



NGOs urge global leaders to bridge the responsibility gap for refugee hosting and protection in East Africa

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As the second Global Refugee Forum (GRF) is about to take place in Geneva this week, the Inter-Agency Working Group for East and Central Africa (IAWG) urges world leaders to honour their commitment to support refugees and the countries hosting them, through increased, equitable responsibility-sharing.

Nearly [four million](#) refugees are hosted by just four countries in East Africa - that is over [10 percent](#) of the global number of refugees. Uganda, Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia are countries of asylum for millions of people fleeing conflict and climate change, many of whom are experiencing protracted displacement. Yet those host countries already face a multitude of challenges ranging from violent conflict and continued mass displacement to chronic poverty, climate change, and domestic food insecurity, which are crippling their ability to provide sustained and adequate financial support for refugees and asylum seekers. Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda are amongst the top 10 refugee hosting countries globally, while also ranking in the top 20 countries with the lowest [Human Development Index](#).

As the number of refugees in the region continues to rise, finding lasting and fair solutions to protect the human rights and safety of all refugees is vital. Yet, despite widely endorsing the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018 - a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing - it is clear that higher income countries are falling short of their commitment to support refugees and host countries in the region.

The funding gap faced by UNHCR for those four countries combined was almost [50 percent](#) in 2022. In Uganda, host to some 1.5 million refugees, dwindling funds for the refugee response have resulted in steep [cuts to food assistance](#) this year, forcing many refugees to rely on dangerous coping mechanisms to survive, such as child marriage, taking debt, or removing children from school. In Sudan, even before the conflict erupted in April 2023, over one million refugees were already struggling to secure basic necessities such as food and water.

The refugee population is not only increasing, but their needs are changing. With limited support available in dedicated camps and settlements, [a growing number of refugees](#) move to cities in search of new opportunities to provide for themselves and their families. However, urban-based refugees are too often overlooked within refugee responses, and are sometimes ineligible for humanitarian assistance. As a result, they are forced to compete with urban and low-income host communities, compounding the strain on limited services and resources in the host country.

Countries implementing open-door policies towards refugees, such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda, often do so not only out of solidarity, but also because they understand the positive contributions which refugees can make to local economies. When the international community fails to meet their responsibility-sharing commitment, the financial burden falls on host countries, and these policies [become at risk](#). People fleeing

violent conflict or hunger in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan or Somalia have so far been able to cross borders freely and receive refugee status and protection and assistance on the other side, but the frustration of host governments is increasingly palpable. In Uganda, government officials have [publicly questioned](#) the feasibility of their welcoming refugee model going forward, unless increased international support is secured.

The GRF presents a crucial opportunity for the world's governments to demonstrate their willingness to do more, and better, on refugee protection and responsibility-sharing through renewed pledging commitments. However, four years after the first GRF took place, we know that pledges, by their voluntary and non-binding nature, may not be enough to guarantee stronger protection and support for refugees and host communities. Strong political will and solid leadership will be needed to achieve the objectives set out in the Global Compact on Refugees.

Ahead of the Global Refugee Forum, we, the undersigned organisations working with refugees and their host communities across East Africa, urge global leaders to meet their moral obligation and international commitments to share responsibility for the world's refugees, and provide sustained, equitable support to refugees and asylum seekers, wherever they may be. Specifically:

- **Global donors must urgently fully fund the Humanitarian and Refugee Response Plans of host countries in East and Central Africa.** Given the scale of the funding gap, this will also require broadening the resource base through, for example, the engagement of development donors and “non-traditional donors” such as international financial institutions, and some of the high- and middle- income countries that should do more to share responsibility for international refugee protection such as China, Japan, or Saudi Arabia.
- **Host countries must renew their commitments under the Global Compact for Refugees, and maintain open borders and asylum space for people fleeing conflict and/or the impacts of climate change,** enabling them to seek safety and access life-saving protection and assistance. **They should also continue and strengthen support for refugees’ self-reliance** through a range of rights including the right to work, to access education, and freedom of movement, and **facilitate refugees’ access to durable solutions,** including local integration, through enabling policy and legislative frameworks.
- **In the medium to long term, global donors must increase their flexible, multi-year, predictable funding in a conflict- and gender-sensitive manner** so that refugee hosting countries can adequately respond to the needs of both refugees and host communities. A greater proportion of this funding must be channelled via local actors (including refugee-led organisations) with deeper knowledge of local contexts and priorities, and refugees should be meaningfully engaged at all levels of decision making about the use of this funding in order to leave no one behind, especially urban-based refugees.
- **Global governments should commit to addressing the root causes of displacement in East and Central Africa.** This includes the use of increased diplomatic engagement on protracted crises in the region to reach political solutions to conflicts that drive displacement, and restore a conducive environment for safe, sustainable returns in the countries of origin.
- **High-income countries should expand resettlement programmes to ensure that more vulnerable refugees are safely resettled to third countries.** They should also increase investments in complementary pathways for refugees, including through education and employment opportunities, as well as family reunification.

Signatories:

