side-lines local actors and creates a parallel system of governance. He questions whether aid has become more about perpetuating external control than enabling community resilience. This aligns with calls from Ishimwe (2024) and others to **decentralise decision-making and centre affected people's leadership**. These critiques suggest that meaningful engagement is not just about adjusting participatory mechanisms, it demands a fundamental rethinking of humanitarian power structures. FDP voices must be integrated into all levels of program design, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation not as a form of consultation, but as co-leaders and co-owners of the response.

1.5.3 Towards a More Inclusive and Digital Future

Technology is often cited as a tool for amplifying FDP voices. Leurs (2022) [23] discusses how digital platforms can increase access to services and facilitate community engagement. However, he cautions against digital divide pitfalls such as excluding those with limited connectivity or literacy. Beyond technical access, interview data and practitioner feedback for this report highlight a deeper concern, the fear of leaving a "digital footprint," especially among displaced persons who worry that being outspoken online could affect future donor support or expose them to surveillance. These dynamics reinforce a top-down power structure, where displaced individuals may feel monitored rather than empowered, and thus disengage from digital spaces altogether.

Technology has the potential to narrow geographical boundaries and enable the otherwise expensive engagement to cheap arrangements and connectivity to opportunities and useful information. This is especially critical for women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups. Thus, the need for intersectional approaches to ensure that participation is genuinely inclusive. The CEF emphasises inclusive practices through age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming as well as closing the feedback loop ensuring community input leads to actual program change [24]. This underscores the need for adaptive, community-sensitive modalities.

1.5.4 Conclusion

The literature converges on a central message: current humanitarian approaches must move beyond consultation toward genuine power-sharing with displaced communities. This involves funding and legitimising RLOs, shifting bureaucratic mindsets, embracing locally-led action, and adopting inclusive, context-sensitive tools. If humanitarian actors are serious about

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[22] Gumisiriza, M. (2025). What if we stopped aid altogether? The New Humanitarian. Available at (Online)

[23] Leurs, K. (2022). Resilience and Digital Inclusion: The Digital Re-making of Vulnerability?. In Vulnerable People and Digital Inclusion: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives (pp. 27-46). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

[24] CEF, 2024. Community Engagement Definition, Terminology and Framework. Available (Online)

accountability and effectiveness, they must invest in displaced persons not as participants, but as equal partners and leaders in shaping their own futures.

Section 2: Approach and Methodology

2.1 Overall Approach

A phased and participatory methodology was employed to integrate desk review, platform assessment, and qualitative primary data collection. It commenced with a systematic desk review of CEF's digital platforms and products, organisational documents, and global best practices related to displaced persons' participation. This was complemented by a structured accessibility audit of CEF's online engagement channels and a review of the Advisory Board structure. Primary data was gathered through key informant interviews (KIIs) with FDPs and practitioners, allowing for deep qualitative insights. The findings from different sources were triangulated to ensure a robust analysis, leading to evidence-based recommendations.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

Data was collected using two main methods: (i) a comprehensive desk review of CEF platforms, related documentation, and relevant global literature on community participation, and (ii) KIIs conducted virtually or by phone with selected refugees and IDP representatives/leaders, and practitioners. Interview tool (as per Annex 1) include semi-structured questionnaires to guide conversations while allowing flexibility for respondents to elaborate.

2.3 Sampling and Respondent Profile

Respondents were purposively sampled to ensure diversity across gender, geography, displacement status (13 refugees, 9 practitioners, 1 asylum seeker and 2 IDPs), and levels of digital access. The sample included both individuals currently engaged in community engagement work and those not previously involved in the CEF. Practitioner respondents included UN, INGOs, and RLO representatives with past, ongoing and no links to the Forum. 16 interviews were secured with displaced persons and 9 interviews with practitioners linked to CEF across 18 countries, based on a purposive sampling strategy. Around 50 invitations were made to potential participants in 40 countries using Newsletters, WhatsApp invitations, email requests, LinkedIn messages and social media messages. The study managed to get 50% success rate in regard to numbers of KIIs vs KII requests. A complete list of respondents is attached in Annex 2.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data from interviews were thematically analysed using a deductive coding framework aligned with the study's objectives. Patterns were identified around accessibility, participation enablers and constraints, and perceptions of value. Desk review findings were analysed descriptively and integrated into the thematic interpretation to provide context and justification.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

All participants were provided with information on the study's purpose, data use, and their voluntary right to participate or withdraw. Informed verbal consent was obtained prior to all interviews. Identities of respondents were anonymised, and data was stored securely, in accordance with confidentiality protocols and ethical standards for research involving vulnerable populations and followed the General Data Protection Regulations.

2.6 Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was the reliance on virtual interviews, which likely excluded perspectives of individuals with limited digital access. Additionally, time constraints limited the number of KIIs, and language barriers and translation need occasionally posed challenges and may have affected the depth of engagement in some cases. Despite these, the diverse sample and multi-source triangulation enhanced the credibility and relevance of findings.

A notable gap emerged in the representation of IDPs, both in terms of direct participation and the visibility of IDP-led organisations. This was due to two interrelated challenges:

1. **Structural and contextual barriers**: Unlike refugee contexts where RLOs often serve as visible convening structures, IDPs are less likely to operate across borders or be part of formalised regional or national networks. In many cases, they are represented by local NGOs or community-based organisations rather than IDP-specific entities, limiting their direct visibility in global engagement platforms like CEF.

2. **Study-specific constraints**: Efforts to engage IDPs directly were further constrained by limited internet connectivity, low digital literacy, and the absence of structured communication channels for outreach. These factors made it particularly difficult to locate and recruit IDP leaders or organisations for interviews. To illustrate this challenge, repeated contact was made with IDP representatives with limited su

Section 3: Key findings

3.1. Introduction

This section presents the key findings of the study, derived from in-depth interviews with FDPs and practitioners, as well as an extensive desk review of CEF platforms and resources. The findings are organised around the core objectives of the assignment, including the accessibility and usefulness of current CEF platforms, the extent and nature of participation in CEF's 2025 priority initiatives, the barriers and enablers influencing meaningful engagement, and best practices from similar communities of practice. Each sub-section highlights perspectives from both FDP and practitioner respondents, offering grounded insights to inform the Forum's strategic direction and inclusive practices.

3.2 Content Relevance to FDPs (Tone, Complexity, Formats Used)

Overall, the content shared across the CEF platforms including the CCCM Cluster webpage, Groups.io, webinars, social media channels, and technical guidance documents is rich in technical depth and well-aligned with humanitarian coordination objectives. However, its relevance to FDPs remain limited due to the professionalised tone, complex terminology, and format choices that assume a practitioner audience rather than a community-based one. To capture this, it is important to note one practitioner respondent from Bangladesh who retorted:

> *"The CEF makes practitioners lives and work better, we need something that makes FDPs lives better, the CEF is nice for us but not nice for them."*

The **tone** used in most CEF content is formal, sector-specific, and largely targeted at UN agencies, INGOs, and coordination actors. Concepts such as "accountability frameworks," "representation modalities," or "participation architecture" dominate the language. For FDPs many of whom may be unfamiliar with humanitarian jargon or lack advanced literacy this language can feel exclusionary, abstract, or difficult to relate to their lived experience. Even in community-oriented documents, the framing is often top-down, with little use of participatory or community voice-based narratives. As one IDP respondent from Iraq remarked:

> *"The CEF platforms are designed for agencies on how to deal with community, but not how communities can deal with organisations or authorities."*

He further stated:

> *"Participation is in English for global meetings… but many FDPs are not literate."*

In terms of **complexity**, many respondents expressed that while the tools and frameworks are valuable, they require high literacy and familiarity with humanitarian jargon. A refugee from Kenya shared,

> *"I received information about the Shirika Plan from the CEF newsletter, but it was only a brief caption that didn't explain what it meant or how it related to local refugees".*

A practitioner from Lebanon remarked:

> *"When you are not fully fluent in the language, you sound shallow and may not attract a listening ear".*

This reflects a broader concern that high-level documentation lacks contextualisation and accessibility for local users. A review of these resources (e.g., tip sheets, frameworks, meeting notes) revealed that some are lengthy and require a certain level of literacy, education, and thematic familiarity to interpret meaningfully. Few documents offer "plain language" versions or visual explanations. While podcast transcripts and webinar recordings provide alternative formats, they are rarely contextualised or simplified for grassroots audiences. This limits uptake by displaced persons who may otherwise benefit from insights shared.

Regarding **formats used**, the majority of resources are shared as PDFs, text-based posts, and long-form videos. These formats are not optimized for mobile use, which is the primary access point for many displaced persons. There are few short-form, visual, or multimedia content types that would engage users with low digital or literacy skills such as infographics, subtitled micro-videos, WhatsApp-friendly summaries, or interactive voice recordings. Additionally, most materials are in English only, which restricts access for large segments of the refugee and IDP population globally.

To increase content relevance, CEF should prioritize the development of multilingual, user-centred content in varied formats such as short videos, audio explainers, illustrated guides, and localized case stories. Simplified summaries for key documents and translated content should be standard practice. Incorporating the voices and experiences of displaced persons in the content creation process would also make materials more relatable, empowering, and grounded in reality.

3.3 Accessibility and Usefulness of Current CEF Platforms

This subsection assesses whether the CEF's and structure (web sessions, Advisory etc.) for interaction and sharing resources been instrumental in connecting this report examines their accessibility and among the Forum's intended beneficiaries. KIIs, and content analysis, each platform is accessibility (language, technology, digital requirements), actual usefulness for displaced perspectives. The overview disparities, and missed opportunities, while to help make CEF tools more accessible, Table 1 synthesises these findings.

