

2025 UNHCR Regional Consultations with NGOs East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

Global Compact on Refugees – A Regional GRF Stock-take

“From Pledges to Progress: Advancing protection and solutions outcomes for both displaced populations and host communities”

Virtual, 19 June 2025
10:00 - 12:00 (GMT+3)



Supported by UNHCR,
the UN Refugee Agency



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION



Summary Report

Executive Summary

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) sets out a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility sharing, acknowledging that sustainable solutions to refugees require robust international cooperation. It offers a comprehensive blueprint for governments, international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure host communities receive adequate support and refugees can lead productive lives.

In collaboration with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and World Vision International, the UNHCR Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region held a dedicated online Global Refugee Forum (GRF) stocktaking session – **“From Pledges to Progress: Advancing protection and solutions outcomes for both displaced populations and host communities”** – as part of the 2025 UNHCR Regional Consultations with NGOs. The online session provided a platform for Civil Society Organisations working in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region to showcase pledge implementation progress, share best practices, identify challenges, and jointly highlight gaps, barriers and possible solutions to pledge implementation in the lead-up to the [Global Refugee Forum Progress Review 2025](#).

Close to 150 participants drawn from NGOs, CSOs, UNHCR, refugee- and stateless-led organisations attended the stocktaking. Beyond financial and technical constraints, CSOs highlighted the need for enhanced participatory approaches in country-level GRF follow up, including in the upcoming national- and regional-level stocktaking meetings. This report provides an overview of the discussions and recommendations made.



Background

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) sets out a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility sharing, acknowledging that sustainable solutions to refugees require robust international cooperation. It offers a comprehensive blueprint for governments, international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure host communities receive adequate support and refugees can lead productive lives.

The GCR specifies that at the global level, a Global Refugee Forum (GRF) be convened every four years for States and other stakeholders “to announce concrete pledges and contributions towards the objectives of the GCR and to consider opportunities, challenges, and ways in which burden- and responsibility-sharing can be enhanced” and a high-level officials meeting (HLOM) be held at the mid-point between Forums to take stock of progress and chart directions for the next GRF.

The HLOM 2025, which will take place in December 2025, will consolidate stocktaking at country, regional, and global levels, assess progress toward supporting low and middle-income countries’ policy commitments through the multi-stakeholder pledging architecture, and focus on policy priorities and next steps in the lead-up to the GRF 2027. To streamline and structure the process, the multi-stakeholder pledges announced at the GRF 2023 will be tracked against the key outcomes that aim to ease the pressures on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third-country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

Against this backdrop, the UNHCR Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region will hold a dedicated 60-minute online GRF stocktaking session as part of the 2025 Regional NGO Consultations. This interactive session will serve as a critical platform for NGOs to showcase pledge implementation progress, share best practices, identify challenges, and highlight gaps in the lead-up to the HLOM 2025. The session outcomes will inform a regional NGO stocktaking report that will be submitted as input for the 2025 HLOM and the 2026 Global NGO Consultations.

Objectives of the event

- Discuss progress made by NGOs in advancing the implementation of relevant GRF pledges across key areas, with particular focus on protection and solutions, and discuss contributions of NGOs as part of a multi-stakeholder/ whole of society process;
- Evaluate how NGO activities align with and support government policy commitments in the region;
- Identify implementation challenges faced by NGOs in the implementation of GRF pledges, identify critical gaps and define key steps for the way forward as well as further support needed;
- Develop recommendations to inform future collaboration between UNHCR and NGOs and feed into the 76th Plenary Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee (ExCOM), the 2025 High-Level Officials Meeting and will contribute to and complement the Global Consultations in 2026.

