

Regional Update for East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes

Collective NGO Statement – Written Statement

The Eastern and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region has historically witnessed large scale displacement and migration, with each country having a unique displacement profile.

The ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan have caused a significant influx of refugees into neighboring countries like South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Burundi and Chad, further straining the region's capacity to host displaced populations. Severe drought and climate change are other major drivers of displacement in the regions, forcing even more people to leave their homes. In the absence of policies to address root causes and ensure durable solutions, the number of forcibly displaced will continue to rise, leading to regional instability and overwhelming the region's collective capacities to respond to the needs of displaced and hosting communities.

Sudan:

In Sudan, the number of refugees surges as war continues to drive displacement. The country now represents the largest humanitarian crisis globally. The war that erupted in April 2023 has greatly exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, increasing displacement figures to [over 3 million](#) refugees, including over 1 million children, making Sudan also the world's largest displacement crisis.¹ In 2025, the situation of those already displaced will continue to be challenging if the war rages on. Considering this reality, NGOs call for:

- International bodies, such as the African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), to facilitate the resolution of the conflict.
- Urgent action to address escalating gender-based violence in Sudan. Reports underscore [widespread](#) intimate partner violence, [sexual violence](#) and exploitation, and trafficking.
- The UN to prioritize and take decisive action including engaging with parties to the conflict to address impunity of human rights violations, including sexual violence, and protect and safeguard the lives, dignity, and wellbeing of women, girls, men, and boys, including survivors of gender based violence (GBV), targeted GBV attacks against GBV workers, humanitarian actors, women's led organisations (WLOs) and human rights defenders, in line with international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Donors to increase funding for GBV prevention and response prioritizing dedicated and flexible funding for WLOs. Ensure GBV programmes are treated as life-saving in decision-making on funding and response.
- Sudanese refugees must be provided with protection and assistance, (especially lifesaving interventions) with a focus on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programs, with resources and trained personnel, enabling access to timely and life-saving health care, establish emergency service points, one-stop centers, and specialized trauma care including fistula clinics so that survivors can access desperately needed sexual and reproductive health and MHPSS services.

South Sudan

¹ [Sudan: About 7,600 children fleeing homes daily in world's largest child displacement crisis | Save the Children International](#)

With over [2.98 million refugees](#) in 2024, the displacement crisis in South Sudan is at its highest since 2017. Displacement levels will likely continue to be high this year due to the postponed December 2024 elections and ongoing political tensions.

Disasters in South Sudan are increasingly frequent and severe, which contributes to displacement. According to the European Commission's [2023 INFORM Risk Index](#), South Sudan is the second most vulnerable country to natural hazards and climate change. With 95% of South Sudanese dependent on the land for their livelihoods, their personal survival is at stake. Against this backdrop, NGOs call on the international community to:

- Enhance sustainable and durable solutions for South Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers including opportunities for resettlement, services like housing, mental health counseling, food support, and health care.
- Increase measures that allow refugees greater self-reliance and resilience, including unrestricted right to decent work, support for financial inclusion, documentation, food security and economic mobility, among others.
- Put a greater emphasis on mental health and psychosocial support programs and related referral mechanisms for refugees and host community

Ethiopia

Ethiopia faces one of the most complex human mobility environments, with a range of social, economic, political, and climatic factors driving populations within and outside its borders. The humanitarian situation remains concerning with ongoing conflict and violence, particularly in the Amhara and western Oromia regions. These factors continue to displace civilians and to disrupt humanitarian operations and essential services. Protection issues - especially gender-based violence - remain a major concern in conflict-affected areas.

In addition to challenge of hosting over 900,000 refugees, 3 million internally displaced people, 500,000 returnees, and 141,000 Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers in neighboring countries, Ethiopia is particularly vulnerable to climate-related shocks, with over 80% of the rural population dependent on rain-fed agriculture. The forecasted drought indicates the exacerbation of the already dire conditions. Therefore, NGOs:

- Call on humanitarian partners to continue spotlighting the dire needs across the country and call for additional funding to address needs and mitigate impacts.
- Urge the Government of Ethiopia to promote inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers into national systems, including legal, physical and social protection, education, health, livelihoods and resilience, to ensure refugees and asylum seekers are protected and have access to vital services. Legal protection must include information, representation and legal advice in formats and languages that are accessible and relevant to them.

Kenya

The Kenya Refugee Act of 2021 is welcome, promising refugees' freedom of movement, the right to work, access to financial services among other rights, and plans to turn refugee camps into urban settlements. This will improve refugee economic inclusion and the per capita income for the host communities. It also allows refugees seeking asylum to live in a dignified way, reducing reliance on aid and improving mental and psychosocial health. Kenya has also shown political will to advance refugee integration through the SHIRIKA Plan.

