Refugees International

ETHIOPIA

BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE WITH DISPLACED COMMUNITIES

Progress on Climate Adaptation from the 2023 Global Refugee Forum

COUNTRY SPECIFIC FINDINGS: ETHIOPIA

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About Refugees International

Refugees International advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people and promotes solutions to displacement crises around the world. We do not accept any government or UN funding, ensuring the independence and credibility of our work.

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Overview

Refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are among the most vulnerable populations to the impact of climate change—the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reports that about 75 percent of the global displaced population live in countries with high-to-extreme exposure to climate-related hazards. But despite experiencing disproportionate impacts from climate change, refugees and IDPs are often excluded from climate adaptation planning and implementation.

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF), over 800 governments, international organizations, civil society actors, and other stakeholders made pledges to support refugees, IDPs, and host communities across sectors, including in response to climate change. According to Refugees International's analysis, among national governments, only 10 pledged to include refugees and IDPs in direct climate adaptation programming within their countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda.

In all, these governments made 16 pledges with commitments that directly correlate with improved climate adaptation and resilience for refugee and IDP communities. Pledges reviewed in this report include commitments to activities across the following eight categories: alternative energy, climate-smart agriculture, disaster management capacity, early warning systems, land rehabilitation, plans and policies, reforestation, and resilient structures and infrastructure.

With one year left until the 2027 GRF deadline for these pledges, what has been achieved? And are these programs reaching the displaced communities they are designed to support?

Refugees International reviewed countries' progress, assessing whether pledges meaningfully included displaced communities and recommending how countries can achieve their pledges and promote meaningful inclusion of displaced communities in the process.

This brief summarizes findings for Ethiopia. This is a section of a larger report from Refugees International, Building Climate Resilience with Displaced Communities: Progress on Climate Adaptation from 2023 Global Refugee Forum. *Refer to the full report for additional context, findings, and recommendations.*

Methodology

To understand progress made towards these pledges, Refugees International reviewed official updates submitted to UNHCR through the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) portal and other country and regional reports available on ReliefWeb. We also interviewed refugee and internally displaced leaders, civil society representatives, UN agencies and other multilateral institutions, as well as local and national government officials. However, this was not a comprehensive survey and is likely missing information from communities and regions that could not be contacted through remote interviews.

We sourced contextual data on displaced populations and climate vulnerability from the UNHCR Data Finder portal, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre Country Profiles database, the European Commission Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre INFORM Risk Index, and the International Disaster Database (EM-DAT).

In the Findings section below, we begin by describing each pledge and whether pledges, if achieved, would practically deliver climate adaptation for refugees and IDPs. These sections also describe whether pledges respond to the climate hazards and impacts that are most pressing in the local context, are proportional to the scale of need, and include key project details to guide implementation.

The Findings section then reviews how much progress a country has made in the implementation of their climate-related GRF pledges. To do so, we considered the following questions:

- *What does progress look like?* Where possible, progress is compared against a quantifiable milestone, such as the number of trees planted. For pledges without quantitative metrics, we reported any activities that demonstrate progress.
- *Does this pledge seem on track for completion by the GRF in December 2027?* Even if a pledge has not yet had direct impact, efforts to organize stakeholders, develop action plans, and acquire funding are markers of some progress towards implementation.

Finally, Refugees International wanted to understand whether governments included refugees and IDPs in the design and implementation of their GRF pledges. We considered **consultation** in design and decision-making of policies and programs; **participation** in implementation and delivery of programs; and **accountability**, in terms of involvement in the monitoring, evaluation, and revision processes. To do so, we considered the following questions:

- *How are refugees and IDPs included in the pledge process?* Meaningful inclusion would create opportunities for participation throughout the project cycle.
- *How accessible are the participation opportunities?* Creating a space for participation is only meaningful if refugees and IDPs can realistically participate, which may require addressing financial, logistical, and other barriers for participation.
- *Is the pledge accountable to displaced communities?* There should be plans to report progress to displaced and local communities and to jointly monitor and evaluate pledges with refugees and IDPs.

Refer to the Methodology section of the full report for additional details regarding this review framework.

