

Update on UNHCR operations in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

At the end of 2024, the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region hosted 26.3 million forcibly displaced persons, including 5.6 million refugees and asylum-seekers and 20.7 million internally displaced persons.

In the Sudan, the Sudanese Armed Forces have regained territory since early 2025, leading to pockets of relative stability and prompting the return of nearly 1 million internally displaced persons to their areas of origin between January and July. Nonetheless, over 10 million people remain internally displaced, while more than 4 million refugees from the Sudan are hosted in neighbouring countries. During the first half of the year, around 340,000 people returned, mainly from Egypt and South Sudan. Meanwhile, insecurity persists in Darfur and Kordofan, where attacks on camps for internally displaced persons have caused further displacement. The humanitarian situation remains critical, with disease outbreaks, food insecurity and devastated infrastructure. Meanwhile, severe funding cuts have necessitated strict prioritization of the 2025 Humanitarian Needs Response Plan and the 2025 Sudan Emergency Regional Refugee Response Plan.

Since February 2025, escalating violence in South Sudan has displaced internally some 200,000 people and deepened humanitarian needs, a situation which is compounded by soaring prices, floods and a sharp decline in humanitarian funding. Some 149,000 people have newly fled to neighbouring countries, creating new emergencies in Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Renewed conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo resulted in the cross-border displacement of over 120,000 people since the beginning of 2025, primarily into Burundi and Uganda, with smaller numbers arriving in Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Mediation efforts in June led to renewed hope for an end to the violence. This was followed in July by a UNHCR-facilitated ministerial tripartite meeting with the governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, at which they reaffirmed their commitment to enable the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rwandan refugees hosted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with UNHCR's support.

Somalia continued to face humanitarian, security and political challenges. Some 3.5 million people remain internally displaced, largely as a result of conflict, drought and forced evictions. While new displacement had significantly declined compared to 2024, between June and July 254,000 people were uprooted by conflict. Considering multiple risks, including renewed conflict and climate hazards, UNHCR has strengthened emergency preparedness in Somalia and in neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya.

Voluntary repatriation to Burundi continued to be promoted, with some 293,000 Burundian refugees remaining in the region. In line with commitments made at a tripartite meeting in November 2023, the United Republic of Tanzania launched a comprehensive protection and solutions assessment to inform solutions for the Burundian refugees remaining on its territory.

Mixed movements

Between January and June, around 24,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers – 27 per cent of them Sudanese – moved onward from their first countries of asylum, representing a 109 per cent increase over the previous year. This trend reflects the growing difficulties refugees face in accessing asylum in neighbouring countries, pushing many to undertake dangerous journeys during which they are at risk of the dangers associated with smuggling and trafficking. In response, UNHCR, together with the International Organization for Migration and partners, is operationalizing a route-based approach to strengthen protection, assistance and solutions.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2025 plan for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region – by impact area

Attaining favourable protection environments

While host countries generally continued to uphold asylum, access to procedures remained inconsistent, resulting in barriers to registration and documentation. As of June, there was a backlog of 420,000 asylum-seekers in the region, leaving many people undocumented, undermining access to essential services, heightening protection vulnerabilities, and necessitating continued reliance on humanitarian assistance.

The inclusion of refugees in national digital identification systems in countries such as Ethiopia has created efficiencies, facilitated economic gains and reduced vulnerabilities. However, despite legal and policy advances in several countries to integrate refugees in national data and service systems, many basic needs remain unmet, fuelling protection risks and undermining solutions.

Forcibly displaced women and girls in the region face compounded discrimination and vulnerabilities, despite progress in health, education and political representation. In March 2025, UNHCR, UN Women and other partners launched a regional coordination platform to link organizations led by forcibly displaced Sudanese women and girls across host countries, enabling collaboration, knowledge exchange and coordinated advocacy. A joint regional action plan on gender equality and gender-based violence was also developed, aligned with pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum.

Efforts continued to integrate refugee children in child protection systems in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda, supported by capacity-building, mentorship and operationalization of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Child Policy Framework. UNHCR and the United Nations Children's Fund are working to harmonize approaches to transition from humanitarian models to nationally-led systems, while technical support to the East African Community and IGAD ensures that regional frameworks are implemented inclusively.

Promoting protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

Conflict-induced displacement accounts for 93 per cent of the 17.6 million people internally displaced in the region, while extreme weather events and natural disasters account for 7 per cent. In 2025, UNHCR focused its efforts on delivering non-food items, expanding cash-based assistance and ensuring targeted protection services, while strengthening coordination across sectors to address critical gaps. UNHCR's protection programmes assisted over 54,000 individuals in the first half of 2025, while emergency shelter and non-food items were distributed to 9,450 households affected by conflict and floods.

In the Sudan, UNHCR continues to deliver life-saving protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, despite the complex context, and works with local

partners and organizations led by internally displaced persons in inaccessible areas. UNHCR conducts protection monitoring, refers people to specialized services, communicate with communities and raises awareness on protection issues. By mid-2025, UNHCR had established 48 multipurpose community centres, provided cash assistance to over 4,000 households, distributed non-food items to more than 75,000 households and supported 6,400 households with shelter assistance.

In May, Somalia's Federal Parliament approved the Internally Displaced Persons Bill, representing a landmark step towards safeguarding displaced populations to ensure access to essential services and outlining mechanisms for durable solutions.

In South Sudan, where 1.8 million people remain internally displaced, UNHCR coordinated with other humanitarian actors to mobilize resources to support newly displaced communities, though access remains a challenge in hard-to-reach areas due to ongoing insecurity and flooding.

