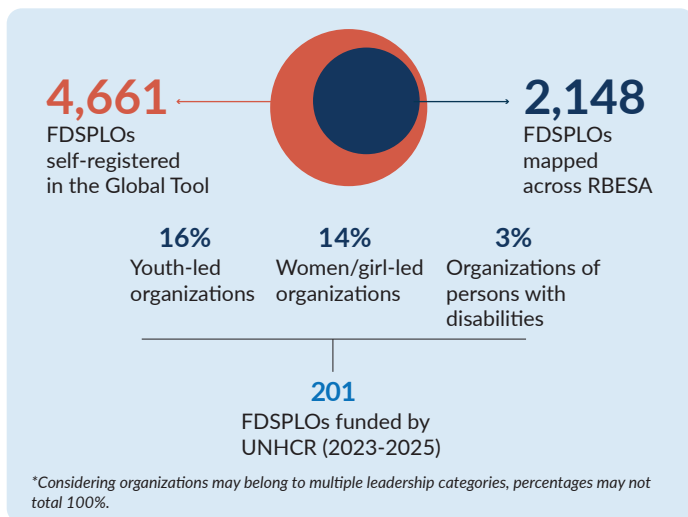


LOCALIZATION AT A GLANCE



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Over three years, RBESA moved organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons (FDSPOs) from the margins of humanitarian response to recognized partnership. The numbers below capture what changed:

-  **USD 2.3 Million** disbursed to **201 FDSPOs** through a range of partnerships and grant mechanisms.
-  **2,500 FDSPO leaders and network members** completed capacity-strengthening initiatives that translated into measurable readiness gains in line with the regional maturity guidelines.
-  **6 of 25** countries now host functioning Refugee-Led Organization Networks (RELONs), giving displaced communities a standing seat in coordination rather than ad hoc consultation.
-  **5 Governments** (Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, and Ethiopia) have developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidelines to simplify legal registration services, converting policy intent into administrative access for FDSPOs.

BACKGROUND

UNHCR engagement with Organizations led by Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons (FDSPOs) is anchored in the recognition that displaced and stateless people are not merely recipients of aid, but key partners whose leadership, lived experience, and expertise are essential to shaping effective, accountable, and sustainable humanitarian responses in forced displacement settings.

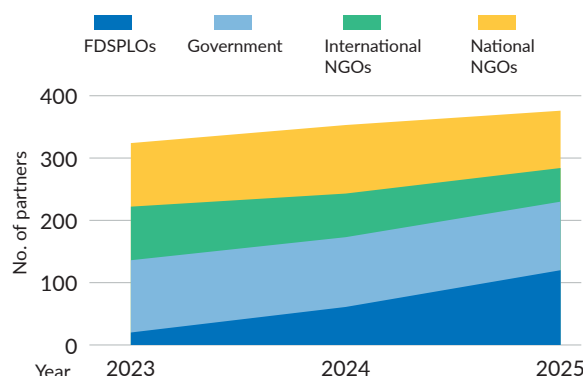
The Regional Bureau for Eastern and Southern Africa (RBESA) is working closely with partners to position FDSPOs as equal partners in the design, implementation, monitoring, and reporting of programmes and policies that affect their communities through promoting refugee leadership, meaningful participation and accountability. Building on commitments and pledges demonstrated by Member States, partners, and FDSPOs themselves, the regional bureau together with partners has co-developed a differentiated and tiered support model that aligns funding and partnership modalities with organizational maturity, operational capacity, compliance readiness, and strategic contribution to protection and solutions outcomes.

Between 2023 and 2025, UNHCR directly disbursed approximately **USD 2.3 million to 201 FDSPOs** through a range of grant mechanisms. This was complemented by capacity-strengthening activities, including training, coaching, mentorship, peer learning, exchange visits, and twinning arrangements between emerging refugee-led organizations and more experienced organizations.

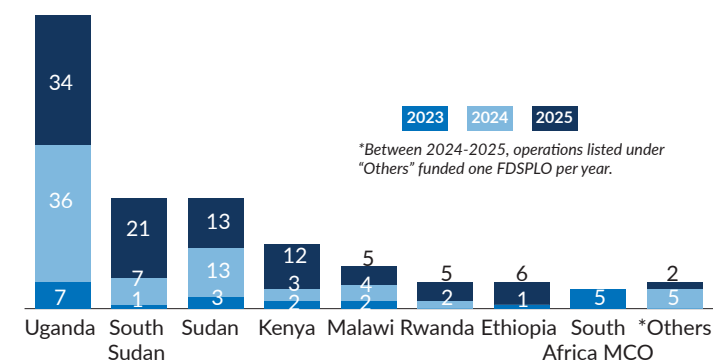
Through this approach, emerging and medium-size organizations received seed funding, training, coaching and mentorship, and foundational institutional capacity strengthening to support their growth and sustainability. More established organizations with stronger governance structures, financial management systems, and demonstrated delivery capacity have been able to access larger-scale and longer-term partnership opportunities from UNHCR and other partners, enabling them to expand their reach, scope and impact.