Ethiopia Findings

The government of Ethiopia's 2023 GRF pledges address multiple pressing disaster risks facing refugees in Ethiopia, and often include specific measurable targets for pledge activities. The government completed their land rehabilitation project and made significant progress on alternative energy and resilient structures and infrastructure. They are in danger of not meeting their targets for climate-smart agriculture and reforestation and did not start any activities related to plans and policies. They reported higher levels of refugee participation in implementing some pledge activities, such as reforestation. Other activities demonstrate less inclusion, including minimal consultation in planning or accountability measures.

Country Context

Ethiopia hosts nearly 4.3 million displaced people, including over 1.1 million refugees and asylum seekers and 3.1 million IDPs, as of December 2025. Most refugees are from Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan and located in 24 camps across the country. IDPs are primarily concentrated in the Tigray, Somali, and Oromia regions. These numbers likely underestimate the true scale of displacement, as conflicts between the Tigray People's Liberation Front and Ethiopian authorities are escalating at an alarming pace.

Ethiopia is ranked in the top 20 countries in the world most at risk to climate change, with a very high INFORM Risk Index of 7.0. This is characterized by compounding conflict risk for those living close to hazard-prone areas and vulnerabilities in physical infrastructure. From 2000–2025, Ethiopia experienced over 60 major climate disasters, particularly flooding and drought. The floods in 2023 were particularly devastating, affecting 1.5 million people and displacing over 430,000. Repeated droughts over the last five years have harmed the food security and livelihoods of displaced communities.

Findings in the following sections reflect interviews conducted by Refugees International, Ethiopia's GRF 2023 Progress Report, a regional update submitted by UNHCR on behalf of the government of Ethiopia, and updates reported through the GCR portal by the government of Ethiopia.

Pledge Description

Under the GRF, the government of Ethiopia pledged to promote climate adaptation for refugees and IDPs through alternative energy access, climate-smart agriculture, land rehabilitation, plans and policies, reforestation, and resilient structures and infrastructure (GRF-07340, GRF-07417, and GRF-07477). *Refer to the Pledge Details section for the full pledge text.*

The pledges include meaningful interventions to address multiple pressing disaster risks faced by refugees in Ethiopia, including flooding, drought, and land degradation. They commit to offering alternative energy sources to refugees and host communities; disseminating resources and information for climate-smart agriculture; rehabilitating degraded land in areas hosting significant refugee populations; including refugees in National Adaptation Plan (NAP) development; planting trees in refugee-hosting regions; and rehabilitation roads and structures to be more climate-resilient.

The scale of projects, where specified, matches the large refugee population in Ethiopia, but the geographic scope does not include every host region for refugees. The pledges often include a specific, measurable goal, although some activities are missing quantitative benchmarks. Notably, the pledges do not include any commitments specific to IDPs, omitting 1.8 million individuals also in need of climate adaptation support.

Implementation Progress

The government of Ethiopia has reported progress on five of six GRF pledge activities. They have exceeded their target for land rehabilitation projects and started implementing projects related to alternative energy, climate-smart agriculture, reforestation, and resilient structures and infrastructure. They have not yet started any activities on plans and policies.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY: Offer alternative energy sources to refugees and host communities.

The government of Ethiopia has started implementing projects related to alternative energy access, but have not yet reached their target. From 2024–2026, the government of Ethiopia and its partners distributed over 6,000 energy-saving cookstoves to refugee communities across the country. They also implemented solar-energy projects in five refugee camps and two host communities, including a solar power plant in Bokolmayo Woreda and solar panels to power boreholes in Aysaita Refugee Camp. The Ethiopia Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) constructed solar minigrid projects in Kule Refugee Camp and in Sheder Refugee Camp, both in the Somali region. The next stages of the solar energy program are unclear. Some informants shared that the government is planning to expand electrification and alternative cooking fuel programs, whereas others stated that this is not a priority.

CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE: Offer resources and education for climate-smart agriculture to refugees and host communities.