Realizing rights in safe environments

While most countries in the region have policies in place to enable refugee inclusion in national education systems, implementation is compromised by limited resources. Despite these challenges, Burundi, Ethiopia and South Sudan are expanding educational opportunities for new arrivals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan are developing national qualification frameworks aligned with IGAD's regional framework, facilitating early transition into formal education, as well as cross-border education and labour mobility. Meanwhile, Kenya's decision to register qualified refugee teachers as professionals marks a milestone in national workforce inclusion. Refugee education is increasingly supported by development financing in Ethiopia, Kenya and the Sudan, reinforcing a shift toward sustainable approaches.

Refugee inclusion in national health systems advanced in several countries, including Rwanda which is expanding its community-based health insurance to include refugees. Over 9,400 refugees have already been enrolled, with full coverage targeted by 2027. Kenya has integrated refugees in its national insurance scheme, while Ethiopia and Uganda are aligning refugee health services with national planning.

In alignment with Global Refugee Forum pledges, the delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene services for displaced people has transitioned or is transitioning to public sector management in Ethiopia, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

From January to June, UNHCR provided cash assistance to nearly 60,000 households in the region, primarily refugees, diversifying and expanding assistance to meet energy, hygiene, shelter and voluntary repatriation needs. Some 89 per cent of recipients were able to purchase the items they required, primarily food, hygiene items, and firewood or fuel, in local markets.

Food ration cuts were made across the region to various degrees. In Uganda, 63 per cent of refugees no longer receive food assistance. While Uganda's progressive refugee policy allows refugees to work, limited income and rising food prices have deepened vulnerability, with food insecurity exacerbated by climate shocks and economic crises. One in ten refugee children under five years of age – up to 15 per cent among new arrivals – suffers from acute malnutrition. Funding shortfalls have led to stockouts of essential supplies, with nutrition programmes reaching only 29 per cent of undernourished children by mid-year.

Efforts to advance the 230 pledges made at the 2019 and 2023 Global Refugee Forums continued, with 18 fulfilled, 106 in progress, eight under planning and 98 pending updates. In March, Kenya formally launched the Shirika Plan to integrate refugees

into the country's socioeconomic fabric. In June, Ethiopia advanced its Makatet roadmap with a landmark high-level dialogue on refugee inclusion and host community support. In August, Djibouti issued a call for action to accelerate inclusion and investment in refugee-hosting areas. Rwanda is pursuing alternatives to camp-based refugee assistance, including transitioning camps to integrated settlements. In Uganda, roadmaps on Durable Solutions, Localization and Transition are progressing, though additional funding and technical support are urgently needed.

Several countries made strides in linking refugee support to national systems with development backing. Kenya advanced the Shirika Plan with the support of the World Bank, while Uganda expanded its projects under the Window for Host Communities and Refugees in alignment with its inclusive refugee policy. Ethiopia rolled out the Fayda digital identification system, easing barriers faced by refugees in accessing health, education, banking and SIM card registration. In Rwanda, a second phase of the World Bank-financed Jya Mbere II project will expand jobs, services and climate-resilient infrastructure for over 380,000 people in refugee-hosting districts. In Burundi, UNHCR and the World Bank are piloting out-of-camp social protection models for new arrivals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

UNHCR and the United Nations Development Coordination Office co-convened the second Development Partners Group meeting on the Sudan crisis in April and launched a Development Action Platform co-designed with UN-Habitat to provide data and analysis and mobilize humanitarian, development and peace support, focusing on integrated settlements and "solutions from the start". The African Development Bank and World Bank are including displaced populations in their broader programming, while the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships is pairing emergency support with early-recovery investments, though current needs still outpace the available resources.

In 2025, private sector-driven initiatives significantly advanced refugee self-reliance and economic empowerment. Kenya hosted the third Africa Private Sector Forum on Displacement, while in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and South Sudan, the NGO Inkomoko supported over 100,000 refugee entrepreneurs and small business owners, disbursing \$24 million and creating 60,000 jobs, primarily for women, through business training, financing and market linkages. Meanwhile, new partnerships, including with the Mastercard Foundation, are expanding access to education and dignified work opportunities for refugee youth. UNHCR sought to advance economic development and self-reliance through private-sector led provision of sustainable energy for productive use, focusing initially in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.

Securing solutions

Between January and June, UNHCR submitted 3,433 refugees for resettlement, while 4,749 refugees, primarily from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, departed on resettlement. It is estimated that some 600,000 refugees in the region require resettlement.

UNHCR facilitated the voluntary return of some 5,900 refugees and asylum-seekers, including 2,900 Rwandans who returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A total of 3,000 Burundian refugees returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda and the Republic of Tanzania, bringing the number receiving repatriation support since 2017 to 257,000. In May, the Government of Burundi launched its Operational Plan for the Reintegration of Refugees 2025-2027, which was livestreamed to camps in Tanzania to provide vital information to refugees.

A further 371,000 refugees, including 245,000 Sudanese and 119,000 South Sudanese, as well as Burundians, Ethiopians and Somalis, returned on their own, without support from UNHCR.

In May, Kenya's parliamentary committee submitted a draft amendment bill to the Kenya Citizenship and Immigration Act, as part of efforts to facilitate the continuous registration of stateless persons.

C. Financial information

The 2025 comprehensive needs budget for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region was approved by the Executive Committee in October 2024 at \$2,167.1 million. The current 2025 budget for the region is \$2,184.7 million as of 31 August 2025.

As of 31 August 2025, the breakdown of the requirements by impact area is as follows: realizing rights in safe environments (\$1,091.8 million); attaining favourable protection environments (\$516.5 million); empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$367.7 million); and securing solutions (\$208.7 million).

As of 31 August 2025, 30 per cent of the region's 2025 financial requirements had been funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions. In comparison, 37 per cent of the region's 2024 financial requirements of \$2,209 million were funded as of the same time last year.