Beyond increasing access to funding and partnership opportunities, UNHCR is investing in the broader enabling ecosystem required for FDSPOs to thrive. This includes strengthening organizational and technical capacities, supporting coordination and networking platforms, promoting policy dialogue and advocacy, and fostering enabling legal and operational environments in which community-led organizations meaningfully influence humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding responses.

PARTNERSHIP TRENDS (2023-2025)



UNHCR SUPPORTED FDSPOs, BY COUNTRY (2023-2025)





KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Capacity strengthening initiatives

The Bureau in collaboration with country operations implemented a series of capacity sharing and organizational development initiatives including in-person and hybrid training workshops, webinars, and regional learning sessions. These efforts reached approximately 2,500 FDSPLO leaders and network members. The FDSPLO Maturity Framework developed by the Bureau enabled organizations to assess and strengthen their institutional capacities, governance structures, and operational systems. As a result, participating organizations are better positioned to meet partnership requirements, access opportunities, and contribute more effectively to humanitarian responses at national and regional levels.

Partnerships and fundraising efforts

With Private Sector Partnerships (PSP) and Innovation Services, the Bureau secured support from the Mastercard Foundation, the Netherlands (PROSPECTS), the European Union (INTPA), and BMZ, among others. These resources did not stop at agreements - in Sudan and South Sudan, FDSPLO partners deployed frontline community workers who delivered life-saving assistance and protection in remote, hard-to-reach areas that conventional actors could not reach. FDSPLOs also increasingly secured direct funding from UN agencies and development partners through intermediary channels.

Enabling policy environment

Regional policy mapping translated into action in five (5) countries. Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, and Ethiopia developed SOPs and guidelines for simplified registration procedures and decentralized administrative offices closer to refugee-hosting areas - the practical difference between an FDSPLO being able to register and operate or not. Engagement with Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) kept legislative barriers on the regional agenda. These efforts reflect growing momentum across the region to create more conducive environments for the legal recognition and operation of FDSPLOs. In Uganda, where most FDSPLOs now comply with national and sub-national requirements for implementing programmes in refugee settlements, the Government and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) have created space for refugee-led organizations to participate and contribute to planning processes.

Coordination, refugee leadership and meaningful participation

Across the region, eighteen (18) entities, including civil society organizations, cities and municipalities, faith-based organizations, refugee groups, private sector actors, and Member States have committed and pledged to advance meaningful participation of forcibly displaced persons and refugee youth, while strengthening their institutional capacity to operate as credible and independent partners. Through sustained engagement with IGAD, Member States, and development partners, the RBESA Bureau strengthened refugee leadership and representation in national, regional, and global spaces, resulting in increased visibility and influence of refugee perspectives in policy discussions and decision-making processes.

By linking FDSPLO initiatives with broader humanitarian-development, and peacebuilding nexus programming, the Bureau, in collaboration with operations, has contributed to improved policy coherence and promoted integrated, multi-sectoral responses. These efforts have reinforced advocacy on legal recognition, socio-economic inclusion, including access to work permits and legal documentation, contributing to more inclusive policy environments and strengthened localization outcomes.

UNHCR supported the establishment and strengthening of Refugee-Led Organization Networks (RELONs) in six (6) out of twenty-five (25) countries, alongside the operationalization of the Regional Refugee Engagement Forum (RREF) and complementary coordination mechanisms. These platforms have enhanced coordination and information flow at country, regional and global levels, and created space for collective advocacy and structured engagement.

In partnership with UN Women, the Bureau supported the establishment and operationalization of the [Regional Women-Led Organizations Support Platform](#) for the Sudan Situation, creating a regional mechanism for women-led organizations to strengthen coordination, collective advocacy, visibility, and engagement on issues affecting forcibly displaced women and girls.



Participants at a regional workshop on refugee leadership, inclusion and meaningful participation in policy and decision-making processes. © UNHCR/Irene Mumbi

II KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Localization continues to gain momentum across the region, with growing recognition of organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons as strategic partners in protection, solutions, and community-led responses. This shift is reflected in stronger participation in coordination mechanisms, expanded partnership opportunities, increased donor investment, and growing interest from governments, the United Nations, international and national NGOs, and development partners.

At the regional level, mechanisms such as the RREF and growing collaboration with IGAD are creating new opportunities for refugees to engage in regional policy dialogue and influence decisions that affect their communities. At the same time, partnerships with philanthropic and private sector actors, including the Mastercard Foundation, are helping diversify investment in refugee leadership, organizational capacity, and locally led solutions.

