

70 Year of Protecting People Forced to Flee

Short report of a regional panel discussion

Region: East Africa

Hosting/organising institution: Institute for Security Studies

Session Title: [Can the Global Compact ease East Africa's refugee burden?](#)

Context/Background of the panel:

The panel discussion reflected on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in the Eastern Africa Region, which is home to 4.3 million of the 6.3 million refugees in Sub-Saharan Africa. 9.5 million of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) out of 18.5 million also live in the region. Implementation of the GCR and its way forward was the key focus of discussion.

The GCR is the most recent and one of the major global refugee policies spearheaded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in its 70-year existence. The central goal of the GCR is to facilitate the self-reliance of refugees and host communities, thereby providing a lasting solution to protracted refugee situations through responsibility and burden-sharing. Six of the eight African GCR rollout countries are located in the region i.e., Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the Somalia situation. Policy changes to align to the GCR and expansion to refugees of access to services, mainly education, are some of the areas that have seen progress in the GCR implementation. However, slow progress has been registered in responsibility and burden sharing, which remains to be a key challenge. On a positive note, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) is an active part of the GCR implementing, giving the project a regional dimension.

Major points highlighted by speakers and the discussions that followed:

Clementine Nkweta-Salami UNHCR's Regional Director for the East, Horn and Great Lakes region of Africa, offered an overview of the GCR implementation in the East and Horn of Africa. She said significant progress has been made in the roll out of the GCR's Comprehensive Refugees Response Framework (CRRF) in the region due to two key factors: utilisation of multi-stakeholder partnerships and setting out a range of responsibly sharing arrangements including through the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). In this respect, the Government of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda have led multi-stakeholder processes aimed at transforming the response to refugees. At the regional level, following the adoption of IGAD's Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali refugees and reintegration of returnees in Somalia, a regional approach to the CRRF has been followed. Forging strategic partnerships with multilateral development banks and other development agencies has been at the forefront. Linked with this, over the past few years, UNHCR has worked with the World Bank to address the developmental challenges of forced displacement. Five of the 14 eligible countries for the World Bank's *regional sub-window for refugees and host communities (IDA 18 RSW)* are located in the region. These are Djibouti, Ethiopia, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda.

UNHCR is also actively working with the Government of the Netherlands, IFC, ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank as part of the PROSPECTS Partnership, a four-year innovative inter-agency partnership focused on increasing economic opportunities for forcibly displaced people and host communities including in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. On burden and responsibility sharing, strong participation from states in the East, Horn and Great Lakes Region of Africa is also observed. To move forward with the implementation of the GCR, there is a need to overcome a series of challenges including political transitions in some of the countries in the region, gaps in financing, and capacity constraints. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated mobility restrictions has also caused challenges to the GCR process.

Charles Obila, IGAD's Migration and Displacement Officer, discussed the significance of regional approaches to the implementation of the GCR with a particular focus on the role of IGAD. He highlighted four key issues linked to the regional approaches. Sustaining the political momentum particularly in ensuring the continuation of the protection space across the region was the first issue discussed. This refers to efforts to address major displacement situations in the region including the Somalia situation as well as the Sudan-South Sudan displacement situations. Learning and exchanges of best practices was the other issue covered. He highlighted the importance of constant dialogue and exchanging of best practices to encourage wider regional adaptations. In this respect, the role of Uganda's long history of refugee-friendly policy and practice and Ethiopia's amendment of its refugee proclamation in 2019 as inspiring examples. The development of the costed plans of action is another key contribution of the regional approaches. In this respect, the governments of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan and South Sudan played lead role in developing costed education plans. Linked with this, the Djibouti Declaration on Education played a role in encouraging states to develop such plans. Fourth, the follow up on the commitment of member states implementation of the Nairobi Declaration was discussed. Here, thematic reviews and IGAD's annual stocktaking review processes were cited as instrumental accompanied by international solidarity. Further, the centrality of resource mobilisation, which led to the launch of the IGAD support platform to respond to the challenge of insufficient resources was highlighted. To support this, IGAD has formed a core group to work with the IGAD secretariat to identify the needs of the different member states across the region. Members of the core group are UNCHR, EU, World Bank, the Government of Germany represented by GIZ . The government of Denmark has also joined as new member.

