

High Level Report Snapshot

FORCED DISPLACEMENT SURVEY | ZAMBIA 2025





Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Forced Displacement Survey overview and objectives	6
FDS Methodology	7
Refugee and Former Refugee Management	8
Demographics	9
Documentation and Mobility	10
Education	11
Multidimensional poverty and Well-being	12
Annex: SDGs Table	13

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Forced Displacement Survey overview and objectives

Zambia hosts over 113,000 refugees, asylum-seekers, and former refugees¹, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, followed by Burundi, Angola, Somalia, and Rwanda. Three-quarters live in Meheba, Mayukwayukwa, and Mantapala Refugee settlements, while the rest are in urban areas. Settlements are closely integrated with host communities, creating opportunities for synergies but also straining limited local resources and services. As Zambia faces mounting economic and fiscal pressures, intensified by the 2024 drought, and with reductions in official development assistance anticipated, sustaining refugee inclusion and service delivery remains a key challenge.

To this end, the Zambia Statistics Agency, the Zambia Office of the Commissioner for Refugees, and UNHCR, with EU funding and UNICEF support, launched the FDS, gathering high-quality socioeconomic data from 4,000+ households. It provides the first nationally representative baseline for inclusion monitoring under the National Refugee Policy (2023–2027). The multi-topic household survey collects both household- and individual-level data through face-to-face interviews on a wide range of topics to inform and guide the Government of the Republic of Zambia, UNHCR, and development partners in designing inclusive evidence-based interventions, and to track progress of refugee inclusion.

As UNHCR's flagship survey programme, the FDS bridges humanitarian and development evidence gaps to:

- Inform programme design and prioritisation aligned with population needs
- Enable targeting models for vulnerable groups
- Provide credible evidence for advocacy and policy dialogue
- Strengthen partnerships with national and development actors
- Enhance donor accountability and resource mobilisation
- Track progress on the Global Compact on Refugees and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



FDS Website

In Zambia, the FDS links the country's refugee response to broader international commitments. By making refugees visible within national data through FDS, Zambia strengthens its ability to align humanitarian action with long-term development priorities to ensure that refugees and host communities alike benefit from Zambia's development agenda, while safeguarding asylum space and progressing towards durable solutions for the forcibly displaced.

¹ UNHCR, 2025

FDS Methodology

The main target populations of the FDS are the refugee and former refugee² populations of Zambia and the "host community".³ The survey covered Zambia's three refugee settlements, Meheba, Mayukwayukwa, and Mantapala, and Lusaka. Together, these locations contain 97 percent of the registered refugee and asylum seeker population and 96 percent of the registered former refugee population. Host community data was collected only around settlements. Data collection took place from April to August 2025. The final realised sample was 4,310 households (2,373 refugee households, 722 former refugee households, 1,215 host community households). Within each household, up to four individuals were interviewed, the head of household, a randomly selected adult member, a woman who gave birth in the last 2 years, and a caregiver of a child under 5. For refugees and former refugees the data are nationally representative. For hosts, data are representative of households near settlements. The data also allows for disaggregation and analysis by locality and target population.



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² For the purposes of the FDS in Zambia, a former refugee is defined as any refugee in Zambia who was subject to a group application of the cessation clause and who holds a registration certificate issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees. In Zambia's case, this covers Angolan (cessation 2012) and Rwandan (cessation 2013) refugees. People with a refugee background who have since naturalized or otherwise formalized their stay in Zambia are not included.

³ Defined as the national, non-refugee population living in proximity to the refugee population, interacting and sharing space, resources, and opportunities with the refugee population.

Refugee and Former Refugee Management

Zambia has maintained an open-door asylum policy since independence in 1964, providing protection to people fleeing conflict and persecution across Southern and Central Africa. Over time, it has been hosting successive refugee influxes from Angola, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Somalia, and other countries in the region. The legal and policy framework for refugee protection in Zambia is shaped by the Refugees Act of No. 1 of 2017 and the 2024 National Refugee Policy and Implementation Plan.⁴ Together, they mark a significant shift towards inclusion, outlining measures to integrate refugees into national systems for health, education, and social protection, alongside the 2014 Strategic Framework for the Local Integration of Former Refugees which outlines policy and responsibility for the protection and legal and economic integration of Former Refugees.

