SHIRIKA PLAN UPDATE



Adelle Mubalama, a Congolese refugee and tailor, runs her own shop after starting with a single sewing machine. Today, she employs and trains other refugees, including women, supporting her family through her work. ©UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

Shirika Plan

Kenya generously hosts more than 835,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. New influxes are mainly from Somalia and South Sudan, but most refugees have been in protracted exile, living in camps for decade. The Shirika Plan, promulgated by H.E. President Dr. William Ruto on 28 March 2025, represents a fundamental shift from a humanitarian-driven response to a government-led, development-oriented approach. It aims to foster the sustainable inclusion of both refugees and host communities into national and county systems, particularly within municipalities.

Major milestones and achievements:

Transition from refugee camps to municipalities

The municipalities were formally recognized through publication in the Government Gazette in November 2025 and are supported by established municipal boards, offices, and dedicated staff, with the objective of integrating refugees into national systems.

Education

- The National Education Sector Strategy includes refugees for the first time, marking a major policy shift toward inclusive national systems.
- The Ministry of Education has recognized 107 UNHCR-supported schools, representing significant milestone toward their transition into fully registered public schools.
- The World Bank is supporting primary education in refugee-hosting areas through the provision of scholarships to more than 8,000 refugee learners, school meals, and funding for school improvements. This programme is expected to be expanded to all 643 schools located in refugee-hosting counties.

In collaboration with UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

Financial inclusion

- The Department of Refugee Services (DRS) and UNHCR co-chair the Working Group on Refugee Financial Inclusion, which supports expanded access to financial services and economic inclusion for refugees on par with Kenyan nationals.
- Refugees are included in the Central Bank of Kenya's National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2025–2028).
- A government-issued Refugee Identity Card enables refugees to obtain a mobile phone number and access mobile money services, including M-PESA, the dominant system for everyday mobile transactions in Kenya, with over 45 million users. This follows more than a decade of sustained policy engagement and regulatory reform.
- Discussions are ongoing with the Central Bank of Kenya to enable refugees to open bank accounts.
- An IFC–Equity Bank facility, valued at USD 20 million, supports refugee entrepreneurs and small business owners, opening access to credit to help them launch and grow enterprises.

Inclusion in national budget

- Refugees were included in the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics census for the first time in 2025. This is critical because population data that directly informs national budget allocations.

Livelihood

- With support from the World Bank, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is implementing an initiative to expand youth employment opportunities, including for refugees.

Health

- Nineteen UNHCR- and NGO-supported health facilities have been registered as public health facilities and are now integrated into Kenya's national health surveillance and information systems.
- Refugees and asylum-seekers have been included in Universal Health Coverage, including access to the National Health Insurance Scheme. UNHCR supports the most vulnerable refugees with insurance premiums, while more self-reliant refugees are expected to self-contribute.
- The Kenya Medical Training College (KMTC) is contributing to the expansion of the health workforce in refugee-hosting areas, helping address critical labor gaps with support from a Danish public-private partnership.
- In Garissa County, an EU-funded public hospital provides services through the national health insurance system to both refugees and host communities.



Ayak Dut, 18, a South Sudanese refugee, is a Form One student at Tumaini Girls Boarding Secondary School in Kakuma Municipality that serves refugee and host community girls from over 10 countries. ©UNHCR

Social Protection

UNHCR Kenya continues to lead policy dialogue on the integration of refugees into national social protection (social safety net) systems, including the following key developments:

- The National Social Protection Policy (2023) was successfully launched in 2024 and recognizes refugees' rights and responsibilities to contribute to, and benefit from, national taxation and social protection systems. A bill currently under parliamentary consideration could codify refugees' access to social protection on par with Kenyan nationals.
- The Strategy for the Extension of Social Protection to the Informal and Rural Economy is refugee-inclusive and is currently being piloted in four counties.
- Refugees are included in the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) self-contributory pension scheme.
- UNHCR aligns its cash assistance programmes with Government of Kenya standards, including transfer values, frequency, and eligibility criteria for especially vulnerable refugees and their families.



"Everyone deserves an opportunity to prove themselves." Says Mariam, a 23-year old Congolese refugee and welder from Kakuma in Kenya.©UNHCR/ Charity Nzomo

Shirika Plan: Critical Next Steps

- Finalize a government-led implementation roadmap, developed with inputs from relevant line ministries, county governments, and development partners.
- Finalize the UN Joint Programme, aligning the work of UN agencies in support of an area-based approach to inclusion and self-reliance in refugee-hosting areas, and avoiding fragmented or project-based interventions.
- Develop a resource mobilization strategy and establish an information system to map existing development partner investments and government expenditures, in order to identify financing gaps and ensure complementarity and coherence.

Stakeholders, collaboration, and coordination

The Shirika Plan is a government-owned and government-led framework, implemented through a fully established governance structure that brings together national ministries and county governments. It moves beyond policy aspiration by providing a practical, costed, and time-bound implementation roadmap for delivering tangible and sustainable impact for both refugees and host communities, with clear priorities, sequencing, and institutional responsibilities to support effective integration into national and county systems - particularly at the municipal level.

The Plan enjoys strong, broad-based support from the international community. UNHCR is working closely with the Government to coordinate this support, which includes international financial institutions such as the World Bank, IFC, and the African Development Bank, as well as bilateral and multilateral partners, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sector actors, community-based and refugee-led organizations, and the refugees and host communities themselves - ensuring inclusive, locally grounded, and sustainable implementation.

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