

GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM PROGRESS REVIEW 2025

Side Event on Sustainable Human Settlements

16 December 2025, 13:30-15:00 (CET)



OUTCOME REPORT

1. Purpose and Objectives

The side event “**Sustainable Human Settlements as Foundations for Inclusive and Resilient Futures**” convened governments, UN agencies, development actors, private sector partners, and refugee leaders to take stock of progress on the Sustainable Human Settlements Multistakeholder Pledge launched at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 2023. With more than 117 million people displaced globally and protracted crises becoming the norm, speakers underscored the urgency of shifting from temporary camps to integrated, resilient human settlements that promote dignity, inclusion, and long-term development.

The side event aimed at:

- **Showcase progress** in implementing the Sustainable Human Settlements pledge, including national policy shifts and settlement transformation efforts.
- **Highlight innovative practices** emerging from countries, cities, partners, and private sector actors.
- **Share lessons learned** from the Technical Deep Dive linking humanitarian response, urban planning, services, governance, and financing.
- **Chart forward-looking priorities** for translating pledges into durable, inclusive, climate-resilient solutions.

2. Format & Participants

The event was opened by the Government of Ethiopia, co-lead of the pledge. It featured a high-level panel format, moderated by UNHCR, with two consecutive thematic panels:

- **Turning Vision into Reality** – Achievements to Date, that highlighted progress updates from pledging entities, demonstrating tangible steps taken toward fulfilling commitments.

- **Future Horizons** – Charting the Path Forward, reflected on the recent technical deep dives on Sustainable Human Settlements and featured announcements of new commitments aligned with the pledge.

The speakers comprised of **eleven (11) government** representatives, **two (2)** representatives from **UN agencies** and **development actors**, one (1) **private sector** partner and one (1) refugee voice.

The event also showcased the recent joint World Bank, UN Habitat and UNHCR Nairobi Deep Dive on Human Settlements, and a floor intervention from **BMZ Germany**.

Speakers:

1. **H.E. Patricia Danzi**, Ambassador, Director General, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Switzerland
2. **H.E. Vl  Fulbert Traore**, Ambassador, Permanent Secretary of the National Commission for Refugees, Government of Burkina Faso
3. **H.E. Salomon Eheth**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Cameroon to the United Nations Office at Geneva.
4. **Aristarque Ngoga**, **Permanent** Secretary, Ministry in charge of Emergency Management, Government of Rwanda
5. **Barkai Hamid Barkai**, General Director of Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry of Social Action, Solidarity, and Humanitarian Affairs, Government of Chad
6. **Cheikh Abdallahi Ewah**, Coordinator of the Hodh Charqui Development Unit, Government of Mauritania
7. **Abdoulaye Garba Maiga**, President of the Association of Regions of Mali, President of the Regional Council of Mopti, Mali
8. **Zewdu Bedada Debella**, Adviser to the Director General of RRS, Refugees & Returnees Service, Government of Ethiopia
9. **Hana Teshome**, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations Office in Geneva
10. **Aragorn Daido**, Planner / Result Area Lead, KUSP II Window for Host Communities & Refugees, State Department for Housing and Urban Development, Government of Kenya
11. **Dyfed Aubrey**, Chief of Office for the European Union, United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat)
12. **Soraya Goga**, Urban Lead, Urban, Disaster Risk Management, Resilience & Land, The World Bank
13. **Grace Dorong**, Executive Director, Root of Generations - Refugee Participant
14. **Kim N hr Skibsted**, Executive Director (CEO), Grundfos Foundation
15. **Sajjad Malik**, Director, UNHCR (Moderator)

3. Key Outcomes

Across interventions, several cross-cutting themes emerged:

I. Transforming Camps to Sustainable Human Settlements

Camps limit long-term inclusion, rights, and opportunities. Moving towards inclusive human settlements is essential for dignity, longterm resilience, or economic opportunity. Countries such as **Kenya, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Rwanda, and Cameroon** showcased concrete shifts - from camp based assistance to sustainable settlements connected to national and local systems.

Examples illustrated included:

- **Kenya's** Shirika Plan and the municipalization of Dadaab and Kakuma.
- **Ethiopia's** commitment to convert Kebribeyah and Asaita into sustainable towns aligned with local masterplans.
- **Mauritania's** transformation of Mbera through urbanization plans, service integration, and national grid connections.
- **Rwanda's** policy shift to move beyond camps toward fully integrated, sustainable settlements.