The government of Ethiopia has started implementing climate-smart agriculture projects, but have not yet reached their target. RRS and the Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), provided training on climate-smart agriculture, including drip irrigation and water-efficient techniques, to 1,275 refugees and 143 host community members. These trainings support refugees and host communities to build more climate-resilient livelihood options. However, given the scale of refugees in Ethiopia, training 1,275 refugees—about 0.1 percent of the total refugee population—does not constitute meaningful progress on this pledge activity.

LAND REHABILITATION: Rehabilitate 20,000 hectares of degraded land in areas hosting significant refugee populations.

The government of Ethiopia exceeded their target for land rehabilitation projects. RRS reported that 23,500 hectares of land in refugee-hosting areas were rehabilitated from 2024–2025, beyond their target of 20,000 hectares. Environmental rehabilitation projects continue in the Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz regions. UNHCR reported that this progress is primarily facilitated by the Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project, active in every refugee-hosting area in Ethiopia. Though this activity's target has been met, the split of benefits between refugee and host communities is not clear.

PLANS AND POLICIES: Include refugees in the National Adaptation Plan.

As of our interviews, the government of Ethiopia had not started activities to include refugees in the NAP process. Government officials reported that the process to update their most recent (2019) NAP is still in preliminary stages. And although the government reiterated their commitment to include refugees in the NAP process in the recently released Makatet Roadmap, no progress has been made towards including refugees in the plan's update. Refugees International spoke with refugee leaders and INGOs who reiterated that this inclusion process, nor informing refugee communities about the NAP, have not yet started.

REFORESTATION: Plant 100 million seedlings in refugee-hosting areas.

The government of Ethiopia has started implementing reforestation projects, but not yet reached their target. Ethiopia's Green Legacy Program, led by the Ministry of Agriculture, was started in 2019 to support reforestation in urban and rural areas. RRS reported that in 2024–2025, the government planted 4.15 million seedlings in refugee-hosting areas. Sources with whom Refugees International spoke put the number closer to 2.5 million, of which a subset are for refugees. UNHCR reported that some partners plant up to 800 trees in a single day. Tree planting is ongoing in Assosa and Gambella, two major refugee-hosting areas. Although the number of seedlings planted is significant, it remains far below the target of 100 million by 2027.

RESILIENT STRUCTURES AND INFRASTRUCTURE: Convert selected refugee camps into urban settlements with more resilient shelters and infrastructure.

The government of Ethiopia has started implementing projects to improve the resilience of shelters and infrastructure in refugee settlements, but not yet reached their target. The government, in collaboration with UNHCR and the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), is targeting two regions for this pledge activity: a protracted refugee-host area in Aysaita (Afar Region), which hosts 32,700 refugees, and the Kebribeyah Camp area (Somali Region), which hosts 23,000 refugees. In Aysaita, integration is still in the planning stages. RRS participated in an Urbanization Roadmap workshop in 2025 with civil society and multilateral organizations, and UN-HABITAT is preparing preliminary designs and planning to develop prototypes for resilient housing models. In Kebribeyah, integration is proceeding under the Kebribeyah Refugee Inclusion Roadmap. The government and partners improved water systems and connected networks in the refugee camps to municipal services, are constructing a pilot durable housing block with plans to build 875 homes, and are upgrading the solid waste management system in the refugee camp. These projects undergo a series of environmental assessments to mitigate the risk of climate change affecting the structures, and to minimize the impact on the environment. Overall, these projects are progressing towards implementation, but are far from supporting the number of refugees in need of durable, resilient housing.

Inclusion of Refugees and IDPs

Inclusion of refugees in Ethiopia's GRF pledges varies significantly across projects. IDPs are not included in GRF pledges or implementation efforts.

Refugee inclusion in reforestation efforts is the most prominent, including consultation in development of plans and participation in implementation. Refugees International spoke with refugee leaders and NGOs, who corroborated that refugees are included and seen as co-creators alongside the government and UNHCR in reforestation projects in refugee camps.





The refugee-led organization (RLO) Youth Life Change for Peace & Development (YLCPD) partnered with UNHCR and Oxfam on tree planting initiatives in 2025 and 2026. YLCPD proactively met with community members to identify locations where trees are most needed, and when seedlings were delivered by a national NGO, YLCPD organized refugees to plant trees in these priority areas. In the photos here, YLCPD is planting trees alongside government officials in refugee communities near Gambella, Ethiopia.