Ambitious pledges were also made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, including inclusion of refugees into the Integrated National Registration Information System (INRIS), issuing digital IDs, and inclusion in national statistics including census data. Despite this progressive policy direction, challenges remain. Protection gaps persist in areas such as non-discriminatory access to asylum and legal documentation, timely refugee status determination, and immigration detention of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as restrictions on refugee's freedom of movement and right to wage-earning employment.



Demographics

Refugees, former refugees and the host community in Zambia are predominately young, with children under 5 forming the majority across all groups. Refugees display a distinctly youthful age structure with very few elderly, while hosts have a more stable profile with a higher share of older adults. Former refugees fall between, with slightly more women among working-age adults.

Disability⁵ affects 6 per cent of refugees, 5 per cent of former refugees, and 5 per cent of hosts, with no major sex differences. Disability prevalence rises sharply with age - 29 per cent of refugees aged 60 and above report functional limitations, compared with 19 per cent among both former refugees and hosts.

The dependency ratio is high across all groups, reaching 92 among refugees, 113 among former refugees and 108 among hosts, indicating that among former refugees and hosts, each working-age person supports more than one dependent. Most households are male-headed - 71 per cent among refugees and 61 per cent among both former refugees and hosts - though female-headed households, often single-parent, make up about one-third across groups.

Marriage before age 15 is rare across all populations. However, early marriage before 18 affects 9 per cent of host girls, compared with 4 per cent of refugees and 2 per cent of former refugees. The overall demographic structure of former refugees is more similar to hosts than to current refugees, reflecting a gradual demographic stabilization over time.

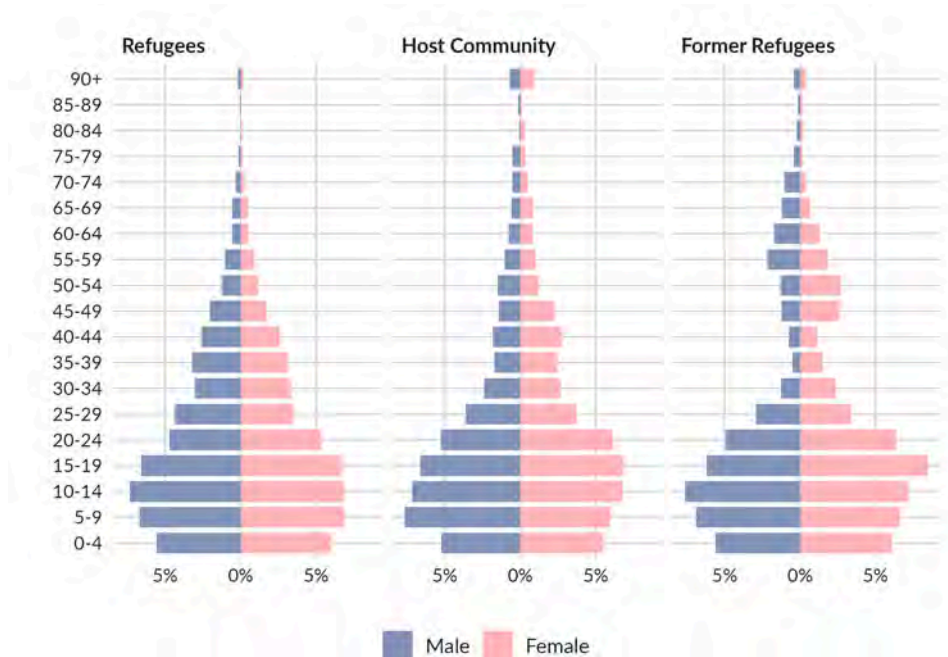


Figure 1: Population pyramid of refugees, former refugees and host community based on survey sample.

⁵ Washington Group on Disability, see <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/>.

