

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

January-December 2021



*Flood affected communities in Rubkona County, Unity State, South Sudan. © UNHCR South Sudan*

### OVERVIEW

The East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes (EHAGL) region is host to a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). As of 31 December 2021, there were approximately 12.37 million IDPs in the region – mainly in Burundi, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and South Sudan. The drivers of displacements are complex, including conflict, persecution as well as climatic and natural disaster factors. Some 80% of Burundi's IDPs, for example, are displaced due to climatic reasons.

Three countries in the region – Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan – were selected in 2019 for the [Step-Up Initiative](#), led by UNHCR's office of the Special Advisor for Internal Displacement. These three step-up-initiative countries also host large refugee populations. Somalia is also an important IDP operation for UNHCR, and IDPs are also part of UNHCR's operation in Burundi. In line with the Global tri-cluster leadership approach and revised UNHCR Policy on Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement (2019), UNHCR is leading or co-leading the Protection, Camp Coordination and Camp Management, and Shelter/NFI clusters in most countries.

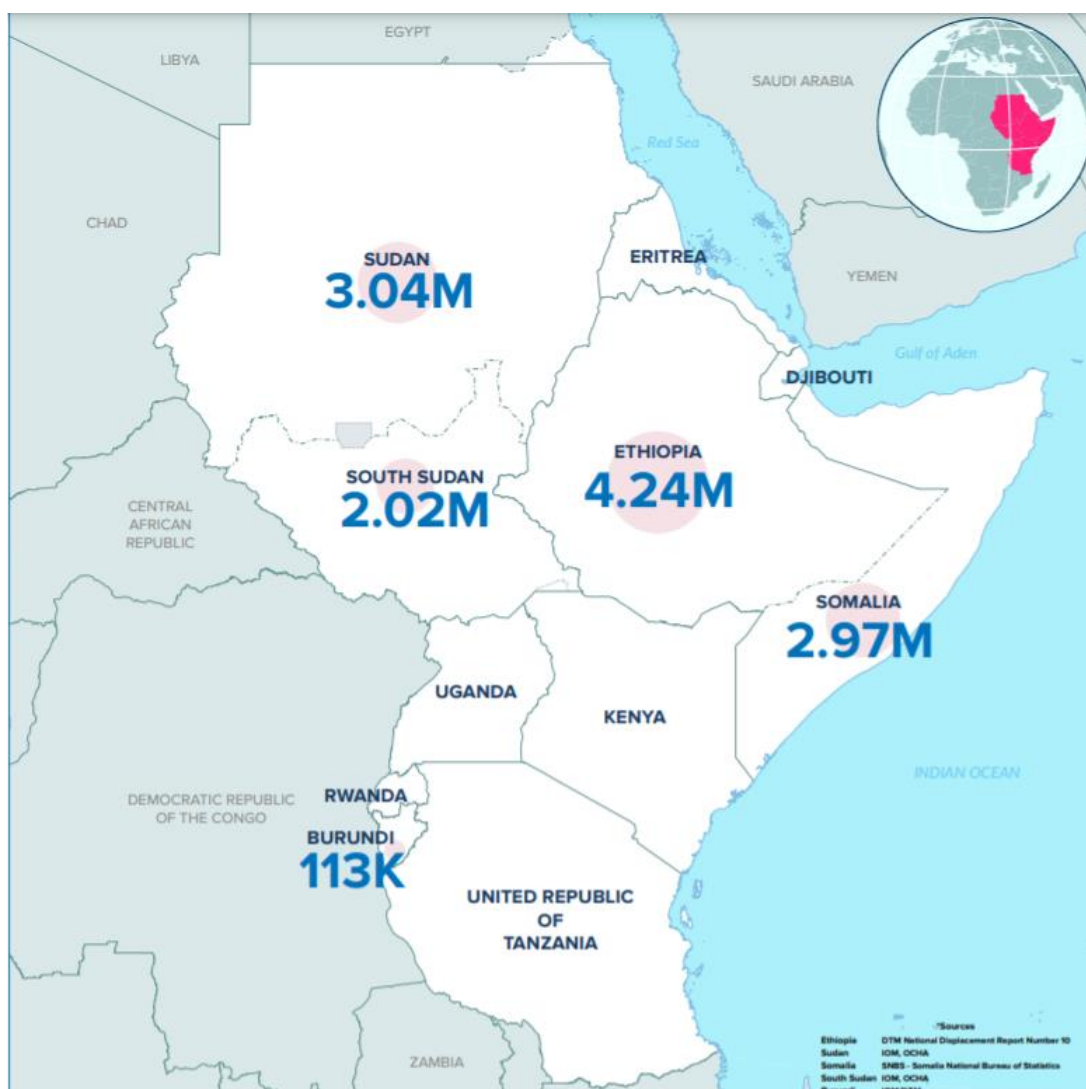
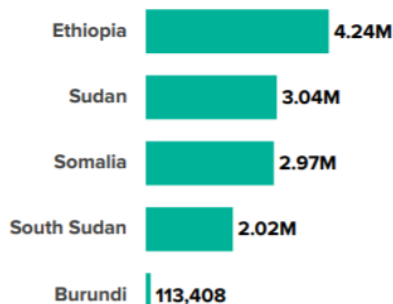
During the COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration with governments was enhanced with additional support and assistance for COVID-19 prevention and response measures. The COVID-19 outbreak compounded already precarious situations and some protection concerns were observed in this context across the [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