Table 1: Accessibility and Usefulness of CEF to FDPs

current digital platforms, modalities Board, interactive digital platforms with the CoP. While these tools have humanitarian practitioners globally, usability specifically for FDPs, who are Drawing on platform walkthroughs, reviewed across key dimensions: literacy, and bandwidth displaced users, and inclusion of highlights critical gaps, regional also outlining practical improvements localised, and empowering for FDPs.

platforms, modalities, and structures

Platforms /Product Overview	Accessibility and usability	Recommendations
CEF Website[25]: The current CEF webpage hosted on the CCCM Cluster website serves as a static information hub, primarily curated for humanitarian practitioners. This page was created in response to	While it includes useful documentation, links, and event updates, its format, language, and layout are not optimised for engagement by FDPs. It lacks accessible features such as multilingual options, interactive elements, or content tailored to non-professional users. Refugees and IDPs with limited digital literacy or low-bandwidth access may find the platform difficult to use and perceive it as institutional rather than community-focused.	• Consider developing an independent, dedicated website designed with displaced persons in mind. Such a site could feature multilingual support, simplified content, visual and audio storytelling, mobile-first functionality, and interactive features like community polls, Q&A forums, and feedback tools.

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[25] https://www.cccmcluster.org/working-groups/community-engagement-forum

Platforms /Product Overview	Accessibility and usability	Recommendations
practitioner suggestions to consolidate tools, resources, and event updates in one accessible location. Due to limited financial resources, the decision to host the webpage within the Cluster's existing infrastructure was a realistic choice that also aimed to enhance visibility through alignment with a recognised platform.	*"The CEF platforms are very useful because it has information that someone can rely on. But for a lay person to go through the website it's not easy" – an RLO Refugee Leader, Ugandan.*	- An independent domain would offer the flexibility to reflect the CEF's identity as a participatory, inclusive CoP, not merely a technical sub-page of a cluster coordination website. - This shift would symbolise a genuine commitment to user-centred design and create a more welcoming and empowering digital space for refugee and IDP voices.
Instagram[26] The CEF Instagram page is visually engaging and offers a creative channel for promoting community-led initiatives, webinar highlights, and snapshots from field experiences. Its visual nature makes it more accessible than text-heavy platforms, and it has potential to resonate with younger FDPs who may already use Instagram for personal or informal communication.	**Instagram** is relatively more accessible, particularly to younger displaced persons already familiar with the platform. However, the CEF account posts infrequently and mainly in in English, reducing its relevance and reach. Most content (especially videos) lacks captions or alternative language options, and the absence of instructional or community-oriented visuals limits engagement from users with low literacy or those seeking practical guidance rather than institutional updates.	- To increase its accessibility and relevance to refugees and IDPs, the Instagram account should be more intentionally leveraged as a storytelling and interaction platform. - Include short multilingual video reels featuring FDP voices, behind-the-scenes footage from community projects, and simplified carousel posts that explain key concepts like community engagement or feedback mechanisms. - Displaced users could be invited to co-curate content, take over the account temporarily, or contribute user-generated media. - Using Instagram Stories and polls could also enhance interaction and give displaced followers a direct way to participate in shaping the Forum's agenda.
LinkedIn[27]**:** The CEF LinkedIn page serves as a public-facing platform to share updates, highlight events,	While CEF's **LinkedIn Page** increases its visibility among professional audiences, it presents several access barriers for FDPs. The platform requires account registration, a	To complement its current professional engagement, CEF should explore parallel outreach strategies on platforms more widely

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[26] https://www.instagram.com/communityengagementforum/

[27] https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/community-engagement-forum/

Platforms /Product Overview	Accessibility and usability	Recommendations
and promote visibility of the Forum's work. It is well-maintained, with regular posts that showcase webinars, resources, and community-led initiatives. While LinkedIn is primarily oriented toward professional networking and is most commonly used by humanitarian practitioners, donors, coordination actors, and RLO leaders, it is important to acknowledge that some FDPs, particularly those with professional or advocacy roles, do engage on the platform.	reliable internet connection, and a level of digital literacy that may exclude many refugee and IDP users. Additionally, content is in English and assumes familiarity with the humanitarian sector's terminology, further limiting its accessibility to grassroots community members or non-English speakers. As such, LinkedIn's reach remains more selective and skewed toward digitally connected professionals, including a subset of displaced leaders, rather than the broader displaced population.	used by displaced populations such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, or community radio and TikTok. • Content on LinkedIn could be adapted to include multilingual summaries, short video clips featuring displaced voices, and simplified visuals that can be cross-posted across other platforms. Linking LinkedIn posts to a more accessible, community-facing website or mobile-friendly page would also help redirect displaced users to spaces designed with their needs in mind. • Importantly, future content strategies should also explore whether FDPs are interested in learning more about the structure, purpose, and members behind the CEF and its affiliated actors. Doing so could foster mutual understanding, build trust, and encourage two-way engagement rather than one-sided information dissemination. • Ultimately, while LinkedIn remains valuable for influencing the humanitarian system, it must be paired with alternative tools to achieve inclusive engagement.
YouTube[28]: The current link on the CEF webpage for YouTube directs website visitors to the CCCM cluster's YouTube channel. This hosts a playlist of coffee and chat webinars, and learning sessions aimed at practitioners within the humanitarian sector.	The YouTube content holds potential for accessible engagement but currently faces limitations. Videos are generally long, in English, and designed for professional audiences, with minimal use of subtitles, translations, or simplified explanations. FDPs with intermittent connectivity or limited data access may find video streaming prohibitive. The absence of short, multilingual, mobile-friendly content hinders the platform's effectiveness as an inclusive engagement tool.	•The YouTube playlist should adopt a more community-focused approach. This includes creating short, captioned videos in multiple languages, using storytelling formats that highlight lived experiences and local initiatives, and developing explainer videos with simple visuals to introduce key themes such as participation, and CLPs. Videos should be summarised in formats and length of 2 – 5 minutes.

[28] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stQZztZo7wc&list=PLpykse793zY8H3YYf6eV8P3xqAiF2ZsuA

Platforms /Product Overview	Accessibility and usability	Recommendations
	Additionally, the content lacks localisation and does not prominently feature the voices or stories of displaced persons themselves. YouTube also being a heavy-data consuming platform may not be the best platform for engaging the FDPs given the recurrent data access challenges emphasized by research participants during the KIIs.	• Playlists could be categorised by theme and audience (e.g., "For Refugee Leaders," "Get Involved," or "Your Rights in Community Engagement"). • YouTube's subtitle and translation tools can also be better utilised to make content inclusive across language barriers. • By tailoring content and inviting displaced persons to contribute or co-produce videos, the channel can shift from being a broadcast tool to an inclusive engagement platform.
Groups.io: [29] The Groups.io platform serves as CEF's primary space for member interaction, resource sharing, and discussion among its CoP. It provides a centralised email-based forum where registered users can post questions, share documents, and access a library of resources.	Groups.io functions as the core forum for CoP interaction, yet it poses significant access barriers for forcibly displaced users. Participation requires account creation, email registration, and digital familiarity with listserv-style communication features that are inaccessible to many with low digital literacy or limited connectivity. Content is predominantly in English, with no translation features or simplified interfaces. For many refugees and IDP users, the platform feels technical, intimidating, and unwelcoming. *"Groups.io is inaccessible, it is very hard to navigate…it should also be made multi-lingual…" A refugee from Germany noted.*	• The CEF should consider supplementing Groups.io with simpler, more inclusive communication tools such as WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, or SMS alerts that are already widely used in many displacement settings. • Additionally, the Groups.io space could be made more welcoming to community-based users by translating posts or summaries into key regional languages, curating a "For Community Members" folder with simplified resources, and appointing refugee or IDP focal points to contribute content or moderate discussions. • Creating a mobile-accessible interface with visual prompts and occasional voice messages could also bridge the usability gap and foster greater inclusion.

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[29] https://ceforum.groups.io/g/main

Platforms /Product Overview	Accessibility and usability	Recommendations
Community Coffee and Chat Webinars: The Community Coffee and Chat webinar series, hosted monthly by the CEF, offers a dynamic platform for humanitarian practitioners to discuss challenges, share experiences, and brainstorm innovative solutions in community engagement. With thirty-five sessions currently available on CEF's YouTube playlist (at the time of assessment), these virtual meetups aim to facilitate real-time reflection and knowledge sharing across global contexts.	Despite the valuable content, the webinars demonstrate limited accessibility and engagement from FDPs. The majority of videos register under 200 views, and only a few surpass 300[30], with multilingual introductory videos often receiving fewer than 50 views each[31]. Compounding this issue, fewer than 10% of the webinar videos include captions (Mostly in English only), undermining accessibility for non-English speakers and those with hearing impairments. This limited reach highlights critical structural barriers, including poor promotion, platform unfamiliarity, technical complexity, language barriers, and lack of mobile-friendly or localised formats. Respondents from the interviews echoed these issues, with one Congolese refugee stating, *"The CEF platform is accessible to a few refugees that can be online and speak English,"* and a Nigerian IDP leader emphasising, *"The CEF platforms are not meant for people like IDPs."*	• The CEF must reconfigure its webinar approach by offering translated captions, shorter audio-visual formats, localised engagement strategies, and co-designed content involving refugee and IDP-led organisations. Without these adjustments, the series risks perpetuating exclusion and reinforcing a top-down model of communication that fails to equitably include the voices and needs of forcibly displaced communities.
TikTok: There is no account TikTok is a social medium platform that continues to be ignored by humanitarian actors' altogether. It is therefore not a surprise that the CEF doesn't have a TikTok account.	TikTok is an inclusive platform that gives a platform to refugees and IDPs who are not able to read and write. Also, most young FDPs have active TikTok accounts, and this would be an avenue to reach out to them than other social media platforms.	• It would be fair to open a TikTok account managed and run by a multilingual FDP who will liaise with displaced persons across different sub-continents and share inspiring stories and good work of FDPs and practitioners serving displaced communities.

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[30] For instance, recent sessions such as "How can we make the CCT work for the communities we serve" received just 66 views in over a month, while older sessions like "Workshop on Community-Led Projects" reached 425 views over a year.