Documentation and Mobility

Most refugees and former refugees aged 15+ hold a legally recognized identity document or credential, well over 97 per cent overall. Among refugees, the Refugee Certificate (COR - issued) is the main document held (89 per cent), followed by the Refugee ID card (COR - issued, 5 per cent). Coverage is highest in the settlements (above 93 per cent with a Refugee Certificate), while in Lusaka 76 per cent report a Refugee Certificate and 12 per cent a Refugee ID card. Very small numbers report having National Registration Cards (NRC) (issued by the Department of National Registration, Passport and Citizenship) as their primary document. For former refugees, the Registration Certificate (COR - issued) dominates (96 per cent), with a small share reporting having no documents (1 per cent) and a very small share reporting having NRC or other document as primary.

Although nearly all refugees possess some form of legally recognized documentation, only 29 per cent hold documents that grant some freedom of movement, either a mobility pass or a white Refugee ID (allowing out of settlement residence). Refugees in Lusaka are most likely to hold such documents, reflecting the fact that many are present in Lusaka because they have been given special permission to live or move outside the settlements. In contrast, legal mobility is notably limited across all settlements, restricting access to education, employment, markets, and self-reliance.

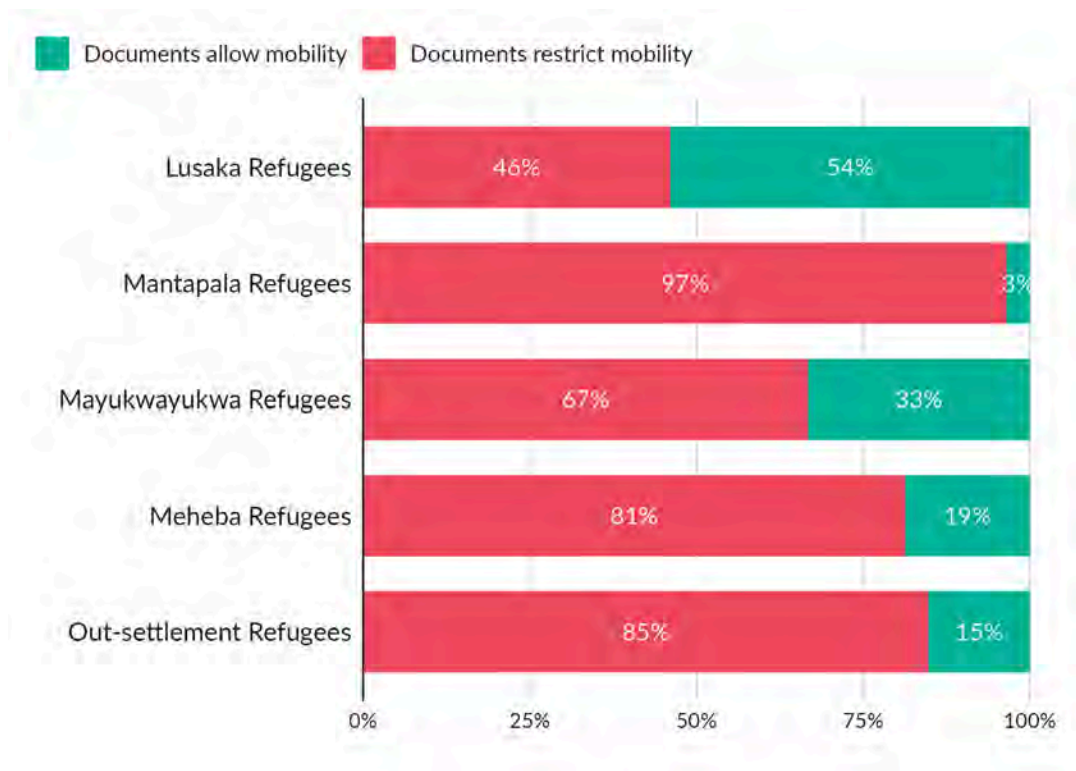


Figure 2: Legal ability to move - based on type of documents refugees hold, by stratum.