- **Cameroon's** model to decongest Minawao into opportunity villages with agriculture and training.
- **Chad** is exploring how to integrate viable camps into nearby towns, while pursuing out-of-camp options for remote sites.

II. Inclusion from the Start

Inclusion from the start was emphasized as central to preventing the creation of parallel systems that undermine both humanitarian and national capacities. Countries emphasized that settlements must be planned from day one to integrate forcibly displaced into national systems, local governance, and service delivery. Key reflections include:

- **Ethiopia** designs all settlements since 2022 for inclusion from the start.
- **Mauritania** mainstreams refugees into education, health, social protection, civil documentation, and national ID systems.
- **Rwanda** already grants freedom of movement, work rights, and access to national systems, forming a basis for transitioning camps into thriving, mixed communities.
- **Chad** is advancing efforts to include refugees in the national social registry enabling refugees to be systematically integrated into national systems and benefit from social safety nets.

III. Empowering Local Leadership Is Essential for Lasting Impact

Local leadership is the backbone of sustainable human settlements. Municipalities and regional authorities are first responders and must be empowered with mandates, capacity, and predictable financing.

- **Kenya** empowering Dadaab and Kakuma municipalities as full governance entities, integrating refugees into local citizen forums and municipal boards.
- **Mali** emphasized that durable solutions depend on territorial governance, not parallel humanitarian structures.
- **Chad** is advancing decentralization so local authorities can lead integrated responses supported by national systems.
- **The World Bank** reiterated that local governments must be the anchor for transitioning from humanitarian to national service delivery.
- **UN-Habitat** highlighted that national roadmaps must position municipalities at the core of planning and investment processes.

IV. Evidence-Based, Risk-Informed Planning

Sustainable and resilient settlements require solid evidence as their foundation. Spatial profiling, hazard mapping, and territorial diagnostics are key to designing viable, resilient settlements.

- **UN-Habitat's** technical work in Ethiopia, Kenya and Chad reflects this approach.
- **Kenya and Mauritania** are linking water networks, grids, and social services through evidence-based municipal planning.
- **The World Bank** highlighted that refugee inclusion must be embedded into national disaster-resilient systems and accompanied by forward-looking territorial planning tools.

V. Financing Must Evolve

Sustainable financing must link humanitarian response, national development plans, and climate adaptation. Stakeholders stressed that humanitarian funding alone cannot sustain settlements or support long-term inclusion. New financial models are needed, including climate finance, results-based development financing, and direct support to local authorities. Key shifts include:

- **Blended and diversified financing**, with **Germany, Switzerland, World Bank** and private sector contributors like **Grundfos Foundation** providing complementary streams.

- **Intergovernmental fiscal transfers** - highlighted by the World Bank - as mechanisms to channel resources to hosting municipalities.
- **Project Flow** (Grundfos Foundation), demonstrating how revolving funds can solarize water systems and create long-term savings.
- Calls from **Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Chad** for predictable financing to implement their development plans and integration strategies.
- The **Geneva Technical Hub (GTH)** scaling up multi-sectoral technical solutions.

VI. Environment and Climate Resilience Is Non-Negotiable

Climate action is the determining factor of whether settlements are viable in the long term.

Climate vulnerabilities like water scarcity, floods, droughts, land degradation, are shaping displacement and settlement design. Countries stressed that climate-responsive infrastructure is indispensable.

- **Solarization** initiatives (Grundfos Foundation): 21 water systems + 4 health facilities.
- **Mauritania's environmental recovery efforts**, from tree planting to combating bushfires.
- **Ethiopia's climate-responsive housing, solid waste systems, and water infrastructure** integrated with municipal services.
- **Kenya's investments in resilient infrastructure**, supported by development partners, to ensure hosting areas can withstand environmental shocks.
- **UN-Habitat's emphasis** on hazard mapping, resilience infrastructure, and climate-centric settlement diagnostics.

VII. Refugee Leadership and Rights

The leadership and participation of FDPs is core for sustainable human settlements and must guide decision-making at every stage. The forcibly displaced populations must be at the table, consulted and empowered to shape their futures. **Grace Dorong's** intervention was especially powerful, articulating the need for land titles and property rights as foundations for dignity and stability and employment opportunities, among others. Communities need to be integrated and not segregated ones, to avoid tensions and foster social cohesion. Across countries, this aligns with policy shifts such as:

- **Rwanda's and Kenya's** recognition of refugee rights to movement, work, and civic participation.
- **Mauritania's** inclusion of refugees in national ID, civil status, and social protection systems.
- The **World Bank's** focus on economic inclusion and jobs as levers for settlement sustainability.