[31] Multilingual introductory videos (e.g., in Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, and Ukrainian) recorded less than 50 views each, indicating that simply offering content in multiple languages may not be sufficient to drive engagement.

Platforms /Product Overview	Accessibility and usability	Recommendations
		• TikTok Live sessions should be held periodically discussing issues that have been determined to be of relevancy. For instance, holding TikTok Live Sessions on the World Refugees Days, Global Refugee Forums, and Climate COPs, Women's Day etc. to discuss issues that relate to FDPs and how they can be meaningfully engaged and taken care of.
"Article: 9 Tips to Overcome Invisible Access and Engagement Barriers"[32]: This article reflects a meaningful attempt by the CEF to surface practical lessons for overcoming common but often overlooked barriers to participation, particularly among marginalised community groups.	The format offering nine actionable tips is user-friendly and well-suited for both practitioners and frontline staff. The resource is hosted as part of the CEF's Community Coffee Chat series, which itself demonstrates a valuable shift toward informal, dialogue-based learning. However, accessibility challenges limit its value for FDPs The article is only available in English, with no translated versions or audio/visual summaries to accommodate non-literate or non-English-speaking users. Most critically, the link to the event recording is broken, leading to a non-functional YouTube URL thereby removing the opportunity for users to hear or see the full discussion. Without the multimedia component, the tips lose depth and the interactive context in which they were originally presented.	• The CEF should restore the video link, provide multilingual versions or subtitles, and consider converting the tips into illustrated or narrated formats tailored for refugee and IDP audiences. • Including real-life examples from displaced participants would further ground the content in lived experience.
Trumanitarian Podcast Link [33]: The inclusion of the Trumanitarian podcast on the CEF webpage represents a commendable effort to broaden the Forum's engagement tools and spotlight nuanced discussions around power,	Importantly, the episode is accompanied by a full transcript, which significantly enhances accessibility for those with hearing impairments, low bandwidth, or who prefer reading over listening. Nonetheless, some barriers remain for FDPs. The podcast and transcript are both available only in English, which	• The CEF could provide translated transcripts or simplified summaries in key languages, and consider producing short, multilingual audio or video snippets that communicate the core messages in more user-friendly formats.

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[32] Available via the CEF webpage.
[33] Available via the CEF webpage.

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participation, and systemic challenges in humanitarian action. The podcast features voices from both international and local actors, including members of the CEF, offering grounded insights on the realities of community engagement.	limits their utility for non-English speaking refugees and IDPs. Additionally, the content, while rich, is dense and framed using sector-specific terminology that may not be easily digestible for grassroots audiences.	
Community Coordination Toolbox (CCT) [34]**:** The Community Coordination Toolbox is one of the most comprehensive and technically rich resources run by NRC and linked through the CEF webpage. It provides structured tools, templates, and guidance for practitioners engaged in community coordination, including modules on community-led projects, governance mechanisms, and engagement strategies.	A key strength of the CCT is its availability in three languages English, French, and Arabic which significantly enhances linguistic accessibility for many displaced communities in Africa and the Middle East. The modular format and downloadable resources further support both online and offline use by field teams. Despite these strengths, there are still barriers for FDPs. The interface assumes moderate to high digital literacy and is primarily designed for humanitarian staff, not grassroots users. Navigation can be complex, particularly for users unfamiliar with technical terms or the broader coordination architecture. While translated, the content remains technical with few simplified or multimedia formats.	• The CCT platform could integrate beginner-friendly orientation pages, visual summaries, voice-over explanations, and pathways that guide non-professional users through specific community-led actions. Introducing a "For Community Leaders" track within the toolbox could also help local actors directly benefit from this rich resource
Tip Sheet for Community-led Projects in Displacement Settings: [35] The tip sheet is a valuable and practical resource designed to support field practitioners and CCCM teams in designing and implementing CLPs. It provides	The inclusion of examples and a breakdown of key concepts (e.g., representation, participation, communication with communities), the structured layout and practical tone, enhances its practical utility for practitioners and policy influencers in the humanitarian space. Its availability as a downloadable PDF ensures offline access, which can be helpful in low-connectivity settings.	• To make the tip sheet more inclusive, CEF could consider creating a simplified, illustrated version for community facilitators and refugee leaders, translating it into key languages, and offering accompanying audio or visual explainers for users with low literacy or digital experience.

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[34] https://cct.nrc.no
[35] https://www.cccmcluster.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/EN-CCCM%20Cluster%20%20CE%20Forum%20Community-Led%20Projects%20Tip%20Sheet.pdf

Platforms /Product Overview	Accessibility and usability	Recommendations
clear guidance, case examples, and actionable steps that align with localisation and participation objectives.	However, accessibility remains limited for FDPs. The document is only available in English, French and Arabic with no translations into other widely spoken languages among displaced populations. As a dense PDF with professional terminology, it may be difficult to understand for community members with limited literacy or those unfamiliar with humanitarian jargon.	
Community Engagement Definition, Terminology and Framework[36]: This guidance paper is a strong step toward establishing a shared understanding of community engagement within the CEF. It clearly articulates definitions, typologies, and terminology in a structured format that supports coherence among humanitarian actors.	However, accessibility for FDPs remains limited. The document is available only in English and is presented in dense text-heavy PDF format, which may be difficult to navigate on mobile devices or in low-bandwidth settings. Its technical language assumes a level of familiarity with sectoral frameworks that many refugee or IDP community members may not have.	To improve accessibility and usability, the CEF could consider producing simplified, illustrated versions in key languages spoken by displaced populations, along with audio summaries or video explainers. Incorporating user-friendly formats would expand the document's reach and empower displaced individuals to understand and engage with the core concepts shaping the platforms and policies intended to support them.

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[36]https://reliefweb.int/attachments/81437f13-ef2c-4912-b38e-a763eca72015/FINAL%20CEF%20Guidance%20paper%20on%20CE%20definitions_03.03.2024.pdf

3.4 Inclusiveness of Communication Channels and Responsiveness

While the CEF demonstrates strong intent to promote dialogue and learning within the humanitarian sector, its current communication channels are not adequately inclusive of FDPs. Most platforms such as Groups.io, the CEF webpage, LinkedIn, and formal guidance documents are designed around the needs and expectations of professionals in international organisations. As a result, communication is largely one-directional (information dissemination), rather than two-way (inclusive dialogue and co-creation). One practitioner respondent highlighted this lack of relevancy to displaced persons:

> *"We need the CEF platforms conversations to focus on like jobs for refugees professionals, donor priorities and how they can be aligned to serve FDPs' interests."*

There are limited mechanisms in place to ensurever that refugees and IDPs can engage in real-time communication, ask questions, provide feedback, or influence content. It is also not surprising that some practitioners still think that there is no place for dialogue and interactions between FDPs and practitioners. One practitioner respondent submitted:

> *"I don't see any reason why displaced persons or professionals should be at the same table with practitioners discussing issues of coordination and serves delivery."*

Perhaps this indicates the long way we have in pushing for FPDs inclusive agenda. This is also reflected in how the Groups.io platform, while technically open, does not proactively include refugee or IDP voices or provide translated or moderated content tailored for diverse user needs. Similarly, CEF's use of LinkedIn and YouTube, though effective for visibility and outreach, does not include interactive elements that would allow displaced persons to meaningfully participate or receive timely responses to their inputs.

The CEF has not yet established systematic feedback loops such as moderated forums, community suggestion boxes, or targeted consultations to ensure responsiveness to displaced users' questions, suggestions, or content needs. Additionally, communication remains predominantly in English and lacks local language interfaces or culturally adapted engagement methods, excluding many non-English-speaking and marginalized community members.

To enhance inclusiveness and responsiveness, the CEF should consider implementing community-based communication strategies such as WhatsApp groups, localised digital hubs, multilingual voice notes, and periodic check-ins or surveys with refugee and IDP members. Appointing refugee focal points or digital moderators to gather feedback and ensure follow-up could further democratise communication. Creating participatory formats such as co-curated content, refugee-led takeovers, or multilingual Q&A sessions would help build trust, increase visibility of community voices, and transform the Forum from a technical resource space into a truly participatory ecosystem

3.5 Inclusivity of CEF Structures: The CEF Advisory Board

3.5.1 Advisory Board Structure and Composition

The CEF Advisory Board, as outlined in its publicly available Terms of Reference, exists to support the Forum moderator in shaping content, technical dialogue, outreach, and engagement. Membership ranges from 3 to 8 individuals representing different regions and organisational levels, with nominations sourced from Forum members, but also gives the moderator discretion to propose members if sufficient nominations are not received. While this flexible approach maintains continuity, the lack of structured pathways for FDPs significantly limits transparency and inclusiveness, especially for underrepresented groups. The ToR rightly emphasises diversity in gender and geography and calls for varied professional experience. However, both the document and current implementation fall short of ensuring explicit inclusion of FDPs or leaders from refugee and IDP-led organisations.

It also appears that the hierarchy and leadership of the Board is rendered powerless by having the moderator as the sole decision maker. While this framework facilitates quick decision-making avoiding bureaucracies that come with wider consultation among many team members, a wider and expanded CEF that truly wants to be meaningfully inclusive would need a team or committee that makes decisions on major content created and resources shared and the wider recruitment for CEF activities. Such a team would rather have a well facilitated displaced professional on it.

The requirement for members to possess CE or CCCM experience, and serve in a personal capacity, further privileges formal humanitarian actors and professionals embedded within established institutions thereby, excluding many displaced leaders who possess lived experience but lack formal credentials. Findings from the interviews reinforced these gaps. Many refugee and IDP leaders were either unaware of the Advisory Board's existence or found it inaccessible. One Congolese refugee observed:

> *"For a refugee person serving on the board is a fantastic opportunity that comes with additional responsibilities and obligations some of which are financial,"*

while another refugee from the Netherlands emphasised:

> *"Putting FDPs on the board is the new way of tokenisation."*

This underscores the gap between formal representation and meaningful participation. Despite some positive experiences such as an IDP leader in Nigeria who appreciated the *"inclusive review of the ToR and participatory capacity-building* sessions" these instances are rare.