Education

Refugees and former refugees in Zambia have access to early childhood, primary, and secondary education on par with nationals, as provided under the Refugees Act No. 1 (2017) and Education Act No.23 (2011). Preschool learning is moderate - 69 per cent among refugees, 59 per cent among former refugees, and 52 per cent among hosts. Primary level enrollment exceeds 85 per cent across all population groups, however progression to secondary level remains a challenge, with 64 per cent of refugees, 55 per cent of former refugees, and 57 per cent of hosts enrolled. Government or public schools are the main provider at all levels, reflecting strong integration within the national system. Education interruptions are similar at the primary level but widen sharply at secondary, where one in four refugees faces disruptions - about twice the rate of hosts and former refugees, mainly linked to high non-tuition schooling costs.

Around three-quarters of adults across groups have received some education, with younger generations achieving higher levels, narrowing historical gaps. Educational completion declines with each successive level of schooling across all population groups, though hosts consistently achieve higher levels. Gender parity is strongest among refugees, while gaps widen at higher levels for hosts and former refugees. Educational attainment rises with household wealth across all groups but remains lowest among the poorest. Only 1 per cent of refugees in the lowest wealth quintile have completed tertiary education, compared with 10 per cent of former refugees and 12 per cent of hosts. Among the richest quintile, differences narrow where around one third of refugees, former refugees and host hold tertiary qualifications, indicating that wealth mitigates but does not fully close inequality in higher education access.

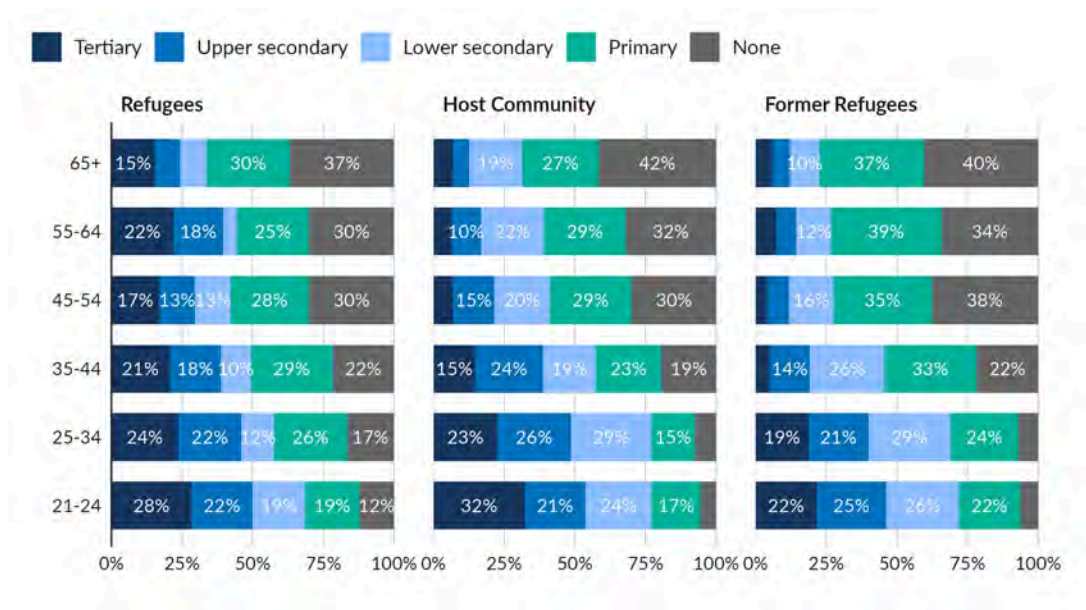


Figure 3: School attainment level, by age and population group.

Multidimensional Poverty and Well-being

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) reveals high levels of deprivation across refugees, former refugees, and host communities in Zambia, with refugees and former refugees experiencing the highest levels of multidimensional poverty across nearly all dimensions. MPI incidence stands at 68 per cent for refugees, 75 per cent for former refugees, and 64 per cent for hosts. Deprivations are particularly concentrated in the standards of living dimension, including access to electricity, cooking fuel, assets, and adequate housing materials.