Background documents/reports/guidance

- GRF Pledges and Contributions [dashboard](#)
- Sudan Regional Crisis Development Action [Platform](#)
- Global Refugee Forum Progress Review 2025 (HLOM)
- [Preparatory meetings and briefings](#) in 2025



Run of show:

- Segment I: Welcoming remarks by UNHCR Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, remarks by International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), followed by Scene Setting with a review of the latest regional pledge implementation progress and ongoing collaborative efforts towards pledge matching in support of host government policy pledges.
- Segment II: NGO GRF Pledge Implementation Success Stories demonstrating effective practices in advancing protection and solutions pledges. The panel will include speakers from the World Vision International, ADRA, East Africa Nationalities Network (EANN) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).
- Segment III: UNHCR moderated an interactive discussion on Barriers and Solutions to discuss key challenges or constraints faced by NGOs in the implementation of GRF pledges, identify critical gaps and define key steps for the way forward as well as further support needed.
- Closing segment: Summary of key takeaways and recommendations to inform future collaboration between UNHCR and NGOs by the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS).

Major discussion points:

- Forced displacement remains as one of the most pressing and persistent challenges in the EHAGL region – that now, more than ever, needs a significant change in how we approach displacement, how we finance displacement, but also how we hold ourselves accountable.
- Importance of the Civil Society in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), especially in promoting inclusion and transitioning from parallel service delivery to integrated national systems. Noted the 30-year history of NGO consultations and the critical role NGOs play in advocacy, technical expertise, and pledge implementation.
- Out of the 3,446 total pledges submitted globally at the two GRF fora (2019 & 2023), 884 were made by the civil society – of which 62% target the East and Horn of Africa region. However, despite progress on the ground, 33% of pledges lack implementation updates, highlighting the need for better reporting in the official GRF pledge tracking dashboard.
- GRF pledges have created a real momentum on how host governments are opening up the space for meaningful political dialogue and refugee approaches as evidenced in the progressive refugee legislation and to the promising early development approaches in emergencies.
- While GCR objectives 1 and 2 (easing pressures on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance) continue to demonstrate significant progress, there is an equally significant lack of progress on objectives 3 and 4 (expanding access to third-country solutions and supporting conditions in countries of origin) partially as a result of gaps/deduction of funding from major donors, bilaterals etc., but also the lack of political will of many (Western) countries to sustain achievements and expand resettlement and complementary pathways.
- The success stories shared were a testament that there has been significant progress in recent years on advancing inclusion, self-reliance, and more enabling legal environments in the EHAGL region. The growing interest in unlocking economic opportunities for leveraging newer, less traditional actors needs the support of all actors.
- The lack of documentation for displaced and stateless persons continues to deny many an opportunity to education, health care, financial inclusion, etc – underscoring the need



for sustained advocacy with policy makers, humanitarian and development actors for sustainable support. There is a growing urgency of collective action and sustained political will to address barriers to access including the cost of securing documentation, bureaucracy, among other challenges.

- Many countries are lagging behind in meeting key milestones on ending statelessness and other key issues, partly because refugees and stateless people are under-represented in the bodies that create and influence policy.
- The cuts to life saving assistance, shrinking resources and limited NGO operations in refugee-hosting areas following the current aid cuts, continue to erode trust from those we serve and undermine protection.
- Despite dwindling humanitarian funding, integration of refugee programs into long-term development has fostered resilience. Durable solutions can only come from greater integration of this important human resource potential that refugees present.
- Nexus programming, Market Systems Development, linkages with micro-finance institutions and other sustainable approaches give displaced communities more options to sustain their livelihoods especially with the reduction in different forms of support.
- The sustained commitment of partners driving protection and solutions for displaced and host communities is commendable. Yet, to make these efforts truly transformative, meaningful collaboration with RLOs/CBOs is key. RLOs are not just stakeholders, they are essential partners whose lived experience shapes relevant, lasting impact.
- Restrictive laws, administrative practices and bureaucratic bottlenecks continue to be the main stumbling blocks against meaningful integration of refugees. NGOs and RLOs have a critical role to play in creating awareness, building capacity and providing technical and financial resources to governments.
- Addressing inconsistencies in national CRRF/GRF structures, which vary in strength and functionality across countries creating barriers to effective implementation.
- While challenges remain, strategic investments in local actors, youth leadership, and green solutions are paying off and deserve continued prioritization.
- Barriers to GRF implementation identified by participants include funding constraints, policy and regulatory restrictions, limited data and monitoring, coordination gaps across countries, and continued fragility and conflict in the region
- Successful approaches used to overcome implementation barriers include internal or private funding, increased host government engagement, partnerships with others, co-financing, localization, diversifying donors, cost-reduction, innovation, meaningful refugee and host community involvement, among others.