3.5.2 Refugee/IDP Representation in Decision-Making

The literature and primary data converge in pointing out that the CEF Advisory Board lacks an explicit, operational mechanism to ensure consistent representation of FDPs. Participation in the Board is voluntary and unfunded, posing economic and logistical burdens for displaced individuals without steady income, institutional backing, or digital access. As noted by a refugee in Uganda:

> *"For me to participate well, I have to travel to a nearby centre with better internet and spend fifty USD per month on data."*

The lack of designated seats or an affirmative inclusion clause also prevents systematic integration of FDP perspectives into governance. Respondents frequently cited the need for co-creation, capacity building, and logistical support to ensure their voices are not only heard but influential. One interviewee from South Africa cautioned against tokenism, urging instead *"co-designing and co-creation… not just ticking the box."*

3.5.3 Recommendations for Enhanced Inclusivity

To address these limitations and align with best practices, CEF should revise its Advisory Board ToR to mandate reserved seats for FDPs, selected in partnership with credible RLOs or community-based networks. The process should be transparent, participatory, and accompanied by support mechanisms including translation, internet stipends, and orientation programmes. As recommended by interviewees and echoed in the broader literature on participatory governance, institutionalising rotating advisory roles or establishing regional FDP consultative groups would enhance legitimacy and sustainability. This would move the Forum beyond symbolic inclusion toward meaningful, equitable engagement fulfilling its commitment to displacement-affected communities.

3.6 Meaningful Participation of Displaced Persons in CEF's 2025 Priority Initiatives

This subsection discusses an assessment of if and how FDPs can meaningfully participate in CEF's three priority initiatives in 2025 in line with the second objective of the assignment. However, analysis of platform walkthroughs and interview data highlights significant shortfalls in the inclusion of refugee and IDP voices in both the design and implementation of these initiatives.

3.6.1 Review of CEF's planned initiatives

Donor Advocacy on CE in Humanitarian Response:

The CEF aims to shape donor policy by positioning community engagement as a critical funding and accountability priority. However, displaced persons interviewed were largely unaware of these advocacy efforts and felt excluded from shaping the messages being sent to donors.

> *"CEF comes with already made plans and content. There is no participation in the design of those content." (Kenya, Refugee)*

> *"Refugees should be part of content generation with topics proposed by refugees themselves." (Uganda, Refugee)*

Some respondents expressed that the actions of donors and misplaced priorities indicate that donors need capacity building to serve and fund the actual interests of the displaced persons.

> *"RLOs leaders and refugee professionals need to build the capacity of donors so that they understand displaced persons priorities" one female refugee leader from Uganda submitted.*

Community Engagement in CCCM Trainings:

While the CE component is being integrated into CCCM training materials, with finalisation expected to continue in 2025, its rollout, particularly in-person trainings, had been paused due to funding uncertainties. Displaced persons were not included in curriculum co-design or delivery roles, and the few indirectly involved (via the Advisory Board being part of the review group) lacked mandates or channels to consult their communities. The training is specifically targeting practitioners, as equally noted by a Ugandan Refugee.

> *"Even when I attended CCCM meetings, the training was in English and felt like it was meant for humanitarians not us." (Uganda, Refugee)*

> *"I think it is important to understand our goal and purpose of engaging displaced persons. What will it look like, what we will do together with them on the CEF and also manage their expectations such that we don't disappoint them". (Bangladesh, Practitioner)*

Development of E-learning Materials:

A proposed e-learning module on community engagement, intended to complement existing CCCM capacity development resources, had been postponed due to a lack of confirmed donor funding. Nonetheless, respondents emphasised that if and when the module is developed, it must reflect real lived experiences and be delivered in accessible, multilingual formats.

> *"Make something that we can use something in audio, translated, maybe on WhatsApp." (Rwanda, Refugee)*

> *"We can help shape the e-learning. Who knows better how to engage our people than us?" (Kenya, Refugee)*

3.6.2 Overall participation in priority initiatives

Across all initiatives, meaningful FDP engagement has been either postponed or omitted. Current structures prioritise practitioner leadership, and there is limited evidence of displaced persons as co-creators, implementers, or validators of CEF's learning and advocacy tools.

Across all three initiatives, the involvement of FDPs has been minimal and largely informal. There is also a perception that humanitarians are full of talk rather than action for displaced persons as noted by one practitioner from USA

> *"FDPs feel that practitioners are full of talk without action. To make FDPs more interested in CEF activities they would need showing examples how participation made a difference or will make a difference in their lives or that of their communities such that they see the value of why they should stick around"*

Findings from the interviews confirmed that past and present level of displaced person participation in CEF's initiatives has remained minimal, sporadic, and largely unstructured. In some cases, tokenistic inclusion has replaced meaningful participation, with several respondents expressing frustration at being included for appearances rather than impact.

> *"After meetings, there was no report, no contact… it was just ticking a box."*
> *(Uganda, Refugee)*

Respondents also emphasised that engagement often stops at the invitation stage with little effort made to ensure feedback is gathered, understood, or acted upon. For example, some Advisory Board members had no formal role in shaping training or advocacy materials and were not asked to consult with their communities.

> *"They don't ask us to share feedback. It's just individual participation. You're not there as a representative." (Kenya, Refugee)*

Therefore, this imply that CEF's approach to inclusion needs to shift from symbolic to systemic engagement. Participation must be structured, compensated, and embedded within content development, community representation, validation, and rollout processes. Displaced persons should be treated as experts with unique insights particularly on how community engagement is experienced at the grassroots level.

3.6.3 Perceived opportunities and barriers

Platform and product walkthroughs and consultation notes reveal a wide range of systemic barriers inhibiting the meaningful participation of FDPs in the CEF's 2025 priority initiatives. These challenges are structural, institutional, and cultural but also vary by region, gender, digital access, and displacement context.

Structural Barriers

Displaced persons consistently reported the absence of formal entry points into decision-making processes and initiative design or even professional engagement. While platforms like the CEF Advisory Board exist, respondents highlighted a lack of visibility and functionality for most displaced communities. Geographic disparities were evident: respondents in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda) and conflict-affected zones (e.g., Tigray, Iraq, Lebanon, Nigeria) cited poor internet access, lack of mobile data for communication, and unaffordable devices as key barriers.

> *"Displacement is very complicated. Some contexts do not have internet or smartphones." (Uganda, Refugee)*
>
> *"The CEF platform is accessible only to a few refugees who can be online and speak English." (Kenya, Refugee)*
>
> *"Even community leaders in Tigray don't have smartphones or access to internet, so physical interaction is the best." (Ethiopia, Practitioner)*

The implication is that structural redesign is needed to provide hybrid digital and physical participation pathways, invest in internet/data access, and create low-tech channels such as WhatsApp, radio, and community info centres.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional practices within humanitarian coordination continue to marginalise FDPs. Several respondents noted that while they are invited to CEF activities, their roles are often symbolic and their inputs rarely shape content. Moreover, key CEF training activities (e.g., CCCM trainings, donor advocacy modules) remain oriented toward practitioners, not displaced communities.

> *"Even during global panels, I was invited just to be seen. After meetings, no contact. They had just ticked their box." (Uganda, Refugee)*

The implication of this is that the CEF must adopt **co-design approaches** where refugees and IDPs are involved from the outset in developing training, advocacy tools, and webinar topics. Clear feedback loops and shared agenda-setting must replace extractive consultation. There should be efforts to have a budget line for inclusion of displaced persons. One refugee respondent from Uganda noted this frustration that *"every event, platform, and INGO project and initiative have budgets except that there is no budget line to facilitate RLO leaders and refugees' participation"*.

Cultural Barriers

Across regions, a persistent cultural norm views displaced persons as passive recipients rather than knowledge holders. This is particularly evident in platforms that require English fluency or assume high levels of digital literacy. Women and youth faced additional cultural and gendered barriers to online engagement, especially in East African and Middle Eastern settings.

> *"As a refugee woman, I know what I need and no one should speak on my behalf."* (South Africa, Asylum Seeker)

> *"The content is too complex for most people in camps. We need audio formats, translated into our local languages."* (Rwanda, Refugee)

This implies that cultural transformation within CEF structures requires recognising lived experience as expertise, ensuring multilingual access, and investing in gender-responsive and disability-inclusive participation formats.

Participation Challenges Faced by Refugee Women

Refugee women face a complex web of gender-specific barriers that significantly restrict their meaningful participation in platforms like the CEF. A South Sudanese refugee in Uganda highlighted:

> *"Around 90% of refugees are women and children... most women don't work and cannot even access data."*

This reflects a broader challenge where social norms, caregiving responsibilities, and economic dependence severely limit women's time, mobility, and digital access. Even when digital devices are available, they are often owned and controlled by male household members. Gender-based roles further reduce women's confidence and ability to participate in online forums, with one female leader stating:

> *"The society thinks that women who are active online will reconnect with another man and neglect home duties."* These cultural perceptions not only stigmatise women's digital participation but also isolate them from training, leadership, and decision-making opportunities.

Moreover, refugee women often lack access to ICT tools, language support, and digital literacy training making engagement with the CEF's primarily online, English-language platforms nearly impossible. The absence of female-centred content, safe spaces for expression, and compensation for participation further excludes women. As one respondent noted,

> *"Being online is hard for women. In my group, I'm the only woman with a smartphone that can be online, though there are other three women with smartphones, they fear being online because it is interpreted as selling themselves"* (Uganda, Refugee).

To address these barriers, the CEF must embed gender-sensitive design in all activities. This includes partnering with women-led refugee and IDP organisations, offering targeted stipends, scheduling events at accessible times, translating materials into local languages, and creating offline or hybrid formats that accommodate childcare responsibilities. Recognising and addressing these challenges is not only a matter of inclusion but also essential to ensuring that humanitarian platforms reflect the perspectives and leadership of half the refugee population.

