



PRESS RELEASE

Refugee Participation Quadruples at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, but the International Community Still Falls Short

Geneva, December 15, 2023: The world's largest gathering on refugees concludes today with more refugee participation than ever before, yet refugees continue to suffer. The second Global Refugee Forum (GRF) – a three day pledging conference in Geneva, Switzerland – raised over \$2.2 billion financial commitments and over 1 million resettlement pledges. Despite these commitments, refugees continue to face hostility and lack the support they need from the international community to access their rights and live in dignity.

A highlight of the Forum was refugee participation. At the 2019 GRF only 72 refugees were in attendance. Of the 4,200 participants at the 2023 GRF, over 300 of them were people with lived experience of forced displacement. Among them, the Global Refugee-led Network (GRN) had a diverse delegation of 38, coming from all six of its regional chapters (North America, Latin America, Europe, MENA, Africa, and the Asia Pacific). The enthusiasm for participation of affected communities in the policymaking processes that concern them was echoed by pledges announced by diverse stakeholders. Over 100 multi-stakeholders signed up to the Refugee Participation Pledge, including 15 States ahead of and during the GRF. Finally, at the High-Level Parallel Event on Meaningful Refugee Participation on 14 December, co-chairs GRN and R-SEAT announced the launch of the Multistakeholder Coalition on Meaningful Refugee Participation – a landmark initiative, also co-chaired by the Netherlands and Australia. The participation and influence of refugees and their organizations and initiatives at the GRF – including in the innovative, refugee-led R-SPACE at Impact Hub Geneva – was palpable.

Despite these achievements, there is still work to be done. Barriers still exist for meaningful refugee participation; several of the refugee delegates accredited to participate in the Forum were denied visas, the majority of whom live in Africa. The event was not as high-level as anticipated, with only five heads of state or government in attendance. Critically, though the numbers of refugees in attendance have increased overall, they continue to represent less than 10% of the participants to the GRF.

“We are proud that we were able to work with our allies to increase refugee participation at GRF 2023,” said Amer Alkayed, Chairperson of the GRN. “Nevertheless, the international community cannot use commitments to refugee participation to cover up contradicting actions at home.”

In the same week that the international community convened in Geneva, an asylum seeker died at sea [while seeking safety](#). States came close to cutting [funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency \(UNRWA\)](#) while Palestinians in the Gaza Strip face bombardments that displace them from their homes and [pushbacks of refugees and asylum seekers](#) continue to be normalized in the absence of equitable responsibility sharing. .

Furthermore, the pledges announced at the GRF fell significantly short of the actual needs of refugees and host communities. Despite the financial commitments raised this week, the amount is dwarfed in comparison to financial pledges announced at the 2019 GRF and are not enough for supporting the numbers of refugees globally. Financial commitments have plateaued all while the total number of people in the world that are forcibly displaced. Numerous protracted refugee situations, or situations where refugees are displaced for more than 10 years, continue to be underfunded.

“The 2023 GRF showed us that progress can be made, but we need to ensure that participation is not tokenized.” Said Najeeba Wazefadoost, CEO of the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees and Asia Pacific Representative to the GRN. “We need a systemic power shift towards refugee leaders and local actors. This entails transferring power, decision making, funding and other resources to refugee-led organizations and those most impacted by displacement.”

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