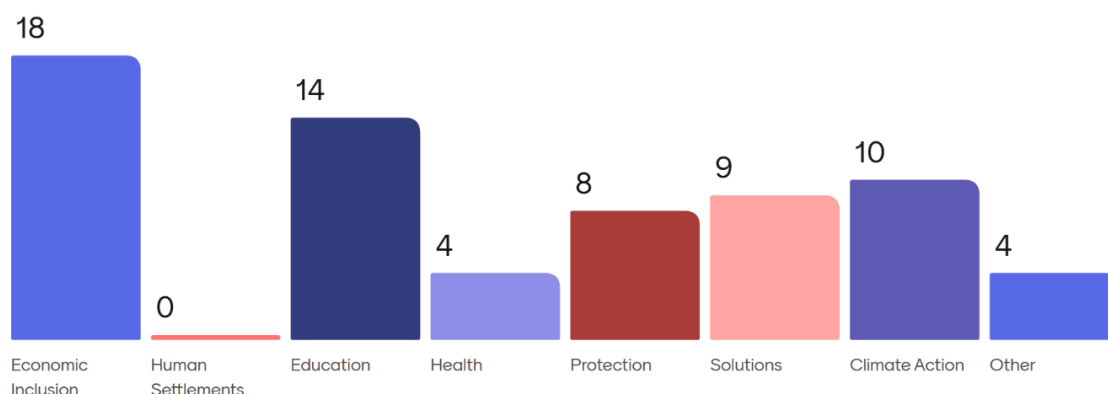
Recommendations

- **Strengthen accountability and political commitment:** All pledging entities - States, Donors, Civil Society, and others - must be held accountable to the GRF pledges made, and ensure the pledges are translated into sustained political commitment. Ensure sustained stock-taking of how progress made and challenges through honest and meaningful political dialogue - and address the barriers that continue to keep people trapped in humanitarian cycles
- **Remove restrictions on displaced populations:** Sustainable and durable solutions will be achieved – not when refugees are stuck in humanitarian funding cycles – but when displaced communities are empowered through freedom of movement, the right to work and inclusion in decision making processes that affect their futures. Support localization and refugee-led organizations, not just as implementers but as strategic partners that are close to communities and that can help in design responses that reflect local realities
- **Bridge the humanitarian-development divide:** Address the growing resource gap by doing more to bridge the humanitarian-development divide, but we also must deliberately tap into nontraditional funding through creative engagement while including climate adaptation, urban resilience and private sector investment. Be more creative and innovative around how we engage politically, while maintaining our humanitarian standards and humanitarian principles.
- **Flexible, longer-term funding to refugees in host countries and to Countries of Asylum:** Investments and financing models need to be bold, but also flexible enough to reach the right actors at the right time. This includes also how we engage refugee-led and local organizations more meaningfully.
- **Improve coordination and coherence across systems:** UNHCR has critical leadership role in building a coherent system that must be exercised with clarity and not hindered by institutional silos, through more innovative ways that allows us to address the current funding crisis. There is need to bring all stakeholders working with Refugee Programming and Host Communities to clear understand interlinkages so that collective gain of Refugee and HC programme can be clearly articulated and linked. Inter-organizational linkages may need to be enhanced to build synergies and avoid silo operations.

