

Global Refugee Forum Progress Review 2025 – Collective NGO Statement

Written version

Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

Every time we gather, we do so with a shared ambition. Yet today, as we reflect on international refugee protection, and to review progress on pledges made, we note a stark regression from that shared ambition. Our collective promises made in 2019 and 2023 demand renewed and immediate, transformative and strategic action.

As NGOs — international, national, refugee-led, and local — we speak today with one voice to sound the alarm: the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees is being challenged by anti-refugee rhetoric, restrictive policies, and a shrinking asylum space. The drastic funding cuts this year continue to have life-threatening consequences, and have pushed humanitarian operations to their furthest limits yet.

Yet, civil society consistently remains on the frontlines to ensure the respect of international law and the protection of refugee rights.

We can tell you, today, where we see some of the most concerning backslides. The funding crisis in Kenya stands as an example of a concerning global pattern:

- A funding gap exceeding USD 20 million has driven water provision below emergency standards.
- Gender-based violence cases have more than doubled in some areas; overall protection incidents have surged by 52%.
- Over 800 refugee incentive workers — teachers, health staff, protection monitors — have been laid off, gutting essential services.
- Negative coping mechanisms are soaring: child marriage, negative coping mechanisms, and voluntary refoulement born of desperation.

We see the same erosion in education, health, WASH, and child-focused interventions across dozens of low- and middle-income hosting countries. **A surge of funding for humanitarian operations globally is urgent.**

We have seen the **collapse of resettlement and complementary pathways** and warn that the 2030 Roadmap ambition to resettle one million refugees is in freefall. After a four-decade high in 2024, available places have plummeted by 84% in one year to just 31,000 places. The European Union has cut its resettlement pledges by 75% between 2024–25 and 2026–27, and the United States – historically the world’s largest resettlement country - has slashed its ceiling by 94% to a historic low.

This hasn’t lowered global resettlement needs, which remain at a near-record high of 2.6 million refugees projected in 2026. Unless this retreat is urgently reversed, hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable will be abandoned without durable solutions nor life-saving protection. **How can we leverage the momentum of this meeting to increase those spaces?**

Meanwhile, advances towards self-reliance and economic inclusion are falling short. We are seeing food assistance reducing along with simultaneous reductions in livelihoods and

education programming, without meaningful consultation with refugees and host communities. Abrupt cuts to food assistance result in negative consequences, including higher levels of child labour, school dropout, child marriage, trafficking, and mental distress. This is not a path towards self-reliance and has proven, at times, fatal. **Funding, as well as continued work towards addressing legal and practical barriers to economic inclusion, must be a priority.**

When looking to efficiencies in highly constrained operational environments, each context will be different, and different actors – whether local, national or international – each bring different expertise.

We must move beyond *championing* locally-led and refugee-led responses towards *resourcing* them, recognising the complementary support of international actors, including global NGOs and UN agencies.

Progress is visible: refugee-led organisations are delivering high impact programmes with extraordinary effectiveness when trusted, included and resourced. Yet, broadly, bureaucratic barriers, under-funding, and exclusion from decision-making persists. **All actors must work cooperatively in a spirit of equitable partnership to maximize impact and deliver positive outcomes for forcibly displaced people.**

Embedding meaningful participation into policy is the goal of the newly launched Independent Declaration on the Right to Participate for Persons with Experience of Forced Displacement or Statelessness, **and we encourage endorsement from the wide range of actors here today.**

Our final recommendations focus on commitments to uphold the **1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol**. This, along with other Regional protection instruments, remains the cornerstone of refugee protection. In practical steps, NGOs recommend States to ensure:

- That law enforcement at borders, and in asylum processes, protects, not abuses, those seeking safety;
- That legal aid – which is increasingly under attack – remains funded to ensure refugees know their rights and are supported in defending those rights. This includes legal aid for stateless persons, and those in detention;
- That humanitarian workers have safe, timely and unimpeded access to people in need;
- That refugees arrive to a welcoming and supportive environment, and that all efforts are taken to counter xenophobic and anti-refugee rhetoric;
- And that externalisation policies do not run counter to legal protection obligations of *non-refoulement*. We must prioritise the protection of human rights, guaranteeing they are upheld rather than compromised by migration management practices.

Distinguished delegates, to conclude; the Global Compact on Refugees is a framework rooted in solidarity, responsibility-sharing, and inclusion. NGOs stand ready to support all actors making this a reality, and to prevent decades of progress from unravelling before us.

I thank you.