region, most notably livelihood impacts, movement restrictions, discrimination and limited government services available. Movement restrictions also affected UNHCR's access to populations of concern, leaving some populations temporarily unattended to. Throughout 2021, despite the continued presence of COVID-19, the restrictions were gradually lifted throughout the region.

Considering that a significant proportion of displacements in the region stem from conflicts, and many conflicts remain active in a very fluid context, most notably the conflict in northern Ethiopia which broke out in November 2020, the protection focus is mainly on life-saving activities through protection monitoring and ensuring the provision of shelters and NFIs. At the same time, there is a strong focus in the region on the pursuit of durable solutions. Despite numerous returns in the region, the number of those displaced remains high.


**12.37M**

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)\*



## ETHIOPIA

In Ethiopia, conflict, inter-communal violence, natural disasters and other impacts of climate change continue to drive people into displacement. Some have lived in displacement for several years, while others have fled their homes more recently.

As of 31 December 2021, it was estimated that over 4.2 million people were internally displaced across the country. Most of the internal displacement is due to conflict, including the expansion of the Tigray conflict into Afar and Amhara and beyond, as well as more localized conflicts, including inter-communal violence, sometimes instrumentalized in connection with the conflict in the North, notably in Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia and Somali regions.

Several regions have also seen climate-related shocks and ensuing natural disaster-related displacements, such as drought and flooding. This is prevalent for example in Afar, Gambella, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) and Somali regions.

### UNHCR response

In 2021, UNHCR expanded its programme to respond to the growing internal displacement situation in Ethiopia. Together with partners, UNHCR reached over 1.7 million IDPs and returning IDPs with protection services, shelter and core relief support in nine of Ethiopia's regions including Afar, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Dire Dawa, Gambella, Oromia, SNNPR, Somali and Tigray regions. In addition, UNHCR supported over 580,000 IDPs in communal settings, the majority in 68 sites in Amhara and Tigray regions, through the camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) clusters established in each region.

UNHCR responds to internal displacement on a needs-basis, works closely with partner organizations and coordinates its activities with government authorities as well as through established humanitarian cluster mechanisms.

In Ethiopia, UNHCR's response to the humanitarian needs of IDPs in protection, shelter, and core relief items in the Tigray region began at the onset of the crisis in November 2020. In 2021, UNHCR increased its operational footprint, especially during the third quarter of the year, including the expansion of its presence and operational response into Afar and Amhara regions in August 2021, and strengthened its coordination roles for the Protection and CCCM Clusters in all three regions. While UNHCR is responding to the needs of 1.2 million IDPs in these regions, preparedness measures are also in place for new displacement with stockpiles of core relief items for over 100,000 people.