Aude Galli, Manager, Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDDS), shared the experience of her organisation in the implementation of the GCR in the Horn of Africa. The first lesson she shared related to multi-stakeholders approach which is linked to the search for durable solutions using a multi- stakeholder rights and needs based programming approach. This process must be viewed as a collective action rather than mandate driven, she pointed out. Translating evidence into practice is the second lesson, which has to do with creating a space to discuss and learn collectively with the objective of translating evidence into practices and work on joint analyses to inform a common agenda. In this respect, the role of IGAD as a convener was emphasised working together with governments, policy makers, practitioners, civil society organisations and researchers. Capacity development and cross learning is the other lesson that is about supporting federal, regional and municipal capacities to lead and coordinate displacement and durable solutions processes, fostering coherence, synergy,

cross learning and collaboration with the purpose of bringing together policy and practice. The fourth lesson is about developing collective outcomes and joint accountability. This refers to developing multi-stakeholder approaches to measure displacement and durable solutions processes, while supporting greater accountability amongst all stakeholders contributing to collective outcomes. This approach enables different actors to contribute to collective outcomes through addressing different components to complement and leverage each other's expertise. The importance of putting displaced communities at the centre is the other lesson, which enables stakeholders to learning from displacement and resilience programming over the past years in the region. This is critical to adopt a 'displacement affected communities' approach that includes returnees, IDPs and host communities, to achieve locally relevant and lasting solutions.

Tsion Tadesse Abebe, Senior Researcher, Migration programme of the ISS spoke about the implementation challenges of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in the East and Horn of Africa. A failure to reach a common ground on responsibly and burden sharing between refugee hosting countries and donors was the major challenge discussed with a specific focus on additionality of development finance and the sustainability of humanitarian and development financing. Implementation trends indicate that the aspect of 'easing pressure on host governments and countries', [one of the objectives of the GCR] has led to the continuation of "you host, we fund" arrangement between refugee hosting countries and donors. This means host countries are expected to facilitate socio-economic opportunities for refugees, while donors provide additional financial, policy and technical support. But the two parties do not seem to have a unity of purpose. Host countries want their contributions to the refugees such as (land, pressure on natural resources and environment, pressure on public services) to be recognized and quantified. Donors, on the other hand, expect host countries in the region to start facilitating the inclusion of refugees in national systems and government budgets as soon as possible. As a result, host governments continue to push back on donors' requests to include refugees in the national budgets, which directly relates to putting additional pressure on tax payers' money. Therefore, host governments feel that without a strong guarantee of continuation of support from donors, and in the context where their contributions are not quantified and acknowledged - including refugee response in government budgets would come at an expensive political cost for them.

Dr. Robert Lilim, Director, Development Response to Displacement Impact Project (DRDIP) in Uganda, shared the experience of DRDIP Uganda, which has practically demonstrated the benefits of the humanitarian – development nexus, a central concept to the GCR. Supported by the World Bank, DRDIP in Uganda aims to "improve access to services, expand economic opportunities and enhance environmental management in refugee hosting districts." Since 2018, the project has been implemented in 15 refugee hosting districts including Arua, Koboko, Ymbe and Moyo with an investment of \$50 million loaned from the World Bank. The successful implementation of DRDIP is demonstrated through its saving of 1 million USD out of the initial 50 million World Bank Credit it received within 2 years and half of its existence. This was achieved using two approaches: labour intensive public works and village revolving funds. DRDIP's success in saving is also strongly linked to the completion of infrastructure projects it has been implementing in the area of health, education and roads. So far, 134 of 304 on-going projects have been implemented. The success of DRDIP is built on the

application of a Community Demand Driven approach, which not only empowers the community but also promotes ownership, sustainability and accountability.

Recommendations/Conclusions on the way forward:

- **Host and donor countries** should chart out a viable agreement that serves the long-term interests of both parties in a way that reconciles their priorities and interests. Here, applying a comprehensive perspective to achieve a long-term sustainable solution is the right way. It is important to rethink the displacement financing architecture to support both early and long-term durable solutions processes through multi sectorial multiyear flexible integrated programming and support the inclusion of displacement related vulnerabilities into development and poverty reduction programming. Developing multi-stakeholder approaches to measure displacement and durable solutions processes and support greater accountability amongst all stakeholders contributing to collective outcomes – learning and adaptation is at the centre.

- **UNHCR** should strengthen its catalytic and facilitating role to support refugee hosting countries and donors to work towards creating a common ground on burden and responsibility sharing. As a multilateral organization, UNHCR needs to reposition itself as an “honest broker” helping host governments and donors navigate the responsibility and burden sharing-related challenges they are facing. As the agency has just turned 70, its wealth of experience in the protection of the forcibly displaced will make it suitable for this role. In this regard, it is important for UNHCR to strengthen its collaboration with regional organisations such as AU, IGAD and the EAC in order to leverage their political clout to press more for the successful implementation of the GCR.

Acknowledgments:

This panel was coordinated by Tsion Tadesse Abebe and moderated by Ottilia Anna Maunganidze, Head, Special Projects, ISS. They would like to thank the ISS Communications team for making the webinar possible.