VIII. Housing and Land Tenure as Foundation for Sustainable Settlements

Secure land and adequate housing are prerequisites for sustainable settlements and self-reliance. Speakers underscored that **secure, well-planned land arrangements** are essential for transforming camps into viable settlements.

- **UN-Habitat** highlighted the need to address **informal land tenure and property rights** to protect vulnerable households
- **Kenya and Ethiopia** are advancing land-use planning and alignment with municipal masterplans.
- Grace Dorong stressed that land titles and property rights as foundations for dignity and economic participation.
- **Mauritania's** urbanization plan and **Cameroon's** allocation of agricultural land further illustrate how land access underpins integration and local development.

IX. Policy, Rights, Inclusion, and Enabling Frameworks

Refugee leadership and rights were recognized as core to designing solutions that last. A strong call was made to strengthen policy frameworks enabling **economic participation, mobility, documentation, and co-creation**. Key messages include:

- Rwanda upholding rights to movement, work, and civic participation.
- Mauritania extending national ID systems and civil status services to refugees.
- World Bank's focus on **jobs and economic inclusion** as pillars of settlement sustainability.
- Refugee voices stressed equal employment opportunities, recognition of skills, and integrated communities to foster social cohesion.

4. Speakers Highlights

Kenya

Kenya showcased major progress since joining the pledge in 2023, including the launch of the Shirika Plan and the designation of Dadaab and Kakuma as municipalities - a bold step toward integrated settlements. Inclusive planning now involves refugee voices in municipal forums, while capacity-building and land tenure reforms are underway. Supported by development partners, Kenya is strengthening municipal systems for resilient infrastructure and services, calling for alignment with national priorities, investment in high-impact projects, and a shift from humanitarian to development approaches to build resilient communities.

Mauritania

Mauritania, hosting over 300,000 refugees- nearly half the population in Hodh Chargui region -has made inclusion a cornerstone for stability and resilience. Its vision is to transform Mbera camp and surrounding communities, where refugees often outnumber hosts, into sustainable, integrated settlements. Progress includes urban planning, connecting Mbera to national electricity and health systems, expanding social protection, and providing civil documentation. Education integration, environmental action, and a five-year development plan (2026–2030) are underway, but financing and coordination remain challenges. Mauritania calls for stronger solidarity to make Mbera and its neighboring communities a model of inclusion and shared progress.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is committed to transforming refugee camps into sustainable urban settlements integrated with local development plans. Since 2022, all new settlements have been designed for inclusion, and in 2023 Ethiopia pledged to convert two long-standing camps into inclusive towns. The vision is to link humanitarian response with urban planning through climate-responsive infrastructure, service integration, and community empowerment, supported by institutional frameworks like the RRS-UN Habitat- UNHCR MoU. Priorities for 2026-2027 include a national roadmap, evidence-based planning, local governance capacity building, and innovative housing solutions. Ethiopia calls on partners for financing, expertise, and innovation to achieve this transformation.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso reaffirmed its pledge to include refugees and IDPs in local solutions to strengthen resilience. The government is implementing the National Recovery Strategy (2023–2027) focused on basic services, economic empowerment, and peacebuilding, alongside an Action Plan for Stabilization and Development. Progress includes a validated diagnostic study for a National Refugee Integration Strategy, with action plans to follow in 2026. Burkina Faso calls for responsibility-sharing and funding support to advance these commitments.

Chad

Chad, hosting nearly 2 million refugees, is integrating humanitarian and development efforts through its National Response Plan and National Development Plan. Measures include adding refugees to the national social registry, supported by a USD 120 million World Bank project, and advancing

decentralization to strengthen local authorities. Chad is working with UNHCR, UN-Habitat, and the World Bank to explore integrated settlements and out-of-camp solutions for remote camps, calling on partners for support to sustain these efforts.

Rwanda

Rwanda announced its consideration on a policy shift to move beyond camps toward integrated, sustainable settlements where refugees can access housing, livelihoods, and services. Already benefiting from freedom of movement, work rights, and national systems, Rwanda is improving connectivity with World Bank support and plans a progressive transition focused on localized planning, self-reliance, and environmental sustainability. The goal is to transform camps into thriving communities that drive local growth and resilience.