UNHCR reported that RLOs are also engaged in alternative energy programs, land rehabilitation, and resilient structures. Refugee cooperatives are often involved in the management and maintenance of solar energy hubs, with financial support from donors and partners. Refugee leaders supported the rehabilitation of structures and soil conservation in Assosa, although this consisted only of participation in implementation, as experts from the Ministry of Agriculture identified the specific areas to be rehabilitated without consulting refugee or host communities. The planning and development process for resilient housing construction in Aysaita and the Kebribeyah Camp area has included refugees from the start. The Refugee Central Committees serve as official consultative mechanisms, beginning with the selection of old homes to demolish.

Other pledge activities report lower levels of inclusion. Refugees may have been consulted in the design of projects (e.g., determining locations for smaller solar energy projects) or been informed of specific pledge efforts, but were not included in the implementation. Very few of the refugees with whom Refugees International spoke had received any direct information about GRF pledges. In general, the government of Ethiopia has restricted the operation of civil society, and according to interviews, only five RLOs are officially registered to operate in the country. All of these severely constrain the ability of RLOs and IDPs to participate as active and equal partners in climate initiatives.

Recommendations

For the government of Ethiopia to deliver on the outstanding components of their pledges by December 2027, we recommend they prioritize the following:

- Scale up trainings on climate-smart agriculture to support additional refugee and IDP communities who rely on agricultural livelihoods. These trainings have already been provided to a very small group of refugees, so with additional resources, they could be expanded to a meaningful percentage of the refugee population. With limited resources available, trainings should be targeted to areas that are most vulnerable to drought and food insecurity, particularly the Afar and Somali regions.

- Led by the Ministry of Planning and Development, partner with RRS to consult refugees and IDPs in the NAP process to understand their priorities for adaptation. Refer to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC's) Technical guide for best practices on integrating refugees into NAP processes.

- In Aysaita, include refugee communities in the design process for shelters and the urbanization program. As this project is starting a pilot phase, the government has the opportunity to integrate communities in the planning process from the beginning.

Ethiopia Pledge Details

The following section reproduces the text of pledges submitted through the GCR pledges dashboard. Text has not been edited.

Climate Pledge ID: GRF-07340
Pledge Date: November 29, 2023

Contribution Name
Climate Action

Pledge Description
Address the environmental impact resulting from hosting large number of refugees by planting 100,000,000 multi-purpose seedlings, executing environmental rehabilitation activities and providing alternative sources of energy, including national grid and solar mini-grid connections. With this pledge, the Government of Ethiopia also commits to include refugees in the National Adaptation Plan.

Expected Impact of the Pledge
The pledge aims to restore degraded land through afforestation, provide renewable energy sources for both refugees and host communities and ensure the inclusion of refugees in the National Adaptation Plan to reduce their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change by building adaptive capacity and resilience.

Climate Pledge ID: GRF-07417
Pledge Date: November 30, 2023

Contribution Name
Human Settlement

Pledge Description
Transform selected refugee camps into sustainable urban settlements by enhancing the quality and availability of shelter, infrastructure and public services, such as roads, electricity, water, sanitation, health and education by aligning them with adjacent towns' master plan by 2027.

Expected Impact of the Pledge
The Ethiopian Government's commitment to transforming refugee camps into urban settlements is expected to significantly enhance the social cohesion and economic participation of refugees and foster inclusive growth and sustainable development benefiting both refugees and communities hosting them through improved and integrated service provisions.

Climate Pledge ID: GRF–07477
Pledge Date: November 30, 2023

Contribution Name
Access to Land

Pledge Description
Provide access to 10,000 hectares of irrigable land through lease arrangements and promote climate-smart agriculture and livestock value chain contributing to improved food security and socio-economic empowerment of refugees and host communities of which at least 50% being women and 30% refugees.

Expected Impact of the Pledge
Access to irrigable land is a key factor to enhance the livelihoods and resilience of refugees and host communities, enable year-round crop growth, diversified production and increased income. Promoting policies and interventions that facilitate such access can foster social cohesion, environmental sustainability and help cope with climate change impacts.

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