3.6.4 Emerging opportunities

Despite the barriers, respondents identified clear opportunities to transform engagement. Many proposed repositioning refugees and IDPs not as "beneficiaries" but as co-leaders, trainers, and storytellers. Youth engagement through social media (e.g., TikTok in Kakuma), use of radio for older persons, and community storytelling through WhatsApp were proposed as powerful tools for scaling inclusion.

> *"Refugees should be part of content generation with topics proposed by refugees themselves." (Uganda, Refugee)*
>
> *"Use TikTok, it's what most youth in Kakuma are using to get information." (Kenya, Refugee)*

The call for **respectful partnerships with FDP-led organisations**, financing community participation, and measuring participation impact (not just presence) emerged strongly across the board. Many FDP leaders emphasised that **meaningful participation must be visible, compensated, and tied to change and service delivery.**

Targeted engagement as entry point
A key insight emerging from the interviews is the pressing need for targeted and context-specific engagement strategies that reflect the diversity of forcibly displaced populations across countries and regions. Respondents emphasised that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient due to the varying digital access levels, languages, cultural norms, and institutional contexts that shape refugee and IDP participation, as cited by one respondent:

> *"Create country-specific platforms or engagement webinars for FDPs so that engagement is contextual." (Nigeria, IDP).*

As such, there is a strong call to develop country-specific engagement events, webinars, and content streams, tailored to the realities of each context. One refugee respondent in Kenya also noted, *"Community engagement campaigns should happen at ideal times when people are at home,"* highlighting the importance of aligning outreach with community rhythms. Another respondent from Ukraine mentioned that platforms like Telegram and Instagram are preferred, while others from regions like Tigray stressed the need for in-person formats due to lack of electricity or internet. Therefore, CEF should consider holding country-level or region-specific webinars and discussions, inviting local stakeholders, refugee-led organizations, and community representatives to share, co-design, and reflect on solutions within their context. This approach would not only enhance accessibility and relevance but also foster cross-learning and localized ownership which are critical elements for sustaining meaningful participation.

Role of RLOs in Enhancing Inclusivity of the CEF

RLOs are uniquely positioned to act as bridges between displaced communities and humanitarian coordination mechanisms like the CEF, globally and locally. Interview respondents repeatedly emphasised the trust that refugee communities place in RLOs compared to international actors. As one Congolese RLO leader in Uganda noted, *"Refugees trust RLOs more*

than international NGOs," highlighting the credibility and contextual understanding that RLOs possess. The CEF and meaningful participation models should recognize informal yet impactful. Many RLOs operating in settlements like Kyaka II are not formally registered but are trusted by the community and demonstrate high-impact grassroots programming. The current CEF participation frameworks often overlook such RLOs because of institutional bias toward legally recognized NGOs. This perpetuates exclusion when these groups are closer to the needs and realities of forcibly displaced populations. I recommend including non-legal identity-based inclusion criteria for participation and leadership in CEF activities. CEF should intentionally recognise grassroots RLOs, and include them in working groups, advisory roles, and co-design processes.

RLO leaders often have lived experience, speak local languages, and operate within refugee settlements, making them well-equipped to translate complex humanitarian processes into accessible formats. They can play critical roles in shaping CEF priorities, generating and validating content, conducting localised awareness campaigns, and co-facilitating community-led discussions. Several respondents called for RLOs to be treated as equal partners, with one stating:

> *"Partnership with RLOs should be very respectful as equal partnerships and have a budget for refugee and RLO engagements."*

To enhance the inclusivity of the CEF, RLOs should be systematically engaged in both governance and implementation. Globally, their representation on the Advisory Board, technical working groups, and planning committees could institutionalise community voices within CEF's structures. Locally, respondents further suggested that RLOs could be financially resourced to conduct offline engagements and provide interpretation services addressing both digital and linguistic barriers. Tools like co-designed community campaigns, local listening sessions, and offline feedback loops can be led by RLOs to extend the reach of CEF into underserved areas. Their grassroots networks and cultural fluency can also help tailor webinar content and tools to the needs of diverse refugee contexts. As one youth leader in Kakuma, Kenya emphasised:

> *"Putting refugees at the centre of planning and content generation makes participation meaningful."*

Therefore, positioning RLOs as central actors not peripheral participants is critical to achieving equitable engagement in CEF platforms.

3.6.5 Perspectives of refugee/IDP leaders on interest and capacity to engage in 2025 priorities

Interviews with refugee and IDP leaders across multiple regions reveal a **high level** of interest and readiness to engage meaningfully in the CEF's 2025 priorities particularly in donor advocacy, CCCM training adaptation, and content co-development. Across contexts, displaced persons emphasised that they are not passive recipients but active contributors with deep contextual knowledge and grassroots legitimacy.

> *"We have the experience ...many of us run our own community-based organisations. Let us shape the trainings." (Uganda, Refugee Leader)*

> *"Refugees should be part of content generation with topics proposed by refugees themselves." (Uganda, Refugee)*

> *"Who knows better how to engage our people than us?" (Kenya, Refugee)*

Despite this enthusiasm, **region-specific disparities** emerged:

- **East Africa (Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and South Africa):** Refugee leaders reported significant barriers in digital access, gender exclusion, and lack of clarity on how to participate. Women in particular noted lower smartphone ownership and access to online forums.
- **West Africa (Nigeria):** IDPs expressed frustration at being structurally excluded from regional engagement platforms, with limited outreach from CEF.

> *"Create a platform that actually speaks to us IDPs not just refugees in other countries." (Nigeria, IDP)*

- **Europe (Germany, Romania, and Netherlands):** Refugee leaders from Europe showed greater familiarity with digital tools but highlighted **perceptions of tokenism** in past engagement. They also emphasised the need for structural reforms to move beyond symbolic representation.
- **Middle East (Iraq, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Yemen, Jordan):** Respondents stressed the need for **translated content** and recognised that digital platforms were not always intuitive or localized.

> *"Even if I get online, I cannot understand most of what is shared. It's not in Arabic." (Iraq, Returnee).*

Another respondent emphasised the issue of language barrier saying*:*

> *"From the 60 IDP sites I have worked in, it is very hard to find someone who speaks English. Even subnational meetings with local organisations need translation to Arabic". (Yemen, Practitioner).*

In nearly all regions, displaced leaders pointed to gaps in **digital infrastructure, translation, guidance, and structured invitations** as primary barriers. Many had never heard of the CEF prior to the interview, indicating poor outreach beyond formal coordination actors.

> *"CEF is a good idea, but it needs to meet people where they are in their languages, in their communities." (Uganda, Refugee)*
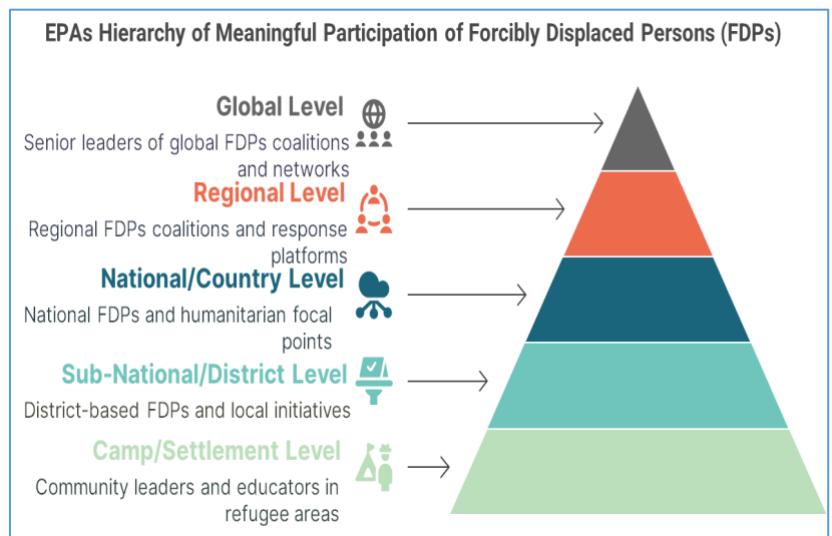
> *"There must be public calls and regional focal points. We need a system." (Kenya, Refugee)*

These findings highlight a strong appetite among refugee and IDP leaders for engagement in 2025 CEF initiatives. However, meaningful participation requires more than willingness, it demands: Accessible digital infrastructure and multilingual tools; targeted engagement strategies per region and demographic (especially women and youth); clear and open invitations to participate, not informal or insider access; recognition, compensation, and capacity strengthening for refugee-led leaders. Moving forward, the CEF should not only open doors for participation but build bridges that ensure FDPs are equipped, empowered, and expected to lead.

3.6.6 Pathways for Meaningful Participation of FDPs in CEF's 2025 Priority

Initiatives drawing from interviews, platform walkthroughs, and key literature such as the GPA 2023 Inclusivity Strategic Outlook[37] which places strategic emphasis on inclusive policy, research and innovation, funding, workforce, and systems change, a multidimensional framework emerges to enable meaningful, non-tokenistic participation of FDPs in the CEF's 2025 priority initiatives.

EPAs Hierarchy of Meaningful Participation of Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)

Global Level — Senior leaders of global FDPs coalitions and networks

Regional Level — Regional FDPs coalitions and response platforms

National/Country Level — National FDPs and humanitarian focal points

Sub-National/District Level — District-based FDPs and local initiatives

Camp/Settlement Level — Community leaders and educators in refugee areas

Participation must be enabled across all levels from global advocacy to local implementation while addressing systemic, structural, and digital barriers. Below is a proposed multi-tiered framework for participation:

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[37] Sarah Rosenberg-Jansen, Joelle Hangi, and Epa Ndahimana (2023) Inclusivity Strategic Outlook. GPA-UNITAR. Geneva, Switzerland. Available (Online)

Framework for meaningful participation of FDPs:

The framework for meaningful participation of FDPs illustrates a multi-level, action-oriented model that embeds displaced leadership and voice from the global to the settlement and camp level. At the global level, refugee professionals are positioned to co-lead strategic advocacy, influence governance through reserved seats on the CEF Advisory Board, and shape donor messaging through lived experience. Regionally, RLO coalitions play a critical role in contextualizing content and facilitating peer learning, while national-level RLOs contribute to co-designing training tools and piloting contextualised e-learning. Sub-nationally, community structures validate tools, run localized campaigns, and monitor accountability, and at the camp or settlement level, grassroots leaders generate content, lead peer engagement, and amplify community innovations. Cross-cutting recommendations emphasise policy co-authorship, funding equity, workforce representation, and systemic inclusion of lived experiences. This layered structure (as reflected in the figure below) confirms that meaningful participation requires not only access but sustained investment, recognition, and shared power, shifting engagement from tokenistic inclusion to transformative co-leadership.

