



OUTCOME DOCUMENT

PEER-LEARNING EVENT ON COMPREHENSIVE DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR REFUGEES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

31 January – 1 February 2023, Bujumbura, Burundi

Preamble

1. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat for the Great Lakes (ReDSS GL) and the United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with funding from the European Union (EU), co-organized the peer learning event on comprehensive Durable Solutions for Refugees in the Great Lakes region from 31st January to 1st February 2023 hosted by the Government of the Republic of Burundi.
2. Representatives from Ministries in charge of refugees and honourable members of parliaments from the following ICGLR Member States attended the event in person or remotely: Republic of Angola, Republic of Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR), Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Kenya, Republic of Rwanda, Republic of South Sudan, Republic of Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, Republic of Uganda, and Republic of Zambia.
3. Representatives from refugee-led organizations, the European Union, the ICGLR Member States' diplomatic corps accredited in Burundi, the ICGLR coordination mechanisms, multilateral agencies, and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) also attended the meeting.
4. The event was officially opened by the Coordinator of the National Office for the Protection of Refugees of the Republic of Burundi. The ceremony was also graced by speeches from the ICGLR National Coordinator to Burundi, the Deputy Executive Secretary of the ICGLR, the Head of Cooperation of the European Union Delegation to Burundi, the Deputy Representative of UNHCR Burundi and the Coordinator of ReDSS Great Lakes. In addition, testimonies from refugees hosted in Burundi and Uganda provided key insights with regards to their forced displacement as well as the need for dignified access to livelihoods. Burundian returnees also gave testimonies on the importance of dignified and sustainable reintegration in their country of origin.
5. Following deliberations, the participants highlighted the following:

Situation and prospects for solutions for refugees from and residing in the Great Lakes region

6. Recalled that the twelve Member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region host a total of 4.68 million refugees, vast majority of them having spent from five to over 20 years in their country of asylum.
7. Noted the significant progress on pledges and good practices made by the Member States of the ICGLR and the ICGLR Secretariat for the 2019 Global Refugee Forum to advance comprehensive durable solutions for refugees in the Great Lakes region as well as the key milestones achieved with regards to their implementation.
8. Emphasized the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, as enshrined in the Global Compact on Refugees, which will provide an opportunity for the ICGLR Member States to showcase concrete steps undertaken towards developing a regional durable solutions strategy for refugees in the Great Lakes region.

Comprehensive and durable solutions

9. Recalled the Outcome of the High-level Meeting of Ministers in Charge of Refugees in the Great Lakes region, co-hosted by the Government of Uganda, the ICGLR Secretariat and the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region on 7 March 2019 in Munyoyo (Kampala), Uganda.
10. Highlighted the need to continuously search for durable solutions for refugees either through voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation and sustainable reintegration, third country resettlement and complementary pathways to third countries, and local integration in their host countries when States opt for it.
11. Recalled that in the spirit of the Global Refugee Compact and without prejudice to durable solutions that may eventually become available, some host countries may also elect to provide local solutions to refugees which entail interim legal stay, including to facilitate the appropriate economic, social, and cultural inclusion of refugees in the country of asylum.
12. Commended the Government of the Republic of Burundi and its national and international partners for holding the roundtable on solutions for Burundian refugees in November 2022 in Bujumbura and called on all development and humanitarian actors in Burundi and countries of asylum to redouble efforts to mobilize resources to ensure the objectives of this roundtable are met.
13. Reiterated the need to uphold the voluntary character of returns in line with international refugee standards, while redoubling efforts to invest in long-term efforts to ensure sustainable and dignified reintegration of returnees, taking into account the needs of both the returnees and the host communities, and the need for improved investment in returning areas improved access to housing land and property and creation of employment and self-employment for refugee and host communities.
14. Underlined the imperative for national and international actors to create conditions conducive for meaningful inclusion and productivity of refugees, returnees, and host communities in developing and determining sustainable solutions in camp and non-camp settings in line with the recommendations from the ReDSS study.
15. Reiterated the need for the ICGLR and its Member States to strengthen regional cooperation in pursuit of comprehensive durable solutions including by addressing root causes of new and protracted displacement in the Great Lakes.
16. Called for greater international responsibility sharing to advance solutions for refugees hosted in the Great Lakes region to ease the pressure on the ICGLR host countries.
17. Recalled the importance of evidence-based research such as the regional ReDSS GL study on “exploring levels of self-reliance, livelihoods opportunities and alternatives to encampment among displaced populations in the Great Lakes region”, and the ICGLR study on “long-term refugees in the Great Lakes region: risks of statelessness and durable solutions” to inform data-driven programming in the region.
18. Highlighted that due to the protracted situations of refugees, risks of statelessness, and the limited availability of resettlement opportunities in third countries, other durable solutions in host countries should be supported with appropriate development financing.
19. Reiterated the importance for refugees to have access to civil status and identity documents to advance comprehensive durable solutions in line with the 2017 Declaration of ICGLR Member States on eradication of statelessness in the Great Lakes region and its Consolidated Action Plan.
20. Encouraged the ICGLR Member States to incorporate refugees in national and local development plans to move away from a humanitarian focusing on addressing primary needs to a more long-term and sustainable approach ensuring self-reliance.
21. Emphasized the need to include refugees in national services such as education, healthcare, social welfare, civil registry, and social protection services.

