

## **Update on UNHCR operations in southern Africa**

### **A. Situational analysis, including new developments**

As of December 2024, the southern Africa region hosted some 9.6 million forcibly displaced persons and returnees, 1 million of whom were refugees and asylum-seekers and 6.9 million of whom were internally displaced by conflict in their countries. In addition, the region also counted 1.2 million people who were internally displaced by the impact of extreme weather events and disasters.

The complex crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique remain the main drivers of forced displacement in southern Africa. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, years of protracted conflict and displacement have been compounded by escalating violence in the eastern part of the country since early 2025, resulting in significant loss of life and human rights violations – particularly targeting women and girls. At the same time, long-standing refugee situations persist in Angola, Botswana, Congo (the Republic of), Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The region also continues to grapple with mixed movements of migrants and asylum-seekers from across sub-Saharan Africa, especially along the southern and Indian Ocean routes.

Extreme weather events – such as drought, heavy rains and cyclones – continue to severely affect forcibly displaced and host communities across southern Africa. Mozambique was struck by three major tropical cyclones during the 2024-2025 season, the most recent being Tropical Cyclone Jude in March 2025. The cyclone impacted over a million people, including some already displaced by conflict, and caused widespread destruction, damaging roads, schools, homes and health centres.

Following the organization's review process, prompted by severe funding constraints, UNHCR will adjust its regional presence as of 1 October 2025. Oversight of the situations in Congo (the Republic of) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo will shift to the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa. Meanwhile, activities in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the South Africa Multi-Country Office, which covers Botswana, the Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Namibia, Seychelles and South Africa, will fall under the purview of the Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes. As part of these changes, the organization's operations in Angola, Malawi and Zimbabwe will be significantly downsized. Despite these adjustments to the organization's presence in the region, every effort will be made to continue supporting forcibly displaced persons and their host communities across southern Africa.

### **The Democratic Republic of the Congo emergency**

As of December 2024, prior to the latest escalation of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 21 million people across the country were already in need of humanitarian aid – one of the highest figures globally. Additionally, 6.7 million people were internally displaced, including 4.6 million in the Provinces of South Kivu and North Kivu. Since the escalation in late January 2025, hundreds of thousands more have been displaced within the country, while more than 119,000 have fled to neighbouring countries, primarily to Burundi and Uganda.

Despite severe operational challenges, UNHCR remains active in the Provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu, working alongside local partners to deliver life-saving support. In North Kivu, assistance continues in displacement sites, while in South Kivu, more than 42,000 refugees have received critical aid. UNHCR has also focused efforts on supporting internally displaced persons returning to their areas of origin. In addition, UNHCR continues to lead the inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo situation, which coordinates the response in Angola, Burundi, Congo (the Republic of), Rwanda, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

### **Mozambique emergency**

Mozambique is currently grappling with a triple crisis: armed conflict and displacement, recurring extreme weather events and months of post-electoral unrest. In March 2025, Cyclone Jude made landfall in Nampula Province, marking the third major cyclone to hit the country in just three months. The storms devastated areas where families displaced by the armed conflict had sought refuge, deepening the already critical humanitarian needs.

Since 2017, around 1.3 million people have been displaced internally due to the ongoing conflict in northern Mozambique, where non-state armed groups continue to carry out attacks against civilians. Even among those who have returned to their districts of origin, many remain displaced within these districts. Overall, returnees face significant obstacles to rebuilding their lives, particularly in accessing essential protection services – especially in rural areas.

In addition to the 699,700 people who remain internally displaced and the approximately 90,500 individuals who have returned to their districts of origin, Mozambique also hosts around 24,600 refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Against this backdrop, UNHCR continues to address immediate protection needs while advancing long-term solutions for displaced populations. This includes supporting national systems and government leadership, driving durable solutions and promoting the inclusion of forcibly displaced people.

## **B. Progress and challenges by impact area during 2024 and updated plans for 2025**

### **Attaining favourable protection environments**

At the Global Refugee Forums in 2019 and 2023, a total of 214 pledges were made to support forcibly displaced and stateless persons, as well as host countries in southern Africa. Of these, 67 per cent were made by States. As of June 2025, 45 per cent of the pledges are at various stages of implementation. To support the implementation of pledges, UNHCR assisted the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in convening a regional meeting with refugee commissioners in June 2025. The meeting provided a vital platform to take stock of Global Refugee Forum pledges, share best practices and identify targeted support required to overcome persistent challenges – particularly limited capacities and reduced focus on key areas such as education.

In parallel, UNHCR continues to promote sustainable responses across the region. In close cooperation with partners, it supports States in upholding their legal obligations to refugees and in delivering strategies which support self-reliance and advance durable solutions.

In response to the rising mixed movements across southern Africa and to assist stakeholders in safeguarding the rights of refugees and migrants, UNHCR had developed a regional mixed movements strategy for 2024-2027. An important milestone in advancing this strategy was reached in June 2025, when Member States officially adopted the recommendations of the high-level technical meeting on the route-based approach, co-convened by the SADC and UNHCR in December 2024. This reflected strengthened political commitment and paved the way for operationalizing the route-based approach in the region. The implementation will be supported through strategic partnerships with the International Organization for Migration and the Mixed Migration Centre, facilitating regional research, evidence-based planning and the development of holistic, human-centred responses and capacity-building initiatives.

UNHCR and partners are also translating the strategy's priorities into concrete action. In June 2025, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government of South Africa and other United Nations agencies, co-facilitated a workshop in Limpopo Province, near the Zimbabwean border. The training equipped frontline actors – such as the Border Management Authority and the South African Police Service – with the tools and knowledge needed to implement protection-sensitive border management practices, with a particular focus on safeguarding the rights of children and women.

Meanwhile, UNHCR continues to support national efforts to expand asylum space, address statelessness, and uphold the rights of displaced populations. Over the past year, Botswana, Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe initiated reviews of their Refugee Acts, with UNHCR advocating for greater refugee inclusion to support sustainable responses.

Notable progress has been made across the region in refugee registration and documentation. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, over 4,500 refugees were registered during the first half of 2025, and more than 19,000 received identity documents. In Angola, registration resumed in 2024 after an eight-year suspension, resulting in the registration of over 7,000 refugee families. Between August 2023 and June 2025, more than 4,000 identification cards were issued to refugees. The registration and issuance of identification for an additional 7,000 refugees is expected to commence before the end of the year.

### **Realizing rights in safe environments**

Displacement and humanitarian needs in southern Africa are largely driven by conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, as well as by extreme weather events, including cyclones, floods and droughts. In response, UNHCR has strengthened regional partnerships throughout 2025, working closely with key regional organizations to promote the inclusion of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. This included integrating sustainable responses into regional policy frameworks to mobilize collective and coordinated regional action.

A major achievement occurred in June 2025, when SADC Ministers approved the first regional programme addressing the nexus between forced displacement, fragility mitigation, climate resilience and disaster risk response. This reflects both political will and commitment, as well as a clear sense of ownership among countries in the region.

UNHCR has also deepened its collaboration with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), building on a memorandum of understanding signed in May 2025. A joint action plan has since been developed to operationalize the agreement and ensure the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons in the governance, peace and security agenda of COMESA. Strategic engagement with the African Development Bank (AfDB) has likewise been enhanced, focusing on joint programming, resource mobilization, co-financing and building partnerships for sustainable responses. These efforts align with the fragility and resilience agenda of the AfDB, which promotes collaboration across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

At the national level, health systems across the region remain very fragile and face significant gaps, requiring continued capacity-building, advocacy interventions and financial support. In 2025, UNHCR continued its efforts to ensure access to health services for refugees and asylum-seekers across southern Africa, placing a strong focus on advocating for their integration into national health care systems. To support this goal, the approach to sustainable responses and health road maps have been reviewed and updated, including revised transition timelines for the handover of health programmes to respective ministries of health.