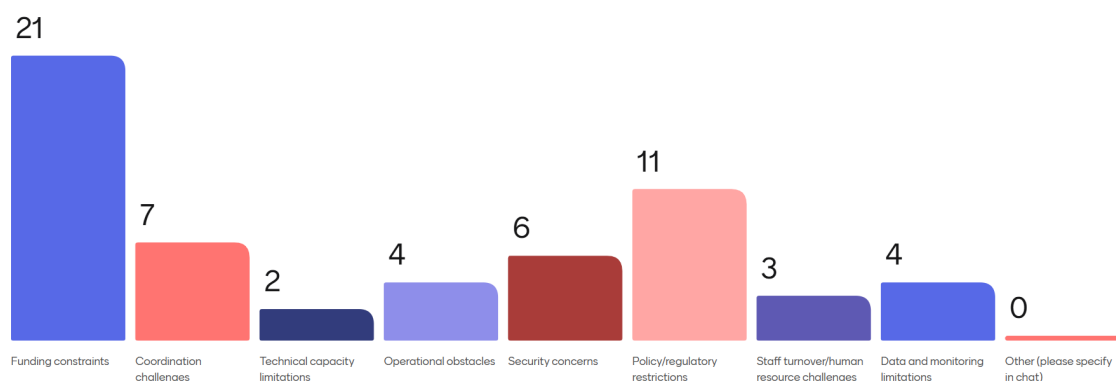
Annex 1 - Outcomes of the Online survey results

A review of the pledge categories below shows that the sectors which have the most pledges are equally the sectors that have experienced significant budget cuts. This raises a significant challenge as to whether the pledges will be made. There is need for more advocacy to ensure that the traction towards progress is not lost.

Which pledge category is your organization implementing?



What are the top barriers to pledge implementation in your context?



Share one successful approach you've used to overcome implementation barriers. (in one or two words.)





Annex 2 - Event Programme

Welcome and Opening remarks

Moderator: **Barzil Mwawughanga**, Humanitarian Emergency Affairs/Anticipatory Action Advisor, World Vision International East Africa Region

Remarks by **Catherine Wiesner**, Head of External Engagement Service, Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, UNHCR

Remarks by **Davina Saïd**, Head of Forced Displacement, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

Setting the Scene by **Anna Maria Leichtfried**, Senior Development Partnerships Officer, Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, UNHCR

Impact Spotlights: NGO GRF Pledge Implementation Success Stories

Moderator: **Barzil Mwawughanga**

Nosizi Reuben Dube, Global Youth Ambassador and former Stateless Person in Kenya

Robert Waweru, Program Advisor, Citizenship and Statelessness, Kenya Human Rights Commission (representing the East Africa Nationalities Network)

Jacqueline Rioba Nyachieo, Director, Program Development and Grants Acquisition, East Africa Regional Office, World Vision International

Hannah Ndung'u, Emergency Management Director, ADRA Africa Regional Office

Harriet Holder, Regional Head of Programmes – East Africa and Great Lakes, Danish Refugee Council

Interactive Plenary Discussion: Barriers and Solutions

Discussants:

Joanina Karugaba, Senior Inter-Agency Coordinator, Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, UNHCR

Daniel Mekonnen, Head of Advocacy, COHERE

Participants discuss key challenges or constraints faced by NGOs in the implementation of GRF pledges, identify critical gaps and define key steps for the way forward as well as further support needed.

Mentimeter Activity: Top barriers to pledge implementation in your context; and how to overcome these challenges / what support do you need to advance implementation before the HLOM?

Annex 3 - Participants and Organizations that attended the session

36 Organizations*: ADRA, COOPI, DRC, EU ECHO, GIZ, HAS UGANDA, HDC AFRICA, HIAS, ICVA NETWORK, IRC, JRS, KCA, KHRC, LWF, NRC, OXFAM INTERNATIONAL, PLAN INTERNATIONAL, RAAGSAN, RCK KENYA, REACH FOR CHANGE, REFUGEES SEAT, REFUGEPOINT, RefuSHE, RELON UGANDA, SAVE THE CHILDREN, TPO, UNHCR, VISION FUND, WATSON, ALIGHT, COHERE, WVI, ZOA.

*of the close to 150 participants that attended, 41 attendees are not associated with organizations.