Framework for Meaningful FDPs Engagement

Characteristic	Global Level	Regional Level	National/Country Level	Sub National Level	Camp/Settlement Level
Who	CEOs or senior leaders of Global Refugee-Led Organizations	Leaders of regional refugee-led networks and coalitions	Country-level refugee-led organizations and refugee focal points	Refugee leaders, focal points engaged in district or municipal-level	Refugee/IDP leaders, community volunteers, and grassroots facilitators
How to meaningfully Engage	Serve on the Management Board; Co-lead global donor advocacy campaigns; Develop content; Influence platform-wide policies	Facilitate regional roundtables; Translate content; Co-author guidance materials	Partner with national working groups; Serve as field validation partners; Engage in participatory M&E	Participate in coordination meetings to integrate local priorities. Design area-based approaches ensuring they reflect community needs.	Mobilize community research; Pilot adaptations of e-learning content; Engage in community exchanges
Focus Areas	Inclusive policy advocacy, representation in governance, co-design of donor engagement strategies	Regional capacity strengthening, participatory knowledge production, localization of tools	Partnership and localization, inclusive system reform, community feedback integration	Local systems integration, feedback to-action loops, district-level planning influence, equitable representation in sub national governance	Innovation, behavioral change, community research, inclusive learning systems
Communication channel	Webinars, Online meetings, Physical meetings, online engagements	Webinars, online meetings, physical meetings, online engagements	Radios, Televisions, Engagement barazas, online engagements	Physical engagements, local radios, TVs, workshops, online engagements	Physical Engagements, online engagements
Challenges	Geopolitical Imbalances, Lack of Harmonized Engagement Models, Limited invites and submission opportunities, Donor / INGO Neglect,	Geopolitical Imbalances, Digital Divide, Lack of Harmonized Engagement Models, Representation Gaps	Restrictive Legal Frameworks, Exclusion from Policy-Making, Power Imbalances, Language and Literacy	Invisibility in Local Governance, Capacity Constraints, Capacity Constraints, Limited Feedback Mechanisms	Poor Infrastructure, Hierarchical Structures, Safety and Security Concerns, Gender and Cultural Barriers
What's needed	Financial facilitation, mentorship, travel and connectivity support, and content co-design?	Budget for regional consultations, translation, and digital access.	Recognition of FDPs coalitions / networks as equal partners, localized platforms, physical engagement options, and M&E inclusion.	Honoraria, data support, access to physical infrastructure (e.g., community centres), and recognition in reporting.	Access to digital tools, simple multimedia formats, and community-level facilitation.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations (Aligned with the GPA's Inclusivity Outlook):

- **Inclusivity in Policy:** Ensure displaced persons contribute to humanitarian policy documents and community engagement strategies shared by CEF with donors and clusters.
- **Funding and Investment:** Allocate micro-grants or co-financing for refugee and IDP-led organisations participating in CEF initiatives (e.g., co-hosting webinars or developing learning modules).
- **Humanitarian Workforce:** Establish a 10–30% representation benchmark of displaced persons in CEF project teams, trainers, and governance bodies.
- **Research and Innovation:** Include displaced researchers in the development of CEF learning content, toolkits, and platform feedback studies.
- **Systemic Change:** Embed lived-experience-based criteria in all CEF-funded or endorsed tools and activities to ensure that displaced voices influence design, not just implementation.

This framework underscores that meaningful participation must be **structured**, **resourced**, and **co-owned** by displaced communities not merely offered as an invitation to contribute. As one respondent emphasised, *"Refugee meaningful participation is not just about presence, it's about power."*

3.7 Enablers and Barriers to Meaningful Participation Without Burden

The following subsection discusses an assessment of if and how the CEF can support FDPs to participate meaningfully in the CoP, without burdening them (financially, emotionally, their time etc.) in line with the third objective of the assignment.

3.7.1 Emotional, financial, and time-related burdens identified by key informants

Many FDPs noted the high cost of internet and the need for smart devices as a primary barrier to online engagement. A Ugandan respondent shared:

> *"Fifty USD per month for data and internet. If you don't have enough data, sometimes you have to switch off data such that you can use it at a later time and save MBs."*

Others highlighted the lack of stipends and structural inequality in engagement processes. A respondent from Germany observed,

> *"It's burdensome to people without jobs,"*

while another participant expressed that:

> *"RLOs should not participate freely in online events. Events have a budget except the RLOs, and refugees are not budgeted for."*

Time is another significant burden. A Nigerian participant shared:

> *"Time commitment is costly,"*

and a South Sudanese respondent added:

> *"We used to climb Panyadoli hill to access internet and we had to carry food and there was no privacy because the hill was full of people looking for network."*

This highlights the challenges some displaced persons have to endure to participate in online meetings.

Feelings of exclusion and mistrust were expressed by several participants. For example, one refugee leader stated:

> *"I Feel free to express myself in CEF platforms, however even if you share a challenge about something it will not be solved."*

A South African respondent described the atmosphere of tokenism:

> *"Yes, you are giving FDPs space but to say what and does it even matter." A practitioner from Bangladesh submitted "when you are not fluent in a language like English, your submission sounds shallow and it may not attract attention".*

A Pakistani participant reflected*:*

> *"Meaningful participation is becoming a new stolen sermon to exploit the refugees and IDPs such that they can help the system survive."*

This sentiment was echoed by others who felt that FDPs' involvement was performative rather than substantive. This is especially true when it is not compensated, not budgeted for, and does not lead to influencing decision making. The perceived lack of feedback loops and result-oriented engagement further diminishes trust. One respondent argued:

> *"After the meetings, no report, no contact they had just ticked their box that they had a refugee on the panel."*

3.7.2 Enablers that reduce barriers (i.e. how the CEF can support FDPs to participate meaningfully in the CoP, without burdening them)

Several practical suggestions emerged across contexts for how the CEF could reduce barriers to participation:

- **Local Language Support:**

  > *"Language is a challenge and there is need to have interpretation to Kinyarwanda,"*

  noted a participant in Rwanda. Similarly, others recommended translating CEF content into Kiswahili, Hausa, Arabic, and other locally spoken languages.

- **Physical and Hybrid Models of Engagement:** Many participants emphasised the importance of face-to-face engagement.

  > *"Physical engagement is the best way to engage refugees in Rwanda,"*

  > *"Online engagement is not the best... the best way is physical engagement,"* were common sentiments.

- **Partnership with RLOs and IDP-led organisations:** Several participants stressed that refugees trust RLOs more than international NGOs.

  > *"Seek partnership with RLOs because refugees trust RLOs than international NGOs,"*

  advised a young refugee in Kenya.

- **Stipends and Technical Support:** There was consensus on the need for stipends, internet bundles, and ICT equipment.

  > *"There is need for access to data or stipend for data,"* and *"Provision of stipend and internet bundles such that IDPs participate fully and it's not burdensome."*

- **Inclusive Leadership and Co-Design:** There were strong calls for the inclusion of displaced persons in platform leadership and content development.

  > *"Putting refugees at the centre of planning and content generation makes participation meaningful."*

- **Simplified and Accessible Technology:** Multiple respondents suggested moving away from complex platforms like Groups.io in favour of more familiar platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok.

> *"Groups.io is very hard to navigate… WhatsApp was the most effective,"*
> one board member shared.

3.8 Best Practices of Meaningful Participation of FDPs

This subsection discusses relevant examples on best practices of meaningful participation of displaced persons in similar CoPs and networks, in line with the fourth objective of the assignment.

3.8.1 Examples from other CoPs, RLO networks, and FDP-led advisory mechanisms

Interviews revealed several grassroots-led, CoP initiatives and RLO-driven platforms that demonstrate promising models of inclusive participation:

- **Peer-Led Digital Forums and WhatsApp Learning**: Refugee leaders in Kakuma and Kalobeyei camps in Kenya reported using WhatsApp and Facebook groups to disseminate information and hold dialogue sessions. These informal, low-bandwidth platforms are familiar to many youth and enable real-time community feedback. A Congolese leader in Uganda emphasised, *"We use WhatsApp to coordinate community issues it's cheap, accessible, and fast."* In Rwanda, peer learning often occurs offline but is complemented by occasional Telegram and WhatsApp group discussions for those with smartphones.
- **Localised Engagement Hubs**: Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) centres in Kakuma, with over 400 computers, were cited as effective local infrastructure for digital learning and engagement. These centres provide free access to the internet, translation support, and in-person mentorship, helping overcome many barriers identified in the CEF experience. Similarly, FilmAid Kenya was repeatedly cited as a valuable partner for mobilising participation through visual storytelling and community film screenings.
- **Community Leadership and Decision-Making Structures**: Several respondents referenced community-led advisory boards at country or settlement level such as the **Refugee Engagement Forum in Uganda**[38] as useful but in need of reform. While some displaced leaders served on boards (e.g., CEF Advisory Board, GRF pledges, RLO coalitions), meaningful influence depended on whether the structure ensured co-creation rather than consultation. In Nigeria, an IDP leader emphasised:

  > *"The review of the TOR is very inclusive and IDPs are part of decision-making, not just observers."*

- **Capacity Transfer and Equal Partnerships**: A key enabler across all successful platforms was equal footing in partnerships. For example, one Nigerian participant shared that they co-designed community-led eviction monitoring tools that were later adopted by practitioners for planning and advocacy. Refugee leaders from Uganda and the Netherlands stressed the importance of shared leadership, stating:

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[38] https://www.responseinnovationlab.com/updates/refugee-engagement-forum-in-uganda-as-an-innovative-approach-to-aap

> *"RLOs are still serving even when INGOs pull out after funding cuts; they are more resilient."*

- **Inclusive Advisory Mechanisms**: Initiatives like **New Women Connectors** (led by a refugee in the Netherlands) and the **Global Refugee-Led Youth Network (GRYN)**[39] have established reserved leadership seats for refugees in advisory structures. These models illustrate how quotas, rotating memberships, and mentoring pathways can shift decision-making power without overburdening individuals.

