

**Standing Committee of the  
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## **Update of UNHCR operations in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region**

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

By the end of 2022, the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region hosted about 5 million refugees and asylum-seekers and 11.6 million internally displaced persons, totalling some 16.6 million people. About 70 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers were hosted in Uganda (1.5 million), the Sudan (1.1 million) and Ethiopia (883,000). The Sudan and Somalia had the highest number of internally displaced persons (3.7 million and 3 million respectively), followed by Ethiopia (2.7 million)<sup>1</sup> and South Sudan (2.2 million).<sup>2</sup>

As a result of changing climatic conditions, the East and Horn of Africa continues to suffer from severe drought since 2019. As water sources dried up and livelihoods were destroyed, millions of refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities were affected in the region. The situation was compounded by the global economic crisis and the rising prices of food and other basic commodities. A mix of conflict and climate shocks triggered new displacement, both internal and across international borders. In 2022, some 93,000 Somali refugees arrived in Ethiopia and Kenya. Some arrivals in Somalia from Ethiopia were recorded as well. As of December 2022, the number of individuals newly displaced internally, primarily due to drought, reached 1.8 million in Somalia and over half a million in Ethiopia.

A two-year conflict in northern Ethiopia has affected the lives and livelihoods of millions of Ethiopians and displaced many people, including refugees who had arrived from Eritrea in previous years and were hosted in refugee camps in northern Ethiopia. In November 2022, the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front signed a cessation of hostilities agreement. The delivery of humanitarian services as well as access to cash, fuel and communication services partially resumed, and some internally displaced persons in Tigray and neighbouring Afar and Amhara are returning to their homes. Conflict in the Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia and Somali regions of Ethiopia is continuing in 2023, and the Oromia region is seeing increased levels of internal displacement due to intercommunal violence. In 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), together with partners, will further strengthen service delivery and coordination in northern Ethiopia and scale up emergency preparedness and response capacity in anticipation of possible population movements in southern Ethiopia due to the ongoing drought.

South Sudan remains Africa’s largest displacement situation, with over 2.2 million refugees in neighbouring countries and 2.2 million internally displaced persons. In parts of South Sudan, floods and drought have killed livestock and disrupted crop cycles, exacerbating food insecurity. While UNHCR is not currently facilitating repatriation to South Sudan, close to 600,000 refugees have returned on their own since 2018. In 2023, UNHCR aims to make progress on the solutions-oriented initiative, Pockets of Hope, which is area-based and multisectoral. This initiative focuses on investing in return areas to enhance living conditions

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<sup>1</sup> The statistics for internally displaced persons in Ethiopia are incomplete due to difficulties collecting data in certain regions.

<sup>2</sup> All data are provisional and subject to change.

and livelihood opportunities for returnees and the local communities, strengthen local systems, and build capacity and access to services through inclusive government and/or community-led projects.

Uganda continues to host the largest number of refugees in Africa, with over 1.5 million refugees. By the end of 2022, Uganda had received 126,000 new arrivals, including from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (59,000) and South Sudan (47,000). With the escalating conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, thousands of people continued to flee to Uganda in January 2023. UNHCR will provide them with emergency assistance and essential services, as well as relocate refugees from overcrowded transit and reception centres into settlements.

The Sudan hosts some 1.1 million refugees, and 3.7 million people are internally displaced amid seasonal flooding, high inflation and food insecurity. Since 2020, the number of refugees arriving from Ethiopia has stabilized, and as progress is made on the implementation of the peace agreement in northern Ethiopia, UNHCR will plan for possible voluntary returns. In the Sudan, arrivals from South Sudan, as well as ongoing conflict and displacement in Darfur, have created additional humanitarian needs. Although the region continues to work on solutions initiatives for Sudanese refugees, political stability and the resolution of regional conflicts in parts of the country, including Darfur, are necessary to create an environment conducive to return and reintegration for both refugees and internally displaced persons.

In Somalia, against a backdrop of successful presidential elections and intensified government efforts to recapture territory from Al Shabaab, the Protection and Return Monitoring Network<sup>3</sup> reports that approximately 1.8 million individuals were newly internally displaced by conflict and drought in 2022. Somalia and neighbouring countries are extremely vulnerable to climate change, and UNHCR will support the implementation of the Action Plan of the Intergovernmental Authority (IGAD) Regional Climate Change Strategy, which outlines priority areas of intervention, including economic and social development under climate security.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of 2022, countries in the region were host to some 280,000 Burundian refugees. The political, economic and security situation continues to improve in Burundi, and over 21,000 Burundian refugees voluntarily returned home in 2022. Since 2017, UNHCR and partners have facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 207,000 Burundian refugees, the majority from the United Republic of Tanzania. UNHCR and the Tanzanian Government continue to make progress on the implementation of the recommendations, such as intention surveys and go-and-see visits, from the 2022 High-Level Meeting on Protection and Solutions for Protracted Refugee Populations. In November 2022, the Government of Burundi and UNHCR also hosted a high-level roundtable that aimed to mobilize development actors to support the sustainable reintegration of Burundian returnees.

The East African Community, IGAD and UNHCR undertook joint country assessment missions to Burundi, Ethiopia and Kenya as part of the African Development Bank's regional programme on climate investment for the economic empowerment of refugee and returnee women, as well as women in host communities. UNHCR and the European Union Directorate General for International Partnerships also developed a regional programme to support the 2023-2030 Solutions Initiative for the Sudan and South Sudan. These regional programmes will assist UNHCR in collecting quality data and evidence, building partnerships and pursuing solutions together with displacement-affected communities.

#### *Mixed movements*

The displacement triggered by conflict and extreme weather conditions in the region continues to raise concerns about the associated risks of human trafficking. In 2022, a mapping exercise of protection services available to victims of trafficking and other vulnerable people on the move towards North Africa, Europe and the Middle East was carried

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<sup>3</sup> In Somalia, the Protection and Return Monitoring Network is a UNHCR-led project implemented in partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council that reports on displacement, protection risks and incidents underlying population movements.

<sup>4</sup> Available from [www.icpac.net/publications/igad-regional-climate-change-strategy-and-action-plan-2023-2030](http://www.icpac.net/publications/igad-regional-climate-change-strategy-and-action-plan-2023-2030).

out in Ethiopia. Building on the 2022 Framework Agreement on Serving and Protecting Together signed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, both organizations are looking at establishing priority areas of intervention in the region with a view to strengthening context-specific policy responses and streamlining collaboration.

## **B. Progress and challenges in 2022 and priorities for 2023 for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region**

### *Promoting a favourable protection environment*

Constraints in accessing asylum procedures resulted in unregistered populations being unable to meet their basic needs, including in drought and other climate-related displacement contexts. In some countries in the region, decisions to deny access to asylum procedures or place refugee status determination on hold for specific profiles have resulted in onward movements and incidents of chain-refoulement, as well as in situations of undocumented asylum-seekers finding themselves in a legal limbo. State-led refugee status determination procedures were hampered by high costs and slow decision-making, and more than 200,000 individuals are currently awaiting a decision on their asylum claims. Arrangements, such as the one between the Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Rwanda proposing to transfer asylum-seekers in the United Kingdom to Rwanda where their claim for international protection would be determined under the national system, threaten to destabilize and overburden asylum systems in the region.<sup>5</sup> In order to help mitigate some of these concerns, UNHCR will share good practices from within and beyond the region, and will support regional entities and States in taking action to address identified gaps and weaknesses in the capacity of asylum systems through targeted capacity-development interventions.

### *Child protection, preventing and responding to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse*

Recurring conflict, displacement, drought and economic crises, as well as reductions in food assistance have exacerbated gender-based violence and child protection risks across the region. In 2022, UNHCR invested in strengthening gender-based violence and child protection case management procedures and referral pathways. The Office also advocated the inclusion of refugees in national protection systems, in particular in response to the northern Ethiopia situation, the arrivals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Uganda, and the drought response in Kenya and Somalia. In northern Ethiopia and Somalia, bolstering gender-based violence response capacity was prioritized in the drought response through additional staffing and training.

Capacity-building on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability to affected people continues to be undertaken in the region through technical support missions and in-person and remote trainings. In UNHCR operations, technical support to help partners assess their capacity to protect people from sexual exploitation and abuse, their accountability to affected people, complaints mechanisms and community engagement is provided on an ongoing basis.

In 2023, the region will strengthen the gender-based violence policy monitoring framework, roll out new standard operating procedures, support the standardization and use of safety audits that help to identify risks gender-based violence in the community. UNHCR will also improve systems for feedback from affected people, ensure quarterly reporting on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and implement behavioural change programmes. The Office will operationalize its renewed partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on child protection, strengthen the Regional Child Protection Network, and engage with the East African Community and IGAD on the implementation of a roadmap to

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<sup>5</sup> UNHCR's analysis of this arrangement is available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/62a317d34/unhcr-analysis-of-the-legality-and-appropriateness-of-the-transfer-of-asylum.html>.

reinforce child protection systems, as well as cross-border and inter-agency coordination on child protection.

*Protection and solutions for internally displaced persons*

In 2022, internal displacement in the region increased due to conflict and climate-related factors. In Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan, UNHCR is working on the implementation the United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement with the United Nations steering group established to support the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement. In partnership with governments and non-governmental organizations, UNHCR prioritizes life-saving activities and protection monitoring. It also leads clusters on protection, camp coordination and camp management and shelter/non-food items and helps address internal displacement through community-based protection responses, as well as shelter, education and livelihoods interventions. However, limited funding continues to hamper these efforts. A coordinated approach to promote durable solutions, prevent displacement and provide effective protection and assistance will continue to be pursued.

*Cash and multi-sector assistance*

In 2022, almost 1.2 million individuals, or 332,000 households, received cash grants, 86 per cent of whom were refugees, 9 per cent were internally displaced and 5 per cent were returnees. Approximately 59 per cent of cash transfers were made through banks and mobile transactions. Post-distribution monitoring reports found that 82 per cent of recipients rated cash as their preferred modality of assistance, while 35 per cent preferred a combined approach (i.e. in-kind and cash). Findings also indicated that some 82 per cent of recipients were able to buy desired items in local markets. Food ranked highest among purchases. Most operations are now using CashAssist, a UNHCR cash management system for better tracking of financial and banking transfers that allows for transparency and easier reconciliations. Some cash coordination working groups in refugee settings are co-led by UNHCR or have become sub-working groups for refugees in situations of mixed movements. Where feasible, UNHCR will continue to prioritize cash interventions and explore the development of targeting strategies.

*Food security*

A number of factors, including conflict, prolonged drought, other climate shocks and the socioeconomic fallout of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, aggravated food insecurity and nutritional status in the region. Refugees and internally displaced persons are at heightened risk in this regard, given that many have lost their assets and livelihoods. This situation is further compounded by funding shortfalls that have contributed to the reduction in food rations (between 20 and 60 per cent of a full ration), affecting over 4.2 million refugees, some 86 per cent of the total number of refugees in the region in 2022. When food insecurity increases, women and girls are at particular risk of hunger and human rights violations, including sexual violence, sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, and child marriage.

*Global Compact on Refugees and Global Refugee Forum*

Host governments and others continue to demonstrate progress in follow-up and implementation of pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. Some pledges have a particular focus on the inclusion of refugees in national, sectoral and local government plans and national statistics. Notably, Djibouti has included refugees in their national policy on financial inclusion.

UNHCR also engages with regional institutions that further the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. For example, the Office supported the finalization of the East African Community's Regional Refugee Management Policy and activities under the IGAD Support Platform and its Nairobi Process, such as a stocktaking event on the Kampala Declaration on

Jobs and Livelihoods<sup>6</sup> and the finalization of an Action Plan for Member States to implement the Kampala Declaration commitments.

In preparation for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR will work closely with the East African Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, IGAD as well as countries in the region – and especially Uganda as a 2023 Global Refugee Forum co-convenor – to highlight best practices, as well as challenges and opportunities, through a series of stocktaking exercises and preparatory events. Efforts will also be undertaken to support the development and matching of pledges.

#### *Durable solutions*

In the region, nearly 25,500 refugees were assisted in their return to their countries of origin in 2022. The majority of these returns were to Burundi, and UNHCR facilitated the return of 2,450 refugees to Rwanda and 1,200 refugees to Somalia, where an additional 1,750 spontaneous returnees also benefitted from reintegration support. Moreover, approximately 126,600 refugees spontaneously returned to South Sudan in 2022.

In 2022, UNHCR submitted the cases of more than 30,000 individuals for resettlement for nearly 28,000 spaces in 13 countries. In 2023, UNHCR and partners will work to reach a combined target of just over 28,000 individuals from the region for resettlement.

#### *Eradication of statelessness*

In December 2022, Kenya announced the decision to recognize people of Pemba descent as Kenyan citizens. UNHCR will support the Ministry of the Interior to translate this decision into action and assist with the provision of legal documentation. UNHCR will also continue engaging with the Government on how to address other statelessness situations, including stateless people of Burundian and Rwandan descent.

Ahead of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region Secretariat and UNHCR plans to co-host an expert conference on the eradication of statelessness to reinvigorate the implementation of the 26 pledges made by 10 countries from the region as part of the #IBelong Campaign. The recommendations of a joint regional study by UNHCR and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region on protracted refugee situations, risks of statelessness and prospects for durable solutions will also be disseminated. In doing so, UNHCR aims to promote the mainstreaming of the prevention of, and response to, statelessness in strategies on comprehensive durable solutions for refugees in the region.

#### *Risk management*

Achievements in 2022 include progress made in embedding risk management in UNHCR operations through the capacity-building of risk advisers and focal persons, the sharing of best practices, and risk management training for staff in the region and partners in Somalia, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania. The mitigation of key strategic risks – in relation to the security and political situation, access to asylum, funding, food insecurity, high inflation, limited livelihoods and the adverse effects of climate change – were a challenge. A risk-based oversight plan will be compiled in 2023 to guide decision-making, oversight and technical support.

## **C. Financial information**

In 2023, the comprehensive needs budget for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region amounts to \$2.02 billion to respond to ongoing emergencies, including the catastrophic drought situation affecting the East and Horn of Africa, the refugee influxes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan into Uganda and the floods in Somalia and South Sudan. In addition, recovery measures to mitigate the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on lives and livelihoods

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<sup>6</sup> Available from Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods, and Self-Reliance.

**Revised version**

**Update – East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes Region**

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and of the Ebola outbreak that affected Uganda, as well as recovery interventions for displaced and returning populations in northern Ethiopia, will be prioritized. As of 31 January 2023, operational needs for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region have been 8 per cent funded with \$162.7 million in voluntary contributions recorded, including the indicative allocation of flexible funding.

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