



# A Critical Turning Point

## Three Ways States and Donors can use the Global Refugee Forum to Advance Durable Solutions for Refugees in Uganda

As world leaders gather for the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) next month, they must commit to concrete actions that will make achieving a durable solution in safety and dignity a realistic prospect for refugees in Uganda.

### A refugee paradise?

Uganda is often referred to as a “refugee paradise”, a place where people fleeing from violence, conflict, and persecution are allowed to move relatively freely, find work, and access the same services as Ugandan citizens. When arriving in Uganda, refugees are allocated plots of land to build their house and cultivate small gardens. Uganda boasts one of the most progressive refugee policies in the world, recognising that hosting and granting rights to refugees will enable benefits to everyone in the country. Yet today, it is clear this policy framework alone has not been enough to support refugees to become self-reliant and flourish in Ugandan society. Many of them continue to rely on humanitarian aid to cover their basic needs, even decades after arriving in Uganda. While the fragile economic situation in Uganda is a contributory factor, the lack of structured, long term donor support has also played a critical role in weakening initiatives to develop meaningful durable solutions pathways for refugees in the country.

### Failed solidarity

As part of the New York Declaration in 2016, and the Global Compact for Refugees in 2018, the international community committed to equitable and predictable responsibility sharing for refugee support. In Uganda, they have failed. In 2022, Uganda received only 45 percent of the funding required for the refugee response and as of November 2023, a mere 22 percent of the refugee response has been funded for this year. This growing financing gap has resulted in some major problems in the refugee response, including overstretched humanitarian resources and the need to repeatedly reprioritise who receives assistance. Part of the problem lies in the fact that humanitarian donors and actors have so far shouldered the refugee response on their own in Uganda, addressing what are mostly development needs through limited humanitarian relief. Development donors and actors are largely absent from refugee-hosting districts, even though those districts are some of the poorest in the country and warrant long-term, development support. This has led to a vicious cycle of aid dependency for refugees, and a lack of prospects for durable solutions. Without commensurate development support to transition people off humanitarian assistance, and with a continued lack of availability and flexibility of funds for when emergencies arise, the situation will only get worse.

### The GRF opportunity

Uganda is host to refugees from some of the most complex and protracted conflict situations in Africa, including ones in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, and continues to receive about 10,000 people seeking asylum each month. The government of Uganda has so far kept its widely acclaimed open-door progressive policy for refugees, but questions arise about how long this can last. Ugandan officials themselves are increasingly expressing concerns about the ability to maintain this policy, given the lack of international support they receive. The government of Uganda has shown good faith in creating conditions for refugees to thrive, but they cannot bear this responsibility alone. Finding ways to support refugees living in Uganda to not only survive, but also find ways to become self-reliant and achieve durable solutions should be front and centre in discussions and pledges at this year’s GRF.

**1**

**In line with their responsibility sharing commitment, global donors, including both humanitarian and development donors, as well as global banks and financial institutions, must work together to find new ways of funding the Uganda refugee response, now and for the long-term.**

While responsibility sharing, as it is defined in the GCR, can take many forms, financial support to host countries remains essential. Donors must increase their long-term, multiyear, predictable funding so that refugee-hosting countries can respond adequately to the needs of both refugees and host communities. More importantly, in Uganda, the pool of donors contributing to the refugee response must widen, to include more development financing. A greater proportion of this funding must also be channelled via local actors with deeper knowledge of local contexts and priorities. Specifically:

- Global donors should urgently pledge enough funds to the Uganda refugee response to allow humanitarian actors to provide life-saving assistance to all vulnerable refugees and prevent the loss of essential coping capacities.
- Development donors should significantly increase their contributions to the refugee response in Uganda, which would not only allow to safeguard humanitarian resources for life-saving assistance, but also to create an environment where refugees can become self-reliant and find a sustainable settlement option.
- Global financial institutions should explore and commit to more innovative forms of support which can improve the macro-economic conditions in Uganda for hosting refugees, including debt relief and expanding the fiscal space.

**2**

**Global donors must use the GRF as an opportunity to engage with the government of Uganda and other actors in the refugee response, including refugees themselves, on the creation of a dedicated coordination platform aimed at greater communication, coordination, and planning for durable solutions for refugees.**

Gaps in coordination between all actors in the Uganda refugee response seem to be central to the international community's inability to create the conditions for greater self-reliance, sustainable transition of some aspects of the refugee response to the government, and the achievement of durable solutions for refugees. A dedicated coordination platform, which could be embedded within the existing coordination structure already in place for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Uganda, would allow those actors to:

- Prioritise honest discussions on the need to facilitate, over several years and with a clear plan in place, a sustainable transition of sectors such as health and education to the government.
- Find ways to better work together to support refugees to achieve durable solutions, including through improved, coordinated programming, and relevant legal and policy reform.
- Integrate refugees' and host communities' lived realities and perspectives into any decision-making about their lives.

**3**

**During the GRF and beyond, global governments must also commit to deploying more efforts to address the root causes of displacement into Uganda, as well as increase the number of refugees relocated from Uganda through resettlement and complementary pathways.**

Beyond funding, global governments must use all tools at their disposal to support refugee-hosting countries like Uganda and ensure the protection of refugees. We therefore call on them to:

- Commit to using increased diplomatic engagement on protracted crises where most refugees in Uganda originate, namely South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, in order to support political solutions to the conflicts and restore a conducive environment for safe returns.
- Grow resettlement programmes to ensure that more vulnerable refugees can be resettled from Uganda to a third country each year, thus supporting the decongestion of settlements in Uganda and the improvement of living conditions for other refugees in the process. Governments should also increase investments and expand work on complementary pathways to offer more opportunities to refugees, including education and employment pathways to durable solutions.