However, refugees still face critical challenges obtaining refugee ID cards and work permits. Thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers are stranded in the camps without humanitarian aid or access to specialized care and mental health support. Additionally, limited infrastructure in camps exacerbate daily struggles. The path to GBV recovery and redress is riddled with obstacles as refugee survivors grapple with many unique challenges when pursuing justice, such as language barriers, prohibitive costs for legal services, and limited awareness of their rights and judicial processes.

Many survivors of GBV also face the additional burden of a precarious legal status and the lack of essential documentation, such as refugee IDs. This not only restricts access to critical services like hospitals and police stations but also limits employment opportunities—an essential pathway for escaping abusive situations, for victims of intimate partner violence. In light of this context, NGOs:

- Commend the Government of Kenya for the progressive Refugee Act 2021 and call for its full implementation through a comprehensive Refugee Management Policy that provides institutional, legal, and administrative clarity, including coordination between/among the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies. The policy should clarify coordination and the roles of the national and county governments, donors, and other humanitarian actors. The policy will address some gaps, some of which were because the law was passed before the policy.
- Call on the Department of Refugee Services (DRS) and UNHCR to sensitize relevant Ministries and the Kenya Revenue Authority on the provisions of the Refugee Act of 2021.
- Call for a review of the existing laws, institutions, and subsidiary legislations relevant to the Refugee Act 2021 to ensure policy coherence and streamlining of policy implementation.
- Call on all stakeholders to improve its collaboration with Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) through funding and coordinated roll-out of programs that help empower refugees and strengthen their socio-economic inclusion.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

According to recent reports, the current situation in the DRC is one of the most significant displacement crises in Africa, with over one million people forced to leave their homes to find safety and protection in neighboring countries. The intensification and rapid escalation of conflict in the DRC in recent weeks has led to [massive displacements of populations](#), further exacerbating the existing humanitarian crisis. The displacement crisis in the DRC remains [one of the largest in the world](#), driven by widespread conflict, chronic poor macroeconomic conditions, and recurrent climatic shocks and natural disasters.

The DRC also faces a high risk of natural hazards, including volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, droughts and disease epidemics. The country experiences extreme weather and climate variability, resulting in a high exposure to disasters which are projected to increase in frequency and severity. Therefore, NGOs:

- Call on international bodies like the UN, the AU and the European Union (EU) to facilitate the peaceful resolution of the protracted conflict in the DRC to put an end to civil populations' sufferings and stop forced displacements.
- Express concerns regarding food insecurity, access to basic services, and funding limitations for humanitarian assistance and protection of refugees and asylum-seekers and call for greater funding for humanitarian assistance

Uganda

Uganda's National Development Plan III (2020/21 – 2024/25) offers a positive example of including forcibly displaced people in national development planning and implementation. Enshrined in national law, refugees can freely organize and form civil society organizations. In this welcoming framework, refugee-led organizations have been established across the country, providing essential services, livelihoods, and other essential support to their immediate communities. However, this refugee model is under severe pressure due to limited funding from the government and the international community, and registration challenges linked to a regression in the country's refugee policy, restricting Sudanese refugees to refugee camps, and not in urban areas.

Refugee self-reliance is a huge challenge due to the high levels of food insecurity, lack of sustainable livelihoods, lack of land for cultivation, youth unemployment, and high rates of school dropouts due to financial limitations. As such, NGOs:

- Commend the Government of Uganda for its progressive approach to refugee management and call for increased financial donors' support for the refugee response in Uganda;
- Urge the government of Uganda to ease restrictions on RLOs registration in Uganda and unlock refugee potential on financial inclusion, education, and employment, and to remove barriers to refugee participation in policy discussions at national, regional and global levels;
- Call for flexible, multi-year funding to RLOs and to meaningfully include them in program development, design, and implementation;
- Advocate for durable solutions, voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement to third countries;
- Commit to putting a greater emphasis on mental health and psychosocial support programs and related referral mechanisms for refugees and host community.

Somalia

Somalia is a country of transit, destination, origin, and return for mass internal and outward migration across the Horn of Africa and beyond. The country hosts some [39,000 refugees and asylum-seekers](#). The combination of protracted conflict, drought, and other factors have continued to fuel both outward and internal displacement. The cycle of displacement continues, and durable solutions remain elusive, making the context one of the largest displacement crises in the world. Around [13.2%](#) of the Somali national population have become refugees and asylum seekers. Human trafficking and smuggling are extremely frequent, with the majority of displaced persons being introduced into smuggling routes within the larger context of international migration.

The humanitarian situation in general remains dire, fueled by the combination of political instability, conflict, hunger, and climate change. Any escalation in conflict or climate shocks could worsen Somalia's crisis in 2025.

- NGOs call for the provision of quality, efficient and timely protection and lifesaving multi-sectoral assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and host communities.