During the last quarter of 2021, some 430,000 people in Afar and Amhara had access to protection services, including through protection desks, and received core relief items and emergency shelter support. In Debre Berhan, Amhara region, for example, seven protection desks were established to provide access to information, counselling and direct support and referrals, as well as child-friendly spaces in three sites.

In the Tigray region, UNHCR and partners expanded multi-sectoral programming to facilitate access to protection services, and to provide core relief items and shelter support. In total, the programme reached nearly 860,000 IDPs and host community members with specific needs including supporting over 560,000 IDPs in 48 sites across the region. UNHCR's response, alongside that of other humanitarian partners, was significantly affected by access and other operational challenges. In particular, UNHCR's programme expansion outside the main response hubs in Mekelle and Shire, as well as other activities and services, such as the protection desks, were periodically curtailed due to the lack of fuel. Nonetheless, in the last quarter of 2021, UNHCR and its partners was able to reach nearly 115,000 people.

With the increasing pressure on IDPs living in primary schools, and reported incidents of forced evictions, UNHCR centred its efforts on safe, dignified and voluntary relocation and returns in addition to concerted advocacy efforts against forced evictions through the Protection and CCCM Clusters. UNHCR supported the voluntary relocation of over 15,000 IDPs to the Sabacare 4 site in Mekelle. In December, the first pilot



of assisted voluntary returns of 536 IDPs to Samre took place as well. Over 3,800 people benefitted from the information, counselling and referral services at the protection desks network ahead of their relocation or return. Over 15,000 children received mental health and psycho-social support in child friendly spaces and more than 12,000 people were reached with GBV prevention and response services.



*Alganesh, 23, had to leave her home in Kafta Humera in 2021 to find shelter in an IDP site in Abi Adi, Tigray region, Ethiopia.*  
 © UNHCR/Olga Sarrado Mur

## SUDAN

As of 31 December 2021, there were over 3 million IDPs in Sudan - mainly in the five Darfur states as well as South Kordofan, White and Blue Nile states. They are spread across the country in settlements and camp like situations and in urban areas. IDPs in Sudan are mainly displaced due the long standing conflict in Darfur since 2004. In addition, seasonal floods also cause mass displacements in the country every year.

Significant collective efforts towards durable solutions in Sudan were undertaken in 2020/21. After decades of humanitarian action, the political transition in Sudan and the 2019 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA), with its detailed provisions on solutions for IDPs, Sudanese refugees returning from abroad, and the communities hosting them had improved the prospects for sustainable return or local integration. However, these provisions remain to be implemented and have been further set back by the recent military takeover.

Since the beginning of 2021, there have also been serious security incidents in the Darfur regions, that limited movement and access to IDP sites, as well as COVID-19 restrictions. Organizing meetings, monitoring, feedback, data input from the field and follow up were a challenge. Some information was transmitted remotely, which was not ideal given the nature of the conflicts and the complexities in understanding and taking the necessary precautions. Sharing information through electronic means, with poor and unstable network coverage, exacerbated an already complex situation. Moreover, flooding during the rainy seasons made accessibility to populations of concern even more challenging.

With the shifting political dynamics, the future of the National Plan for Protection of Civilians - the National Mechanism and state level protection of civilians' committees that were established for the implementation of the plan - remain unclear. Apart from the formation and deployment of joint security forces, the Plan was covering intervention in nine thematic areas including return of IDPs and refugees, human rights, rule of law, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), humanitarian assistance, service delivery etc.

The recent military takeover has impacted the livelihoods of many people. The overall security situation remains tense, and all Darfur states held protests condemning the military takeover in 2021. El Geneina and Nyala remained the most volatile. Returns are currently not feasible, even self-organized.

