

Briefing note: The Global Refugee Forum Multi-stakeholder Pledge on Economic Inclusion and Social Protection and the Intersection with GRF Policy and Evidence Pledge Initiatives in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda

Background

The Global Refugee Forum [Pledge on Economic Inclusion and Social Protection](#) is a multi-stakeholder initiative involving 270 pledges by supporters and committed investments of over 1 billion USD; 88 states are involved in the pledge, including Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.¹ The pledge aims to **galvanize concrete commitments from a wide range of stakeholders to advance the self-reliance of refugees, other forcibly displaced and stateless people, and host communities**. It focuses on three thematic areas of work: law and policy; programs; and evidence. The thematic focus areas of the [Re:BUILD Research Symposium](#) – Access to Finance and Microenterprises; Access to Social Protection; Access to Jobs and Skills Development; and Access to Justice and Legal Identity – are interwoven and represented across these three pillars.

Law and policy pledge commitments made by States aim to build enabling environments to promote equal access to economic opportunities, employment, decent work, and inclusive government social protection systems. This includes the right to work, rights at work and social rights through access to labor markets, and contributory and non-contributory social protection systems to address poverty and vulnerabilities across all stages of life. Pledges support related rights such as freedom of movement, access to individual registration, documentation, and legal status, as well as access to productive land, education and training, bank accounts, and other financial services. Policy pledges also assist States and local governments in implementing national legislative frameworks, preparing for future needs and shocks, and promoting strategies that mutually benefit refugees, other forcibly displaced and stateless people, and host communities.

Program pledge commitments support socio-economic inclusion and enhance employability and employment, including through: strengthening pathways to inclusion in and adjustment of government social protection systems to address poverty and vulnerabilities across all stages of life; implementing programmes and providing technical assistance to facilitate self-reliance for people of all ages, genders, and diverse groups; creating decent employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in local and digital economies; and supporting local economic development through intersectional area-based approaches in urban and rural contexts. In addition, pledges support the development of innovative, flexible, and predictable funding models to support inclusion and allow for sustainable funding to local governments and communities, including organizations led by forcibly displaced persons, alongside the expanded engagement of development partners and the private sector. Many pledges include outcomes for vulnerable groups, such as women, children, youth and adolescents, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Data and evidence pledge commitments support strengthened planning, effective programming, and inclusive law and policy-making through the provision of tools, expertise, and data disaggregated by

¹ The Multistakeholder Pledge on Economic Inclusion and Social Protection is led by the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) and UNHCR with the United States, Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa, Denmark, Germany, Mexico and Mauritania. Technical co-conveners pledge include: the International Labour Organization, Innovations for Poverty Action, Poverty Alleviation Coalition, and Tent Partnership for Refugees. Technical contributors include: International Finance Corporation (IFC), World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), OECD, UNICEF, ODI, and the European Union.

age, gender, and disability status to advance measurement and build the evidence base related to self-reliance, economic inclusion, and social protection outcomes.

For state actors, the pledge platform serves a critical coordination role. Importantly, the pledge and a newly established, associated donor group on self-reliance promote synergies and matching opportunities between pledging entities and other stakeholders. The pledge conveners – through the evidence pillar – also aim to actively forge working partnerships between researchers and policymakers with the goal of expanding evidence that responds to the needs of policymakers while centering the perspectives and voices of persons with lived experience of forced displacement.

Other relevant policies and coordination structures

The multi-stakeholder pledge on Economic Inclusion and Social Protection draws from, and is situated within, the context of ongoing work of other policy initiatives and coordination structures, including:

The [Global Compact for Refugees \(GCR\)](#), endorsed by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2018, continues to guide regional policy and country-level initiatives related to refugee response efforts by providing a framework for resource planning, responsibility sharing, and international cooperation.

The [Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework \(CRRF\)](#), as part of the GCR, provides guidelines to be applied to situations of forced displacement in order to achieve a more predictable and effective response implemented by a broad range of stakeholders.