3.8.2 Lessons learned and replicable elements for the CEF

Drawing on these examples, the following best practices can be adapted or scaled within the CEF platform:

- **Use Familiar and Low-Burden Tools**: Platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, and even TikTok offer intuitive and accessible interfaces for communication and knowledge sharing. These tools should be prioritised for mobile-first engagement among displaced populations.
- **Invest in Hybrid and Decentralised Engagement Models**: Relying solely on online platforms excludes a majority of displaced persons. Establishing localised engagement hubs or partnering with existing infrastructure (e.g., JWL, youth centres, community Wi-Fi zones) enables participation without mobile data or travel burdens. However, this is a resource intensive option that should only be taken up depending on resource availability. Amidst technological developments, there are always cheaper alternatives to worldwide engagement.
- **Simplify Content and Prioritise Translation**: Respondents consistently emphasised the need for multilingual content and simplified communication. Materials should be co-developed with refugee leaders and adapted into local languages and formats (e.g., voice notes, infographics, captioned videos).
- **Institutionalise Refugee Leadership in Governance**: Rather than treating participation as an ad hoc opportunity, CEF should embed FDP leadership through structural provisions such as reserved seats on the Advisory Board, recruiting FDP professionals, regional consultation mechanisms, and participatory evaluation systems.
- **Support Participation Logistically and Financially**: Participation must be resourced to be meaningful. As one refugee leader stated:

> *"Engagement without a stipend or recognition is not sustainable."*

Providing stipends, internet bundles, transport allowances, and certification can boost both motivation and impact.
- **Foster Co-Design, Not Just Consultation**: Effective participation involves co-creating content, setting priorities, and evaluating outcomes. This includes involving displaced persons in the design of CCCM trainings, advocacy messages, e-learning modules, and platform governance processes.

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[39] https://www.gryn.network/

- **Recognise and Elevate Local Innovation**: CEF should proactively showcase and scale successful FDP-led projects and tools, transforming them into case studies, training resources, or partnership pilots. This validates local knowledge and strengthens trust.
- **Ensure Intersectionality and Inclusion**: Mechanisms should be in place to ensure inclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and those with limited digital or language literacy. Customised engagement strategies, like partnering with women's groups or disability networks, are essential.

Section 4: Recommendations

The study thus recommends the following for the CEF to facilitate meaningful participation of FDPs in their activities:

4.1 Platform Design and Accessibility

- Develop a **standalone multilingual website** for the CEF optimised for mobile and low-bandwidth environments.
- Create and disseminate **visual summaries, audio explainers**, and **translated micro-content** for key documents.
- Use **WhatsApp and Telegram** for grassroot engagement and feedback collection.
- Build in feedback loops using tools like polls, SMS queries, or community-led monitoring.

4.2 Governance and Advisory Board Inclusion

- Amend the **Advisory Board ToR** to include **at least two reserved seats for representatives from displaced populations.**
- Provide **stipends, interpretation, and mentorship** for displaced board members.
- Introduce a **rotating FDPs consultative panel** at country and regional levels to inform global strategy.

4.3 Capacity Strengthening and Mentorship

- Co-create simplified versions of CE in CCCM training and CE e-learning content with input from FDPs, in collaboration with IDP and RLOs, local facilitators, and humanitarian training institutions. These **trainings should be specifically targeted to FDP representatives**.
- Offer **online and in-person mentorship programs** for FDPs on policy advocacy, digital storytelling, and tool development.
- Build regional **resource and learning hubs** to deliver training in local languages with offline access. These hubs can also capture and document lived experiences and FDP-led recommendations.
- Promote **digital inclusion and multilingual access at settlement/camp level**. There is need for localised CEF engagements, including in-person dialogues, translated toolkits, and hybrid learning for remote settlements and camps. Local RLOs are ready to co-facilitate such sessions and document refugee-led recommendations. CEF should allocate funding to pilot settlement based CEF learning hubs co-led by local FDP-led organisations. These can bridge the digital divide and serve as platforms for capturing lived experiences from the ground.

4.4 Compensating and Supporting FDP Participation

- Institutionalise **budget lines for displaced persons'** participation including both IDPs and refugee representatives and their representative organisations (such as RLOs and IDP-led groups), covering costs such as data, transport, interpretation, and honoraria.
- Provide **certificates of participation** and publicly recognise contributions after trainings that take more than 3 days, and for serving on the Advisory Board.
- Align engagement timelines with FDP availability and ensure **follow-up mechanisms** are in place.

4.5 Focusing on Topics that Improve Service Delivery for FDPs Rather than Online Tools for Project Design and Delivery

- Develop advocacy topics for enhanced **professional participation of forcibly displaced** in humanitarian workforce. For instance, holding discussions on the advantages of hiring displaced professionals and how that improves project design, services delivery and optimises resources for both the donors and INGOs.
- Co-develop with RLOs **donor and coordination advocacy messages on localised topics** such as the legal and regulatory challenges that hinder formalisation of refugee-led structures in some contexts.
- Facilitate discussions through webinars, community chats, or collaborative events on **topics such as inclusive partnerships, equitable hiring practices in the humanitarian workforce, inclusive funding mechanisms for RLOs and IDP-led organisations, and inclusive policy development**. Where feasible, invite refugee and IDP professionals and displaced leaders to co-host or share lived experience insights on these topics.
- Find ways to **invite RLO and IDP leaders to propose and discuss community issues** that are affecting the lives of FDPs from where they operate.

4.6 Suggested Tools, Platforms and Engagement Models

- Scale **community-to-CEF engagement cycles** by partnering with RLOs and IDP-led organisations, national NGOs, and camp/area-level coordination bodies, to gather local experiences and insights from FDPs on a quarterly basis, feeding into CEF's global discussions, policy inputs, and strategic planning.
- Leverage **popular platforms like TikTok, Facebook Live, and radio** for youth and community outreach.
- Partner with **trusted RLOs and IDP-led organisations** to co-host forums, training, and advocacy events in displaced communities.
- **CEF Coffee and Chat webinars** should integrate multilingual captions, co-create content with RLOs and IDP-led organisations, and disseminate short, mobile-friendly summaries through platforms commonly used by FDPs such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or community radio.

- **Conduct targeted and context-specific engagements** that reflect the diversity of forcibly displaced populations across countries and regions, through holding country-specific engagement events, webinars, and content streams, tailored to the realities of each context.

4.7 Prioritise Relevant and Service-Oriented Topics to Attract and Empower FDP Participation

To meaningfully engage FDPs in the CEF and ensure their sustained interest, the platform should curate and prioritise discussion topics that resonate with their immediate needs, long-term aspirations, and lived experiences. Suggested topics include (but not limited to):

- **Navigating employment and hiring processes for displaced professionals**: Including guidance on international recruitment systems (e.g., UN job portals), local market access, and inclusive hiring policies.
- **Inclusion mechanisms like quotas and reserved opportunities**: Advocating for refugee representation in coordination bodies, employment rosters like NORCAP's Expert Roaster (or convince NORCAP to establish an FDP expert pool) and capacity-sharing platforms.
- **Fundraising and resource mobilisation for RLOs and IDP-led organisations**: Practical sessions on proposal writing, donor mapping, grant application processes, and showcasing successful refugee/IDP-led funding models.
- **Donor and INGO capacity building by FDPs**: Facilitating two-way learning, where FDPs and RLOs/IDP-led organsiations can provide feedback to donors and agencies on effective engagement, partnership dynamics, and local accountability.
- **Shifting from practitioner-led to FDP-informed humanitarian planning**: Exploring models where displaced persons are co-creators in strategy, planning, and monitoring humanitarian responses supported by participatory tools and advisory roles.

4.8 Develop Indicators for Successful Meaningful Participation in the CEF

- Together with FDP representatives, **develop indicators for the above recommendations**, as well as other concrete initiatives that may be suggested in the process.

Table 2 presents a comprehensive matrix of recommendations largely informed by the findings each of which is categorised under key thematic areas such as platform design and accessibility, governance, capacity strengthening, compensation, engagement models, and content relevance and mapped against short-term, medium-term, and long-term implementation horizons, so as to provide a practical roadmap for phased action, allowing CEF stakeholders to prioritise immediate improvements while planning for sustainable, systemic transformation in the engagement of displaced populations.

