



## **OUTCOME DOCUMENT: KEY MESSAGES FROM REFUGEE LEADERS AT THE GRF 2023**

### **VIRTUAL REFUGEE TOWN HALL**

*HOSTED BY THE GLOBAL REFUGEE-LED NETWORK*

*4 DECEMBER 2023*

The 2023 Global Refugee Forum takes place in a sobering context. Since the last GRF in 2019, rates of forced displacement have only worsened. As of October 2023, UNHCR reported over 114 million people are now displaced worldwide due to conflict and human rights violations, meaning that the number of displaced people worldwide has almost doubled in the last five years. The number of refugees fleeing individual persecution, however, remains marginal, resulting in some donor countries questioning the validity of the refugee convention. Many countries that host refugees are increasingly questioning the principle of non-refoulement, in particular in response to an erosion of international responsibility sharing for supporting refugees and host communities. Protracted displacement situations across the globe leaving refugees in situations of legal limbo; as well as more recent conflicts such as the war in Ukraine; conflicts in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Myanmar; droughts, floods, and insecurity in Somalia; the prolonged humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and Syria; and the recently renewed violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are among the main drivers behind worsening displacement rates.

Continually rising numbers of refugees and protracted displacement situations have outpaced the availability of solutions, and there is a continued erosion in responsibility sharing, with low- and middle-income and neighboring countries continuing to host approximately 75% of the refugee population, resulting in continuing inequities. -Donor States continue to trend towards securitizing, and externalizing migration policies, including by outsourcing their responsibilities to refugees to the “Global South” through humanitarian deals and other third-country arrangements that contradict their existing commitments. Meanwhile, COVID-19 allowed States to close borders in contravention to their international obligations. These COVID-era policies lasted longer than the pandemic in many contexts and continue to exacerbate delays to regularization and asylum processes.

During the GRF, members of the GRN can call on States and other stakeholders to:

- Move beyond *ad hoc* approaches and expand and systematize meaningful refugee participation. Stakeholders can support this goal by (1) signing up to the multi-stakeholder Meaningful Refugee Participation Pledge; (2) joining the Multi-Stakeholder Coalition on Meaningful Refugee Participation; (3) and securing a refugee observer seat to UNHCR’s governing body, the Executive Committee (EXCOM), akin to the status given to NGOs.
- Increase quality and sustainable direct funding to refugee-led organizations and initiatives to promote refugee self-reliance and advance equitable partnerships, as well as ensure the inclusion

of refugees and their organizations and initiatives in the wider framework of the localization of aid and development. These efforts must include refugee-led organizations and initiatives that are led by refugees in all their diversity, including women-led, LGBTQIA+ and persons of disability-led organizations.

- Establish new pathways to regularize migration status in countries of asylum, clearly distinguished from local integration as a durable solution. Refugees must not be left in protracted situations of legal limbo. And, where relevant, measures should seek to go beyond currently existing legal frameworks so that refugees and asylum seekers can access their full political, social, and economic rights within wider frameworks of peacebuilding, safe and dignified returns, and local integration.
- End the detention of asylum seekers, externalization of asylum obligations, and forced returns. These practices are illegal, in violation of refugee human rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention, and in contravention to the principle of non-refoulement. Research and evidence on the effectiveness of securitization in stemming migrant movements are mixed. One should question the cost both financially and politically of these policies. Refugee participation offers an alternative that is cost efficient and respects human rights.
- Review and implement changes in existing restrictions on domestic and international mobility that are hampering refugee self-reliance. Restrictions on both domestic and international travel hinder refugees' mobility. The removal and/or easing of these restrictions will enable refugees to access a wider range of job opportunities that allow them to become self-sufficient.
- Ensure predictable and sustained investments in countries hosting refugees to enable access to basic social and economic rights for refugees and host communities in all their diversity within a wider framework of local integration, including access to health services, education (including higher and vocational education), employment, shelter, humanitarian assistance, digital technology, and social protection, amongst other services.

**Notes:**

The key messages above have been developed through a consultation process involving representatives of the six regional chapters in the GRN (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, and North America), and a Virtual Refugee Town Hall organized on 4 December that brought together over 50 refugee leaders to develop and shape key messages from refugees for the GRF. These key messages were shared by representatives of the Global Refugee-led Network's delegation with key stakeholders at diverse spaces at the second Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva between 13-15 December 2023.