Poverty is more pronounced in rural settlements, especially in Mantapala, while urban refugees living in Lusaka are relatively better off, reflecting better access to services and resources. Within the refugee population, female-headed, elderly-headed, and large dependent households, as well as those where the head has not completed primary education, face the highest risks of multidimensional poverty. Refugees and former refugees report lower satisfaction with community belonging and practicing their culture, compared to hosts, with the greatest dissatisfaction among all population groups linked to living conditions, access to food and achievements in life.

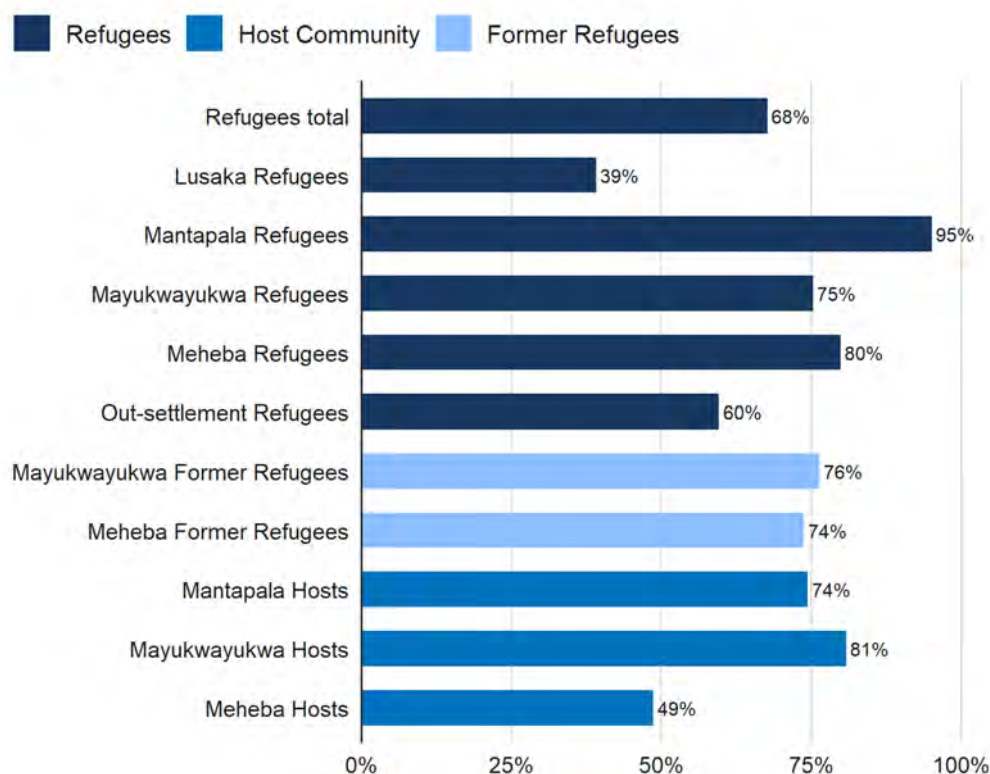


Figure 4: MPI poverty incidence, by stratum.

Annex: SDGs Table

Sustainable Development Goal	SDG Description	National value (source)	Refugees	Former Refugees	Host Community
SDG 1.3.1a	Proportion of population covered by at least one social protection cash benefit	30.3% (ILO, 2022)	13%	13%	27%
SDG 1.3.1c	Proportion of women giving birth covered by maternity benefits	3.5% (ILO, 2022)	1%	0%	0%
SDG 1.3.1d	Proportion of persons with disabilities receiving benefits	20.9% (ILO, 2022)	6%	4%	3%
SDG 1.3.1e	Proportion of unemployed receiving benefits	0.0% (ILO, 2022)	0%	0%	0%
SDG 1.3.1g	Proportion of older persons receiving a pension	25.80% (ILO, 2022)	10%	6%	17%
SDG 1.4.1a	Proportion of people (adults) with legally recognized documentation over land	10.3% (UN Habitat, 2018)	2%	11%	10%
SDG 1.4.1b	Proportion of people (adults) who perceive their rights as secure	No data available	4%	15%	19%
SDG 2.2.1	Proportion of children moderately or severely stunted	32.3% (WHO, 2024)	25%	32%	24%
SDG 2.2.2	Proportion of children moderately or severely wasted	4.20% (WHO, 2023)	2%	2%	5%
SDG 3.1.2	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	80.0% (DHS/WDI 2022)	99%	97%	98%
SDG 3.8.1	Tracer 2: Percentage of women aged 15-49 years with a live birth in a given time period who received antenatal care four or more times.	63.50% (WHO 2019)	73%	78%	87%
SDG 3.8.1	Tracer 3: Percentage of infants receiving three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis containing vaccine)	91.0% (WHO 2014)	95%	100%	100%
SDG 4.2.2	Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official entry age to primary education (children age 4 years)	46.6% (UNESCO 2024)	69%	59%	52%
SDG 4.1.2	Completion rate of primary school amongst those age 12 - 14 years.	72.0% (UIS 2018)	62%	54%	56%
SDG 4.1.2	Completion rate of primary school amongst those age 12 - 34 years.	No data available	54%	66%	72%
SDG 4.1.2	Completion rate of lower secondary school amongst those age 15 - 17 years	51.0% (UIS 2018)	45%	38%	44%
SDG 4.1.2	Completion rate of lower secondary school amongst those age 15 - 34 years	No data available	37%	41%	48%
SDG 4.1.2	Completion rate of upper secondary school amongst those age 19 - 21 years	28.2% (UIS 2018)	25%	20%	25%
SDG 4.1.2	Completion rate of upper secondary school amongst those age 19 - 34 years.	No data available	19%	19%	24%
SDG4.3.1 (25 - 45 years of age)	Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months	18.2% (UIS 2022)	5%	4%	7%
SDG 5.3.1a	Number of women aged 20-24 who were first married or in union before age 15	5.2% (UNICEF 2018)	0%	1%	0%
SDG 5.3.1b	Women age 20 - 24 years married before the age of 18	29.0% (UNICEF 2018)	4%	2%	9%
SDG5.b.1	Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone	51.8% (National ICT Survey 2022)	65%	52%	68%
SDG6.1.1	Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services	No data available	67%	50%	49%
SDG 6.2.1	Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water	No data available	20%	10%	14%

Sustainable Development Goal	SDG Description	National value (source)	Refugees	Former Refugees	Host Community
SDG7.1.1	Proportion of population with access to electricity	48% (WDI 2022)	28%	8%	17%
SDG7.1.2	Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology	9.20% (WHO 2024)	4%	0%	2%
SDG8.3.1	Proportion of informal employment in total employment, by sector and sex	83.8% (ILO 2023)	97%	100%	98%
SDG8.5.2	Unemployment rate	5.9% (ILO 2023)	30%	20%	44%
SDG 8.6.1	Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training	28.9% (ILO 2022)	28%	37%	45%
SDG8.7.1a	Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour	No data available	11%	19%	16%
SDG8.7.1b	Proportion and number of children aged 5-17 years engaged in economic activities and household chores at or above age-specific hourly thresholds	No data available	36%	42%	45%
SDG8.10.2	Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider	72.30% (World Bank Findex 2024)	56%	38%	51%
SDG 16.b.1	Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law	No data available	61%	53%	32%
SDG 16.1.4	Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark	No data available	36%	43%	52%
SDG 16.9.1	Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	14.0% (WDI 2018)	71%	38%	27%
SDG 17.8.1	Proportion of individuals using the internet	33.0% (ITU/WDI 2023)	38%	10%	9%
SDG 1.2.2	Multidimensional Poverty Index	48% (UNDP 2024)	68%	75%	64%

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Further information on forced displacement survey is available
on UNHCR's statistics website <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/reports-and-publications/data-and-statistics/forced-displacement-surveys>.



FDS Data