22. Called upon ICGLR Member States to adopt a “whole of government approach” to refugee management, involving all relevant ministries, prioritizing sectoral responses providing refugees with access to education, health, water, justice, energy, jobs, when possible, land, and other livelihoods opportunities. Highlighted that climate change will provoke increasing hardships for refugees and encouraged ICGLR Member States to strongly consider this issue in the development of sectoral responses.
23. Encouraged ICGLR Member States, in line with protocols of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), to implement regional legal frameworks enabling community citizens residing in the Great Lakes region to move and work in neighbouring countries with greater ease to alleviate the pressure on refugee programs and create more space for refugees to cater to themselves and for transnational community networks to support individuals across borders.
24. Agreed to leverage peer-to-peer learning events and sharing of good practices with sub-regional organizations including RECs such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to draw lessons learned in line with the national laws with through the development of regional management policies for harmonization purpose, while acknowledging the need to remain context specific.
25. Appealed to the international community and development actors to increase their financial support for voluntary repatriation and reintegration in the countries of return to avoid secondary movements.
26. Urged bilateral and multilateral donors and partners involved in supporting local solutions and enhanced livelihoods interventions for refugees to move from a top-down approach of aid to more localized interventions, supporting community-based mechanisms of social protection and livelihood strategies that are both market and demand-driven.
27. Noted the need to take into consideration realities on the ground in refugee hosting areas and involve refugee-led organizations in the design of interventions to support context specific livelihood strategies given refugees are driven by different experiences of interaction with markets and host communities, traditions, norms, expectations and hopes.
28. Highlighted the important role that Parliaments play in the protection of the rights of refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, and persons at risk of statelessness; and urged them to take a leading role in the development of legislation and policy as well as allocation of resources to address the needs of displaced and host communities in the Great Lakes region.
29. Committed to implement the lessons learned of this peer-learning event among the ICGLR Member States and prior events with Regional Economic Communities to accelerate the development of a regional comprehensive durable solutions strategy and action plan.
30. Reiterated the role that ICGLR Secretariat will further play for the development of a strategy on comprehensive durables solutions for refugees in the Great Lakes region and plan of action in cooperation with ICGLR Member States in line with paragraph 29 of the 2019 Outcome of the High-level Meeting of Ministers in Charge of Refugees in the Great Lakes region and its December 2019 GRF pledges.

Acknowledgments

31. Extended appreciation to the to the Government of the Republic of Burundi for hosting the peer learning event and to the ICGLR Secretariat for convening it.
32. Thanked the ministries of the ICGLR Member States and representatives of refugee-led organizations for providing their insights and testimonies.
33. Thanked multilateral agencies and NGOs involved in supporting refugee management initiatives for their continuous contribution.
34. Thanked the ReDSS GL, UNHCR, and the European Union for their logistical, technical, and financial support in organizing the event.