Table 2: Recommendation Implementation Matrix

Recommendation	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
A. Platform Design and Accessibility			
1. Develop a standalone multilingual website for CEF optimized for mobile and low-bandwidth environments.			✓
2. Create and disseminate visual summaries, audio explainers, and translated micro-content for key documents.	✓		
3. Use WhatsApp and Telegram for grassroots engagement and feedback collection.	✓		
4. Build in feedback loops using tools like polls, SMS queries, or community-led monitoring.	✓	✓	
B. Governance and Advisory Board Inclusion			
5. Amend the Advisory Board ToR to include at least two reserved seats for representatives from displaced populations.	✓		
6. Provide stipends, interpretation, and mentorship for forcibly displaced board members.	✓	✓	
7. Introduce a rotating FDPs consultative panel at country and regional levels to inform global strategy.		✓	✓
C. Capacity Strengthening and Mentorship			

Recommendation	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
8. Co-create simplified versions of CCCM training and CE e-learning content with input from FDPs, in collaboration with IDP-led organisations, RLOs, local facilitators, and humanitarian training institutions.		✓	
9. Offer online and in-person mentorship programs for FDPs on policy advocacy, digital storytelling, and tool development.		✓	✓
10. Build regional resource hubs to deliver training in local languages with offline access.			✓
D. Compensating and Supporting Refugee Participation			
11. Institutionalise budget lines for displaced persons' participation including both IDPs and refugee and their representative organisations (RLOs and IDP-led groups), covering costs such as data, transport, interpretation, and honoraria.		✓	
12. Provide certificates of participation and publicly recognise contributions.	✓		
13. Institutionalize equitable compensation policies for all FDP contributions to CEF platforms and resources.		✓	✓
14. Align engagement timelines with FDP availability and ensure follow-up mechanisms are in place.	✓		
E. Focus on topics that improve service delivery for FDPs rather than online tools for project design and delivery			
15. Develop advocacy topics for enhanced professional participation of forcibly displaced in humanitarian workforce. For instance, holding discussions on the advantages of hiring displaced professionals and how that improves project design, services delivery and optimises resources for both the donors and INGOs.		✓	✓
16. Facilitate discussions through webinars, community chats, or collaborative events on topics such as inclusive partnerships, equitable hiring practices in the humanitarian workforce, inclusive funding mechanisms for RLOs and IDP-led organisations, and inclusive policy development. Where feasible, invite refugee professionals and displaced leaders to co-host or share lived experience insights on these topics.	✓	✓	
17. Find ways to invite refugee and IDP leaders to propose and discuss community issues that are affecting the lives of FDPs from where they operate.	✓	✓	
F. Suggested Tools, Platforms and Engagement Models			
18. Scale community-to-CEF engagement cycles by partnering with RLOs, national NGOs, and camp-level coordination bodies, to gather local experiences and insights from FDPs on a quarterly basis, feeding into CEF's global discussions, policy inputs, and strategic planning.		✓	✓

Recommendation	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
19. Leverage popular platforms like TikTok, Facebook Live, and radio for youth and community outreach.	✓	✓	
20. Partner with trusted RLOs to co-host forums, training, and advocacy events in displaced communities.	✓	✓	
21. CEF Coffee and Chat webinars should integrate multilingual captions, co-create content with RLOs, and disseminate short, mobile-friendly summaries through platforms commonly used by FDPs such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or community radio.	✓	✓	
22. Conduct targeted and context-specific engagements that reflect the diversity of FDP populations through events and content streams.	✓	✓	
23. **Relevant and Service-Oriented Topics to Attract and Empower FDP Participation:** To meaningfully engage FDPs in the CEF and ensure their sustained interest, the platform should curate and prioritize discussion topics that resonate with their immediate needs, long-term aspirations, and lived experiences. Engagement should move beyond abstract humanitarian concepts to tangible, service-delivery–linked themes that empower and inform. Suggested topics include: Navigating Employment and Hiring Processes for Displaced Professionals: Including guidance on international recruitment systems (e.g., UN job portals), local market access, and inclusive hiring policies.	✓	✓	
24. Inclusion Mechanisms like Quotas and Reserved Opportunities: Advocating for refugee representation in coordination bodies, employment rosters like NORCAP Expert Roaster (advocate for the establishment of the NORCAP Refugee Expert Pool) and capacity-sharing platforms.		✓	
25. Fundraising and Resource Mobilization for RLOs: Practical sessions on proposal writing, donor mapping, grant application processes, and showcasing successful refugee-led funding models	✓	✓	
26. Donor and INGO Capacity Building by Refugees: Facilitating two-way learning, where refugees and RLOs can provide feedback to donors and agencies on effective engagement, partnership dynamics, and local accountability.	✓	✓	
27. Shifting from Practitioner-Led to Refugee-Informed Humanitarian Planning: Exploring models where displaced persons are co-creators in strategy, planning, and monitoring humanitarian responses supported by participatory tools and advisory roles.		✓	✓
28. Create indicators of progress to track the implementation of the recommendations.	✓	✓	

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Annexes

Key Informant Interview Guide for Refugees, IDPs Leaders, and Humanitarian Practitioners

Purpose:

To gather insights from refugees, IDPs and practitioners on their experiences with and perceptions of participation in humanitarian coordination and learning platforms, especially the Community Engagement Forum (CEF), and to understand barriers, enablers, and recommendations for more meaningful inclusion.

Estimated Duration: 30–45 minutes
Format: In-person, phone, or online (Zoom, Teams, WhatsApp Calls, Google Meet etc.)

Informed Consent (To be read at the start of the interview)
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. We are conducting this study to learn more about how refugees, IDPs and practitioners are engaging in humanitarian coordination and learning forums such as the Community Engagement Forum (CEF). Your responses will help improve how these platforms work with and for displaced persons. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be linked to your name or organization. We may use anonymous quotes in our report. Do we have your permission to proceed with the interview? May we also record the conversation to ensure accuracy?
☐ Yes to proceed   ☐ Yes to record   ☐ No to record

SECTION 1: Respondent Profile
    1. **Background Information:**
        a. Country of residence/asylum: _____
        b. Displacement status: ☐ Refugee ☐ IDP ☐ Asylum-seeker ☐ Returnee
        c. Affiliation with a refugee-/IDP-led organization? If yes, name and your role:
        d. Languages spoken: _____
        e. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary/Other ☐ Prefer not to say
        f. Age range: ☐ 18–30 ☐ 31–50 ☐ Over 50

SECTION 2: Experience with Humanitarian Platforms
    2. **Participation History:**
        Have you participated in any humanitarian coordination platforms (e.g., CEF, CCCM, UNHCR meetings, NGO working groups)?

Probes: *How were you invited? Who supported your involvement? Was it one-time or ongoing?*

3. **Awareness and Use of CEF Platforms:**
Have you heard of the Community Engagement Forum (CEF)? If yes, what was your experience with the platform (e.g., website, webinars, email group, social media)?
Probes: *What kind of content do you remember? Was it useful? Did you understand it easily?*

4. **Barriers to Participation:**
What challenges do you face when trying to engage in coordination or learning platforms?
Probes:
   a. *Do you feel excluded or overlooked in decisions?*
   b. *What role do language or literacy play?*
   c. *Are financial or logistical issues (e.g., transport, internet, and data) barriers?*
   d. *Do you feel safe sharing your opinions in these spaces?*

SECTION 3: Quality and Value of Participation

5. **Meaningful Engagement:**
Have you had the opportunity to speak, lead, or influence any decisions or outcomes in such forums?
Probes:
   a. *Were your inputs followed up on or acknowledged?*
   b. *Did you receive any feedback or updates?*
   c. *Did you feel your participation was meaningful or symbolic?*

6. **Value of Participation:**
How relevant or helpful have these forums been to your work or community?
Probes:
   a. *Did you learn anything you applied back home or in your work?*
   b. *Were you able to build partnerships or gain recognition?*

SECTION 4: Inclusion and Representation

7. **Inclusivity:**
Do you feel that refugees, IDPs or practitioners like you are fully included in decision-making or learning platforms? Why or why not?
Probes:
   a. *Are there groups within the displaced community (e.g., women, youth, and persons with disabilities) who are left out?*
   b. *What would make participation more inclusive?*

8. **Accessibility of Platforms:**
How accessible are these forums (e.g., time, language, internet, and format)?
Probes:
   a. *Are webinars scheduled at appropriate times for your location?*
   b. *Is the platform mobile-friendly or easy to navigate?*
   c. *Do you need interpretation or simpler language?*

SECTION 5: Recommendations and Innovations

9. **Support Needs:**

What kind of support (e.g., training, funding, mentorship) would help you or others participate more effectively?

Probes:

    a. *Are there specific tools or resources that would make participation easier?*

    b. *Would honorariums or internet bundles help remove barriers?*

10. **Good Practices and Innovations:**

Have you seen any good examples (from your country or elsewhere) where refugee/IDP participation worked well?

Probes:

    a. *What made them work?*

    b. *Were they co-designed by displaced persons?*

11. **Improving CEF and Other Forums:**

What would you suggest to make platforms like the Community Engagement Forum more useful and inclusive?

Probes:

    a. *Should CEF include refugee-led working groups or leadership roles?*

    b. *How could content or language be made more accessible*?

SECTION 6: Final Thoughts

12. **Closing Question:**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with humanitarian coordination or learning platforms?

Annex II: List of Respondents

S/N	Category	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Country of residence
1	Refugee	Male	10-30	DRC	Rwanda
2	Refugee	Female	10-30	Rwanda	Kenya
3	IDP	Male	31-50	Nigeria	Nigeria
4	Refugee	Male	31-50	DRC	Uganda
5	Practitioner	Male	31-50	Nigeria	Somalia
6	Refugee	Male	31-50	DRC	Uganda
7	Refugee	Female	18-30	South Sudan	Uganda
8	Refugee	Male	31-50	Syria	Germany
9	Practitioner	Female	31-50	Ethiopia	Ethiopia
10	Refugee	Female	18-30	South Sudan	Uganda
11	IDP	Male	31-50	Iraq	Iraq
12	Refugee	Male	31-50	Brazil	France
13	Asylum Seeker	Female	31-50	Kenya	South Africa
14	Practitioner	Male	31-50	United Kingdom	United Kingdom
15	Refugee	Female	18-30	Burundi	Uganda
16	Practitioner	Female	31-50	Nigeria	Nigeria
17	Refugee	Male	31-50	South Sudan	Netherlands
18	Refugee	Female	31-50	Pakistan	Netherlands
19	Refugee	Male	18-30	South Sudan	Kenya
20	Refugee	Female	18-30	Ukraine	Romania
21	Practitioner	Female	31-50	Switzerland	
22	Practitioner	Female	31-50	Lebanon	Lebanon
23	Practitioner	Female	31-50	USA	Bangladesh
24	Practitioner	Female	Over 50	Syria	USA
25	Practitioner	Male	31-50	Yemen	Yemen