Cameroon

Cameroon, hosting around 1 million refugees, is addressing protracted displacement in Minawao camp, now home to 85,000 people. The government promotes self-reliance through agricultural land access and inputs, and with EU and UNHCR support, is exploring ways to decongest the camp and develop surrounding areas. Plans include creating opportunity villages for farming, vocational training, and commerce, aiming to transform Minawao and neighboring communities into an agricultural hub.

Mali

Mali emphasized the critical role of local and regional authorities in ensuring social cohesion and inclusion. Sustainable human settlements require an integrated territorial approach based on urban planning, essential services, inclusive governance, predictable financing, and environmental sustainability. Mali called for avoiding parallel systems, strengthening public services, and reinforcing local capacities, political roles, and access to international financing to achieve durable solutions and peaceful coexistence.

Switzerland SDC

The Geneva Technical Hub (GTH), launched by UNHCR and Switzerland in 2021, addresses the growing technical challenges of housing and settlements for forcibly displaced people, including resilience to extreme weather. Initially focused on areas like disaster risk reduction, energy, shelter, and WASH, the Hub is now expanding with strong partnerships and funding from SDC and ECHO. Starting next year, GTH will deliver integrated, locally owned solutions, strengthen technical capacity, and scale innovations to support displacement-affected and host communities. It plays a key role in advancing the Multistakeholder Pledge on Human Settlement and invites further donor and partner engagement to amplify impact.

Grundfos Foundation

The Grundfos Foundation is advancing sustainable human settlements by ensuring access to clean, safe water - a fundamental need for dignity and opportunity. Through initiatives like Project Flow, which transition from costly, fossil-fuel water systems to solar-powered solutions, UNHCR is already solarizing 21 water systems and 4 health facilities across four countries. This effort, along with others supported by Danish partners, demonstrates that water unlocks health, education, and livelihoods. However, greater collaboration is essential - donors, foundations, and the private sector are invited to join, because solving water means transforming lives.

Grace Dorong, Root of Generations

“Make Kakuma a Home”: Grace Dorong, a South Sudanese refugee advocate that lived more than 20 years in Kakuma, Kenya called for transforming camps into real homes through property rights, land titles, and inclusive planning. She urged enabling refugees to co-design solutions and granted equal employment opportunities. Grace emphasized the importance of integrated settlements where refugees and hosts live together, reducing segregation and fostering self-reliance, dignity, and stability.

UN Habitat

UN-Habitat, as co-lead of the Sustainable Human Settlements pledge, is driving implementation by supporting countries to move from camps to integrated settlements. Next steps focus on developing national roadmaps, strengthening local leadership, and applying risk-informed spatial planning using

GIS and hazard mapping. Early diagnostics will feed into bankable investment proposals, while land and property issues must be addressed to protect vulnerable households. Partnerships with governments, UN agencies, the World Bank, and private sector will enable technical assistance and blended finance. Follow-up missions, capacity building, and regional learning events will turn pledges into real, inclusive human settlements.

The World Bank

The World Bank emphasized the need to move beyond camps and strengthen national systems for refugee inclusion. Priorities include creating jobs and economic opportunities, positioning local governments as first responders, and designing sustainable financing mechanisms such as intergovernmental transfers. The Bank also highlighted embedding refugee response into disaster-resilient national systems and planning for a future without camps.

BMZ/ Germany

Germany reaffirmed its strong commitment to GRF pledges, announcing additional support for Ethiopia's Makatet Plan and Kenya's Shirika Plan. It emphasized transforming camps into sustainable settlements as key to development, supporting WASH, energy, and job market integration. Germany promotes community-driven planning, invests in infrastructure to enable a shift from humanitarian to national services, and partners through GIZ and innovation labs to advance urban inclusion and economic opportunities. Freedom of movement and the right to work remain essential to achieving safe, inclusive, and resilient human settlements.

5. Next Steps

The side event demonstrated **real momentum** behind transforming camps into sustainable settlements that contribute to social cohesion, economic opportunity, environmental resilience, and human dignity. Hosting governments are leading bold reforms, partners are aligning efforts, and technical innovations are creating new pathways for impact. The next phase will focus on scaling implementation, strengthening local leadership, and operationalizing all **53 existing commitments** ahead of **the Global Refugee Forum 2027**.