Complementing these efforts, UNHCR is working to strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene services across the region. This includes expanding access to groundwater, improving the quality and design of water supply networks, promoting the construction of appropriate family latrines – led by refugee households themselves – and implementing a more sustainable approach to solid waste management. Meanwhile, closer collaboration with ministries responsible for water, as well as other key stakeholders such as district councils, the United Nations Children's Fund and development partners has resulted in more robust emergency responses and development interventions. These partnerships are also laying the necessary

foundation for improving the inclusion of refugees in national water, sanitation and hygiene services.

### **Empowering communities and achieving gender equality**

UNHCR continued to advance the integration of refugees into national education systems across southern Africa through strategic partnerships and policy initiatives. UNHCR continues to work with governments and development partners to advance refugee inclusion in national education systems. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 352 teachers working in refugee-hosting schools in the Ubangi and Bas-Uélé Provinces are being transitioned onto the government payroll – a critical step toward sustainable refugee education and its integration within national structures. In Malawi, the secondary school in Dzaleka Camp has been included in the country's Integrated Financial Management Information System, enabling the school to receive its first government grant, thereby advancing the inclusion of refugee education. In Zambia, the Government introduced a refugee-specific indicator in its Education Management Information System, improving data collection for more inclusive planning.

Another significant recent development in refugee education is the participation of Congo (the Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia in the Inclusion Support Programme for Refugee Education (known by its acronym INSPIRE), an initiative established by the World Bank. The programme seeks to provide predictable concessional financing to countries that open their schools to refugee children. In 2025, Zambia hosted the inaugural World Bank–UNHCR Education Policy and Learning Event, where the INSPIRE Guide – developed by the World Bank, UNHCR and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – was launched to assist governments in mainstreaming refugee education into national systems.

Despite these advancements, socioeconomic challenges in host countries in the region continued to hinder progress toward refugee self-reliance. Areas hosting refugees and other forcibly displaced persons often face limited development and weak market engagement, contributing to high food insecurity, unemployment and poverty. Building on commitments made at the Global Refugee Forums in 2019 and 2023, UNHCR continues to work with governments and partners to foster a more favourable environment for economic inclusion in the region. In Zambia, more than 600 refugees and former refugees were included in the Farmer Input Support Programme in 2025, receiving agricultural inputs – representing a significant step toward enhancing long-term self-reliance of refugees. Meanwhile, the Government of Zimbabwe – through the Agriculture Marketing Authority – signed a memorandum with UNHCR to improve market access for refugees and asylum-seekers, fostering their economic empowerment and integration.

### **Securing solutions**

In 2024, UNHCR partnered with the University of Cape Town to train 45 government officials from 16 SADC countries on statelessness identification and response. Complementing this effort, UNHCR also organized a regional training for journalists and hosted a webinar for civil society organizations to strengthen advocacy and accelerate implementation of the African Union Protocol on the Right to Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa. Momentum continued into 2025, with Angola, Congo (the Republic of) and Lesotho pledging to join Zambia and the Pan-African Parliament as members of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness – marking an important expansion of the regional commitment to address statelessness.

In parallel, UNHCR advanced durable solutions for displaced populations. During the first half of 2025, more than 700 refugees were resettled and over 2,000 individuals were assisted in voluntarily returning to their countries of origin – primarily to Rwanda, as well as to the Central African Republic. Preparations are underway to facilitate further voluntary repatriations before the end of 2025, including intention surveys, go-and-see and come-and-tell visits, voluntariness assessments, facilitation of exit clearance procedures and cross-border coordination initiatives.

**C. Financial information, including updated budget figures**

The comprehensive needs budget for southern Africa for 2025, which was approved by the Executive Committee at its annual plenary session in October 2024, amounted to \$451.3 million. The current 2025 budget for the region remains unchanged as of 31 August 2025.

The breakdown of the requirements by impact area, as of 31 August 2025, is as follows: “realizing basic rights in safe environments”, \$127.0 million; “attaining favourable protection environments”, \$140.0 million; “empowering communities and achieving gender equality”, \$87.4 million; and “securing solutions”, \$97.4 million.

As of 31 August 2025, 31 per cent of the region’s 2025 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions. In comparison, at the same time last year, 33 per cent of the region’s 2024 financial requirements – totalling \$492.2 million – had been funded.

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