The region is also witnessing a growing number of mature FDSPLOs that are increasingly capable of implementing programmes, mobilizing resources, and contributing to humanitarian and development responses beyond traditional service delivery. This presents an important opportunity to transition from viewing refugee-led organizations primarily as beneficiaries towards recognizing them as equal partners in planning, implementation, and decision-making.

Despite this progress, significant challenges remain. Many FDSPLOs continue to face barriers to legal recognition, registration, access to financial institutions, compliance requirements, and sustainable financing. Organizational capacities remain uneven, particularly in areas such as governance, financial management, due diligence, safeguarding, reporting, and resource mobilization. Building long-term trust between UNHCR, governments, NGOs, and community-led organizations, while strengthening joint planning and coordination, will be essential to ensuring that localization efforts translate into sustainable and impactful partnerships across the region.

✓ STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

RBESA remains committed to advancing localization and will pursue the following strategic interventions to strengthen localization efforts, promote refugee leadership and ensure meaningful participation.

Strengthening partnerships with FDSPLOs and local

Expand and deepen long-term strategic partnerships with organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons, women-led organizations, and other local actors, promoting joint planning and advocacy, sharing decision-making, strengthening refugee leadership and ensuring meaningful participation throughout programme design, implementation and monitoring.

Promoting enabling legal and policy environments

Support advocacy and dialogue with governments, regional institutions, and partners to address administrative, legal, and regulatory barriers that limit registration, recognition, accreditation, and participation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in order to strengthen their governance and legal status.

Diversifying funding mechanisms

Expand access to resources by strengthening engagement with humanitarian donors, foundations, philanthropic organizations, development actors, and the private sector, while increasing opportunities for FDSPLOs to access direct funding.

Strengthening the regional FDSPLO digital ecosystem

Remodel existing comprehensive regional platforms to facilitate mapping, profiling, networking, organizational assessment, capacity strengthening, and knowledge sharing that supports transformative growth and enhancement of capacities of FDSPLOs and partners. In addition, this initiative will address data duplication and strengthen FDSPLOs ownership of their data.

Investing in organizational capacity and sustainable systems

Strengthen institutional capacities through tailored support in governance, financial management, due diligence, safeguarding, proposal development, compliance, reporting, resource mobilization, and organizational development. This will be complemented by mentoring, peer learning, and coaching to support organizations as they progress towards long-term sustainability and partnership readiness.

Strengthening coordination and trust-based partnerships

Promote stronger collaboration and trust between UNHCR, governments, NGOs, development actors, and FDSPLOs through coordinated planning, shared learning, and inclusive coordination mechanisms that position refugee-led organizations as equal partners rather than beneficiaries.

▶ LOCALIZATION IN ACTION: FROM LIVED EXPERIENCES TO COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

When Vanessa Ishimwe arrived in Uganda as a refugee, she began making handmade leather sandals simply to support herself while pursuing her studies at Makerere University. What started as a personal survival strategy gradually evolved into [FUSE Women Initiative](#), an organization that now supports refugee women not only through livelihoods and education, but also by strengthening an entire ecosystem of Women Refugee-Led Organizations. Today, FUSE has mobilized more than USD 85,000 in sub-grants for ten refugee women-led organizations, trained over 100 women artisans, supported 15 refugee girls to complete secondary education, and helped partner organizations collectively reach more than 10,500 refugees, most of them women, girls, and persons living with disabilities.

Rather than delivering services alone, FUSE now enables other refugee women leaders to access funding, strengthen their organizations, and expand their own community impact.

A similar story is unfolding in Kenya. Having experienced firsthand the barriers faced by refugee girls in Kakuma Refugee Camp, including poverty, early marriage, and limited access to menstrual health products, Sudi Omar Noor founded the [Girl Power Action Initiative \(GPAI\)](#) in 2021. What began as one young woman's determination to ensure girls did not lose opportunities because of circumstances beyond their control has grown into a trusted refugee-led organization working across Kakuma and Kalobeyei. With support from UNHCR and other partners, GPAI has established community learning spaces, strengthened protection services, trained women to produce reusable sanitary pads through the Pawa Pad initiative, and expanded programmes on GBV prevention, sexual and reproductive health, livelihoods, and leadership. The organization has now reached more than 8,000 refugee and host community members while creating income-generating opportunities that enable refugee women to become providers and leaders within their own communities.

These organizations demonstrate that localization is not simply about transferring resources. It is about investing in leadership. When refugee-led organizations receive sustained support through institutional capacity strengthening, flexible funding, strategic partnerships, and opportunities to participate in decision-making, they evolve from addressing immediate community needs to strengthening local systems, mentoring emerging organizations, influencing policy, and delivering sustainable, locally led solutions at scale.

UNHCR appreciates the earmarked and flexible contributions from donors, including:

