

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

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

By mid-2022, the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region hosted nearly 5 million refugees and asylum-seekers and 12.8 million internally displaced persons, totalling 17.8 million people. Over 70 per cent were in Uganda (1.5 million), Sudan (1 million) and Ethiopia (870,500). Ethiopia and Sudan also hosted the highest number of internally displaced persons, 4.5 million and 3 million respectively, followed by Somalia (3 million), South Sudan (2 million) and Burundi (85,000).

Following poor rainfall patterns in the Horn of Africa since 2019 and changing climatic conditions, the region is currently facing the worst drought in 40 years, which is severely affecting millions of persons of concern to UNHCR and host communities. With water sources drying up, livelihoods decimated and rising prices, there is new displacement – both internal and across borders due to a mix of conflict and climate shocks – as well as drought-specific impacts on existing refugee camps, settlements and host communities. As of August 2022, some 27,000 refugees had arrived to Ethiopia and Kenya from Somalia, with some arrivals to Somalia from Ethiopia as well. The number of individuals who were newly displaced internally due to drought since January had reached over 580,000 in Ethiopia and 755,000 in Somalia. In June, UNHCR launched a regional drought response emergency appeal for the Horn of Africa and internally increased support and resources in order to support additional needs in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.

The dynamics of the conflict in northern Ethiopia remained complex and fluid, including with the resumption of hostilities at the end of August, leading to new displacements, hindering humanitarian access to the affected populations and hampering effective delivery of protection and assistance. Although more aid became available in northern Ethiopia during the second quarter of 2022 while the 5-month humanitarian ceasefire held, with the delivery of humanitarian cargo and fuel, the quantities fell short of meeting the immense needs. Intermittent access to certain areas and the difficulty in positioning supplies have affected tens of thousands of vulnerable Eritrean refugees in Tigray and more recently in Afar. Tens of thousands of internally displaced returned to their areas of origin in the Amhara region in the first half of the year. While not directly related to the conflict in the north, the Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia and Somali regions of Ethiopia have also reported new internal displacement due to inter-communal violence.

South Sudan remains Africa’s largest and the third-largest refugee crisis globally, with 2.3 million refugees in neighbouring countries. Some 2.2 million are internally displaced with conflict and floods aggravating an already precarious situation. In other parts of the country, droughts have killed livestock and disrupted crop cycles, worsening food insecurity. While UNHCR is not facilitating repatriation to South Sudan at this time, close to 600,000

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

refugees have nevertheless returned on their own accord since 2017, although some of these returns likely represent pendular movements.

Uganda continues to host the largest number of refugees in Africa, with over 1.5 million refugees in the country. Since the beginning of the year, Uganda has received nearly 90,000 new arrivals: more than 60,000 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 28,000 from South Sudan. The conflict in the Congolese provinces of North Kivu and Ituri intensified in late March 2022, triggering the displacement of thousands into Uganda. The situation remains unpredictable along the border where new arrivals continue to cross. While UNHCR has been relocating new arrivals to settlements, by the end of July, the holding capacity at Nyakabande Transit Centre in Kisoro District remained overstretched (nearly 18,000 people accommodated in a facility with capacity for 7,200).

The displaced in Sudan continue to face various challenges that are also impacting the local population, such as inflation, high levels of food insecurity and seasonal flooding. The country hosts about 1.1 million refugees and has over 3 million internally displaced persons, many of whom are caught in situations of protracted displacement. The resolution of conflicts, including access to arable land, is critical to end violence and subsequent displacement. Furthermore, international support will be needed to ensure conditions become conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced people. The influx witnessed last year from Ethiopia has stabilized, however new arrivals from South Sudan and ongoing conflict and displacement in Darfur since the start of the year have created additional humanitarian needs.

The operational environment in Somalia remained dynamic throughout the first half of the year. While the government emphasized political and social reconciliation during the Presidential election, the political and security situation in most parts of the country remains tense. The worsening drought conditions are affecting most of the country. According to the Protection and Return Monitoring Network led by UNHCR, approximately 1 million individuals have been displaced internally within Somalia as of August 2022. The displaced families face multiple protection risks and have identified livelihood support, food, water, shelter and health as priority needs.

By the end of June 2022, countries in the Great Lakes Region were host to some 261,000 Burundian refugees. The country has experienced relative political stability since the political transition in May 2020 and the overall political, working environment and security situation has improved. A total of 8,900 Burundian refugees returned home voluntarily from January to June 2022. Since 2017, UNHCR and partners have facilitated the voluntary repatriation of over 185,000 Burundian refugees, the majority of whom returned from the United Republic of Tanzania which hosts the most Burundian refugees. [In March 2022, the government of Tanzania hosted a High-Level Meeting on protection and solutions for protracted refugee populations and developed a comprehensive work plan to implement key recommendations from the meeting.](#)

### *Mixed movements*

The ongoing displacement of people by conflict and extreme weather events in the region continues to raise concerns about the risks of human trafficking along existing migration routes. An exercise to map protection services available for victims of trafficking and other vulnerable people on the move towards North Africa, Europe and the Middle East was carried out in Ethiopia. The first regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons in East Africa was held in February 2022, providing a platform to exchange information on challenges and priority areas of intervention in the region for strengthened and more coordinated context-specific policy responses.

## **B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2022 plan for the East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region**

### *Promoting a favourable protection environment*

Restrictions on access to territory due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) were lifted throughout the region, however access to quality asylum procedures remained constrained, resulting in onward movement and incidents of chain-refoulement. Refugee status determination procedures were hampered by high costs and slow decision-making, with more than 200,000 individual asylum applicants pending adjudication. Seeking to promote a favourable asylum space, UNHCR engaged in high-level dialogues in Eritrea and the United Republic of Tanzania aimed to improve asylum conditions and supported Djibouti to assess and increase the capacity of its national asylum system. UNHCR maintained strong and principled advocacy efforts against the externalization of asylum obligations in general, including the arrangement between Rwanda and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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

Notable achievements have been the establishment and implementation of case management procedures and establishing systems in Ethiopia and Sudan in the emergency response to the northern Ethiopia situation and in Uganda, in response to the new arrivals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This includes community engagement, awareness-raising on rights, services and referral pathways for victims of gender-based violence, implementation of Safe from the Start grant projects, providing alternative care support for unaccompanied children, capacity-building and advocating for the inclusion of children and women in the national systems, as well as assisting children and women to recover from physical and psychosocial effects. However increased protection risks, limited funding, the worsening economic situation, food assistance cuts and the limited capacity of national services to accommodate refugees have impacted the level of response to children and women's protection needs.

The zero-tolerance approach and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, including accountability to affected populations, remain a priority in the protection and solutions strategy in the region. Countries have undertaken assessments of implementing partners and conducted capacity-building for UNHCR personnel, partners and the refugee community focused on accessible reporting, quality assistance and enhanced accountability. The regional bureau continues to support broader accountability by compiling quarterly reports, providing technical support and monitoring activities at country level as well as engaging in regional interagency platforms for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

### *Protection and solutions for internally displaced persons*

For internally displaced persons the main focus of UNHCR is on life-saving activities through ensuring the provision of shelter, non-food items and protection monitoring. In line with the global tri-cluster leadership approach and revised the Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement), UNHCR is leading or co-leading the clusters on protection, camp coordination and camp management, and shelter/non-food items

Durable solutions are also a core priority in the recently launched United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and are a critical element of the organization's response to situations of internal displacement in the region. While each country in the region has different contextual factors, UNHCR is pursuing a more coordinated approach together with others, including development actors and donors, to promote durable

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

solutions initiatives. While some returns by internally displaced persons are being registered in the region, many others are self-organized rather than facilitated and therefore difficult to quantify.

### *Cash/multi-sector assistance*

In the first half of the year almost 868,000 individuals (188,000 households) were assisted with cash grants, of which 88 per cent of recipients were refugees mainly living in camps, followed by internally displaced persons (9 per cent) and returnees (3 per cent). Operations have diversified their cash assistance interventions and 84.5 per cent of the cash transfers were conducted through bank transfers and mobile transactions. Reports have shown that 85 per cent of beneficiaries have rated cash as their preferred modality of assistance with 23 per cent expressing a preference for a combined approach (in-kind and cash). Most recipients (84 per cent) were able to access desired items in local markets and food was the top purchase, irrespective of the type of cash programme implemented.

### *Food security*

The current drought emergency is in addition to numerous other hazards also affecting food security and nutritional outcomes in the region, including flooding, conflict and insecurity, macroeconomic challenges, rising global food prices linked to the Ukraine crisis, the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, and desert locusts. Internally displaced persons and refugees are at a heightened risk of food insecurity as many have left behind assets and lost their social capital and livelihoods. This situation is compounded by funding shortfalls that have contributed to significant reduction in food rations (between 20 and 60 per cent of a full ration) affecting over 3.8 million or 77 per cent of refugees in the region, and amplified the cross-sectional protection needs of the most vulnerable.

### *Global Compact on Refugees/Global Refugee Forum*

Notable progress was made in the follow-up and implementation of pledges made by host governments and other entities at the Global Refugee Forum. This contributed to translating the ambitions of the Global Compact on Refugees into improvements in the lives of refugees and host communities.

Host governments continue to demonstrate progress towards the inclusion of refugees in national, sectoral and local government plans as well as in national statistics. The Government of Djibouti has included refugee teachers in its policy on vocational training for 2021-2035. In Kenya, the adoption of a progressive Refugee Act 2021 provides an enabling environment for livelihoods and economic inclusion with specific provisions on the inclusion of refugees in national and county development plans. In Sudan, the Government has been active in monitoring the implementation of the nine policy pledges it made at the Global Refugee Forum, through the creation of an inter-ministerial committee to oversee and monitor pledge implementation.

Engagement with regional institutions that furthered the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees included support to the finalization of the East African Community regional refugee management policy, activities under the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Support Platform and its Nairobi Process including a study tour to Uganda, a regional training of trainers on refugee protection and management, as well as signing a new agreement on areas of collaboration with IGAD.

### *Durable solutions*

Refugee returns continued in the first half of 2022 and are higher than those recorded during the same period in 2021. Nearly 101,500 refugees returned to their countries of origin,

including almost 12,500 facilitated returns to Burundi and 87,700 self-organized returns to South Sudan. Nearly 300 Somalis were assisted to return, while some 1,040 who returned on their own were provided with support. UNHCR also facilitated over 1,000 refugee returns to Rwanda. In 2022, UNHCR support for refugees willing to return is ongoing, while advocating that governments, humanitarian partners and development actors work together to enhance the conditions required for safe return and sustainable reintegration.

The region also continues to expand and diversify its resettlement and complementary pathway activities. In 2022, the region was allocated 30,245 resettlement places, of which 26,000 resettlement places were from the United States of America, including group resettlement submissions from Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania, providing further opportunities to use resettlement strategically to improve the overall protection environment in countries of asylum, as well as to improve access to other durable solutions. By the end of July, the region had submitted a total of 11,836 individuals to 13 resettlement countries. There were also positive trends witnessed in terms of departures, with a total of 5,338 individuals departing to 14 third countries by the end of July 2022.

#### *Eradication of statelessness*

The first half of the year saw the finalization of the study by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region and UNHCR, which examined the risks of statelessness arising from prolonged exile in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. The research builds on pledges made by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region's Secretariat to obtain more data on statelessness in the region and informs the development of a comprehensive durable solutions strategy.

In May 2022, civil society organizations in the region launched the Eastern African Network on Nationality, the region's first statelessness network, to advance ongoing efforts in eradicating statelessness in the countries of the region.

#### *Risk management*

Risk management and technical support on compliance and oversight were provided to operations in the region by the regional bureau to determine emerging risks and further support needs. The 2022 risk registers of all operations were reviewed for quality and feedback sent to country operations for action. Risk management briefing sessions were conducted for newly-appointed representatives and risk focal persons in the region. Notable challenges included limited progress in some operations in implementing agreed risk treatments; an analysis of pending risk treatments was carried out and shared with operations for follow up action and feedback.

### **C. Financial information**

At the beginning of the year, the comprehensive needs budget for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, approved by the Executive Committee in October 2021, amounted to \$1,880.2 million. The situation in northern Ethiopia, the drought situation in the East and Horn of Africa, the recent influxes of individuals from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo into Uganda, and other calamities that affected the region including floods in Somalia and South Sudan are just some of the issues requiring much needed funding in the region. The overall regional funding requirements were funded at 22 per cent as of 31 July.