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Sharing Responsibility, Changing Lives: Highlights from West & Central Africa's 2023 GRF Pledges

The 2023 Global Refugee Forum strong engagement from West and Central Africa countries translated into nearly 90 pledges submitted by 14 countries—Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Brazzaville Democratic Republic, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo - as well as by the ECOWAS and ECCAS Commissions.

Two years after the Global Refugee Forum, important progress in West and Central Africa were made on three key areas: strengthening policy and legal frameworks for asylum and statelessness, improving access to basic services through system enhancements and removal of barriers, and promoting socio-economic inclusion through livelihood opportunities and support for self-reliance. This brief note highlights key achievements in pledge implementation across the region.

- **ECOWAS** has engaged in supporting humanitarian responses to bridge national resources gaps in the region and contributed to food provision to 10 million refugees and internally displaced persons by 2026. The first phase consisted in a 9 million USD grant in 2024 and the same amount is projected for 2025. At policy level, building on its convening role, ECOWAS advanced the implementation of the GCR Action Plan, promoted the domestication of the Model Law on Statelessness, and worked toward adopting a regional refugee policy to strengthen durable solutions and burden sharing. However, significant challenges remain, including limited financial resources and data gaps.

- **ECCAS** developed a regional model law on statelessness supported by five Member States' accession to the 1954 and 1961 Conventions, drafting a common asylum policy aligned with African Union standards, and preparing a regional humanitarian fund policy framework, although reduced humanitarian funding continues to hamper implementation.Benin initiated actions to strengthen the capacities of two thousand host families and planned measures to improve access to education for five thousand refugee children. Burkina Faso made notable progress in the legal domain, completing 75% of the process to revise the Persons and Family Code and ninety percent of the decree regulating travel documents, while establishing an inclusive monitoring mechanism of GRF pledges led by CONAREF.

- **In Cameroon**, efforts have focused on expanding access to education through the construction of schools and recruitment of teachers, improving health services by designating hospitals to serve refugees, and promoting socio-economic integration by supporting the creation of refugee-owned businesses. These initiatives are guided by a pledge monitoring mechanism that brings together relevant ministries and partners for quarterly reviews to ensure accountability and sustained progress.

- **In Central African Republic** agreements with armed groups in accordance with the Luanda Roadmap and Peace Agreement contributed to enhance peace efforts while stabilization allowed for voluntary repatriation of refugees from neighboring countries (around 40,000 between 2024 and 2025). While the arrival of 50,000 Sudanese refugees put additional strains on the country that is facing budget deficits and infrastructure limitations, peace-responsive and nexus-based approach ensured effective access to essential services and strengthened economic resilience in affected areas.

- **In Chad,** the establishment of decentralized eligibility commissions has strengthened the national asylum system, with half of all cases now processed through these bodies. Collaboration with the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) facilitated the introduction of accelerated procedures in urban areas and enabled staff capacity-building through exchange initiatives. Ongoing legal reforms—including a draft decree on legal aid—and refugee documentation initiatives supported by the World Bank further contribute to system improvements.
  Access to education has also been enhanced through increased teacher recruitment and the transfer of vocational training centers. Economic inclusion efforts advanced as well, with the allocation of agricultural land to refugees and targeted entrepreneurship support delivered through a partnership with Inkomoko.

- **Côte d'Ivoire** issued biometric identity cards to over 2500 recognized refugees, extended universal health coverage to asylum seekers, and facilitated access to higher education, while also strengthening efforts to combat statelessness through participation in global initiatives.

- **Gambia** undertook measures to align nationality legislation with international standards and enhance local integration, while Guinea-Bissau improved community integration and access to services, allocating land to ninety-eight percent of families and providing civil registration services.

- **Ghana** has secured land to enable refugees to engage in farming, integrated more than seven hundred refugees from the Upper East and Upper West regions into the national household registry, enrolled refugee children in the national education system, and ensured their inclusion in the national health insurance scheme.

- **Guinea-Bissau** has achieved full community coverage in civil registration and also consolidated the local integration of protracted and naturalized refugees, with over 98% of families now accessing land for farming. Technical capacities of civil society organizations and public officials on mixed movements and international protection were strengthened, reaching 100% at the national level and 30% in the regions. The revision of the Local Integration Clauses is well advanced, supported by a newly reactivated National Steering Committee.

- **Nigeria** worked to include refugees in national health programs, improve education infrastructure with a primary school policy enrolment in Taraba State and ongoing expansion in other states, and promote economic self-reliance through agricultural support and partnerships with private actors, although challenges persist in data management and funding.

- **Sao Tome and Príncipe** strengthened cooperation between the Ministry of Justice and national refugee response bodies to improve identification systems, prevent statelessness, and ensure access to rights and essential services. With UNHCR support, at-risk individuals are being integrated into education and health systems even in the absence of official documentation, while ongoing efforts aim to identify stateless persons and members of the diaspora.

- **In Senegal** the naturalization process of Mauritanian refugees and digitalization of civil registration systems, contributed to increased protection and access to rights, while the country ratified international instruments and revised its national action plan on statelessness.

- **Sierra Leone** implemented its National Action Plan on Statelessness and launched economic inclusion projects, including ECOWAS-funded cash transfers and youth employment initiatives, although delays in disbursements and limited resources hinder progress.

- **Togo** advanced social protection and economic empowerment initiatives through the WURI project, which aims to establish a unique national identifier for all residents, and launched microcredit programs for refugees.

- **The Democratic Republic of Congo** reformed its civil registration system, promoted refugee inclusion in national services, and supported regional solutions platforms, while also working toward accession to conventions on statelessness and formalizing refugee status determination procedures, despite security challenges and reduced funding.

- **The Republic of Congo** developed a National Asylum Strategy to provide a comprehensive response for forcibly displaced persons, encompassing both legal protection and socio-economic inclusion. In addition to establishing a committee to eradicate statelessness, concrete measures were implemented to prevent it, including awareness campaigns that reached over 180,000 people and mobile court hearings for birth registration and issuance of birth certificates, benefiting approximately 14,000 individuals.

A significant share of the pledges made in West and Central Africa is tied to major multi-stakeholder commitments. These joint pledges are designed for large-scale impact, advancing ambitious common goals and establishing long-term mechanisms for burden- and responsibility-sharing backed by clear resource and financing arrangements. In West and Central Africa, the most prominent multi-stakeholder pledges related to Economic Inclusion and Social Protection, Policy and Legal Frameworks, and Education. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, 47 multistakeholder pledges were announced. All of these pledges are working towards securing one or more of the eight key outcomes for the GRF, which will guide future engagement in comprehensive responses.

More information is available here: Multistakeholder Pledges for the Global Refugee Forum 2023 | The Global Compact on Refugees | UNHCR (globalcompactrefugees.org)