The [Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods, and Self-Reliance](#), adopted in 2019 by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa (IGAD) to advance livelihood opportunities and economic inclusion of refugees, is one of the key mechanisms utilized regionally to advance the GCR and CRRF. It provides a common plan of action, supports national implementation roadmaps, and outlines commitments toward durable solutions that address the socio-economic challenges affecting refugees, returnees, and host communities in the region.

As a co-convenor of the multi-stakeholder pledge on Economic Inclusion and Social Protection, IGAD convenes and supports member states in East Africa in promoting joint development strategies, harmonizing policies, and creating an enabling environment for economic and social protection initiatives. IGAD also supports states in mobilizing resources, strengthening coordination efforts, building technical capacity, and disseminating information in the region.

Overview of 2023 Global Refugee Forum Country Pledges

Below are highlights from the State pledges of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda:²

Ethiopia: The Government of Ethiopia’s pledges at the Global Refugee Forum focused on supporting and enhancing the ongoing efforts of the government to improve the lives of refugees and host communities while also aligning with national development plans and the feasibility of implementation within a four-year period. Most relevant to the thematic areas of the symposium are the Government of Ethiopia’s pledges on human settlement, through which the government reaffirmed its commitment to integrate refugees who have been living in the country for a protracted period of time by transforming some of the refugee camps into urban settlements and ensuring their social and economic participation.

² The State summaries here include highlights, only. For the full text of the State and other pledges, please visit the Global Refugee Forum [website](#).

The settlement strategy aims to include service provision to refugees in the national systems, such as basic and social services, as well as other services offered by local governments to Ethiopians.

Related to the thematic focus areas of the symposium, the Government of Ethiopia put forward several pledges to include or further expand the inclusion of refugees into existing national systems, e.g., WASH Services, Tertiary Education, Central Statistics, National ID, Gender-Based Violence Services (GBV) and Secondary Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Recognizing the central role of the private sector in fostering economic growth, the government has also committed to improvements in the legal, regulatory, and institutional frameworks, as well as relevant infrastructure. Additional pledge commitments include access to land for irrigation, support for cooperatives and agricultural value chain activities, and improvements to digital connectivity in refugee-hosting areas to promote financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and remote work.

Kenya: The Government of Kenya's pledge commitments focused on initiatives to improve conditions for refugees and host communities, building on the foundational legal framework of the Refugees Act No. 10 of 2021, which came online in 2022 and enhanced access to documentation, services, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, pledges build on policies and frameworks such as Kenya's Vision 2030, the Bottom-Up Economic Transformative Agenda (BETA), County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030).

Specific pledges that align with the thematic focus areas of the symposium include: the development and rollout of the Shirika plan; enhancements of access to registration, documentation, and services for public and private sectors for refugees; and labor market policies to facilitate socio-economic inclusion. Implementation will be overseen by the Ministry of Interior and National Administration and the State Department for Immigration and Citizen Services and the Department of Refugee Services. The Shirika plan aims to transform camps into integrated settlements to ensure the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and host communities by 2027. Registration and documentation pledges include enhancing progressive access to government services through the digitization of services that integrate refugee data into the e-citizen digital ecosystem and the National Master Database. Social protection pledges include, for example, the establishment of mechanisms that enable refugees with professional skills and trades to exercise their rights under the Free Movement protocols, facilitating their engagement in formal and self-employment within the labor market.

Uganda: As a co-convenor of the 2023 GRF, the Government of Uganda contributed a number of concrete pledges – complementary to their national jobs and livelihood response plan – across the thematic areas of: Resilience and Self-Reliance; Climate Change; Transition Management and Burden Sharing; Localization; and Durable Solutions. Relevant to the focus areas of the symposium and falling under the resilience, livelihoods, and self-reliance thematic bucket of pledges, the Government of Uganda pledged to create up to 300,000 viable economic opportunities for refugees and host communities by 2027 by including refugees in agricultural value chains, increasing agricultural production and productivity, enabling private sector investments, promoting graduation and market systems development approaches, increasing access to formal and non-formal vocational skills training, and promoting the development of market-relevant skills and employment creation.

A number of Ministries will contribute to the achievement of the pledge, including the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Cooperatives and the CRRF secretariat within the Office of the Prime Minister. Sub-workstreams range from establishing regional job

centers and developing national minimum standard indicators to establishing an incentives regime for refugee hosting districts to stimulate investment and trade and promote climate-smart agricultural practices.

For all three countries, the 2023 GRF pledges are anchored within existing policy frameworks. In Ethiopia, this includes Proclamations No. 1110/2019 (related to refugee laws and progressive rights), and No. 1180/2020 (related to investment and the role of the private sector) and Directives on the Procedures for Refugees' Right to Work (No. 10/2024); Conditions for Movement and Residence of Refugees Outside of Camps; and Refugees and Returnees Grievances and Appeals Handling. In Kenya, this includes the Refugee Act of 2021 (effective February 2022). In Uganda, this includes the Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response plan for Refugees and Host Communities (April 2021) and the Uganda Refugee Act (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010), which guarantee refugee rights, protection, and administrative matters for refugees and asylum seekers. All three countries are also signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol, as well as the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

Commitments and Progress Toward Goals

Since December 2023, significant progress has been made in all three countries toward the intended 2023 GRF pledge outcomes, with a variety of regional initiatives supported by a wide range of stakeholders contributing to the evidence base and coordination of efforts. A few highlights from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda as of October 2024 include:

- Leadership by the Government of Ethiopia on a new directive to enhance the inclusion of refugees in national systems, digital connectivity, and access to national IDs and work permits, in addition to ongoing work in Kebribeyah town in the Somali regional state to merge refugee camps and host communities. These efforts are being supported by donors, including through the Netherlands'-funded PROSPECTS Partnership and 4.2 million Euro in new funding commitments from Germany since December 2023.
- Continued investment by the [IKEA Foundation](#) to support the joint pledges made by the cities of Nairobi and Kampala through [Re:BUiLD Program](#), which seeks to support inclusive access to services for refugees and vulnerable hosts in urban cities.
- Leadership by the Government of Kenya to provide comprehensive refugee access to social protection systems through its Enhanced Single Registry, as well as a range of social protection programmes and labor market policies.
- Commitments of 800 million Euro by the Government of the Netherlands in new funding for the PROSPECTS Partnership, phase two, which will target work in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and five other countries. The initiative, implemented by UNHCR, IFC, ILO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, aims to strengthen economic inclusion and social protection for displaced populations and host communities through a wide range of interventions. Notable progress already underway includes the planned creation of 75,000 employment opportunities by the end of 2024 toward the goal of 200,000 by 2027.
- Establishment of a partnership between WFP and the government of Uganda, which is contributing to a new self-reliance model for refugees and host communities, under which the government is also developing a framework for measurement, stakeholder engagement, and indicator development in coordination with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics. The Government of

Denmark is supporting the Ugandan refugee response to enhance refugee resilience and self-reliance while addressing the socio-economic needs of host communities.

- Completion of a national consultation on the Kampala declaration, which took place in Kenya in February 2024 (national consultations were held in Ethiopia and Uganda in late 2023).
- Launch of a new program on financial inclusion by the African Development Bank looking at key issues related to self-reliance and an upcoming [event](#) hosted by the African Union - African Skills Week 2024 - focusing on 21st century jobs.
- Launch of the Shirika Plan, which is the Government of Kenya's pioneering innovative approach for the Refugee management in Kenya and is aimed at transforming the refugee camps into integrated settlements and supporting the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and hosting communities in Garissa, Turkana, and urban areas.
- Forthcoming high-level workshop to validate the findings and recommendations of the regional investment climate report – led by IGAD, the African Development Bank, UNHCR, and the East African Community (EAC) – and to deliberate on policy recommendations to improve the investment climate regionally, with a focus on women's economic empowerment.

This briefing note was prepared by the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative with review and inputs from IGAD and UNHCR.