Assistance provided to IDPs is limited and irregular. Many IDPs rely on day-to-day income generating activities including manual labor which was lost due to restrictions brought about by COVID. Without direct support, households are coping with multiple stressors, which could eventually result in various protection concerns.

### **UNHCR response**

In Sudan, UNHCR is leading the protection and shelter/NFI clusters, and working in coordination with partners in protection monitoring (including remote protection monitoring), responding to individual protection needs through protection desks, distribution of NFIs, cash for shelter, psychosocial support, legal assistance and information counseling.

In 2021, UNHCR deployed five dedicated sub-national protection cluster coordinators in all Darfur states. At the national level, and in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, UNHCR's protection staff are coordinating inter-agency protection activities at the state level while also leading the operational response to internal displacement.

In coordination with key Government counterparts and partners, UNHCR aims to provide IDPs with legal assistance, including counselling and support, to bolster access to legal advice, civil documentation and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights, including for those returning to areas of origin.

In the current operational context, UNHCR has had to pivot toward remote protection monitoring and distributed hotline numbers through established Community Based Protection Networks (CBPNs). It expanded its CBPNs in 2021 by supporting over 106 networks in the country. Remote protection monitoring has generally been effective across the country, although the complex situation in Darfur made it particularly challenging. As one of the monitoring tools, it has helped keep offices updated on specific protection situations, when there is lack of access or insecurity in an area. UNHCR has multiple committees and networks at different locations, including CBPNs, youth and women networks, in addition to the community leaders and local administration structures. UNHCR reaches out to them for monitoring the situation and has provided training to CBPNs to reach out to UNHCR in any emergency.

In 2021, UNHCR's legal assistance response in Darfur provided 2,613 IDPs with paralegal support and 75 IDPs with representation in formal courts. Additionally, approximately 10,000 IDPs received awareness raising on legal rights. In North Darfur, UNHCR distributed personal sanitary kits to 891 women and girls of reproductive age in Abu Shouk settlement in El Fasher. UNHCR conducted training sessions on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), targeting 44 female members of protection networks in Alsalam and Abu Shock IDP camps. Participants were familiarized with different forms of SEA, overcoming SEA related barriers, as well as the reporting and referral of cases.





*Intercommunal violence broke out in the mountainous Jebel Moon region of West Darfur, Sudan on 16 November 2021, which displaced thousands of people, including across the border into Chad. UNHCR participated in an inter-agency mission to the area between 29 November and 2 December 2021 to assess the needs of those who had lost homes and belongings.*

© UNHCR/John Mwate

## SOMALIA

Internal displacement in Somalia is characterized by complex and often interlinked conflict and climatic drivers. As of 31 December 2021, Somalia had about 3 million IDPs. It is estimated that more than half have been forced to move since late 2016 following four consecutive failed rainy seasons in much of the country. Most have moved from rural areas to informal sites in urban and peri-urban locations. IDPs frequently live in undignified and hazardous circumstances, where they face multiple protection risks/threats such as, unlawful evictions, overcrowded and unsanitary environments with limited access to basic services, exposure to explosive hazards, increased risk of Gender Based Violence (GBV), negative coping mechanisms - child marriage and child labor, and tension with the host community.

IDPs are faced with overall lack of access to services, such as health care services and humanitarian assistance due to limited access to certain geographical areas and security roadblocks. This also further exposes people, in particular women and girls, to risk of violence including GBV.

### UNHCR Response

In Somalia, UNHCR is leading/co-leading the Protection, Shelter and CCCM Clusters.

UNHCR's engagement in IDP protection includes conducting protection monitoring directly or through partners, as well as responding to protection needs through identification and referrals mechanisms for



assistance, distribution of CRIs, dignity kits, and provision of emergency shelter kits with cash-based approach.

In 2020 the Government of Somalia domesticated the Kampala Convention. The UNHCR operation in Somalia has consistently, through 2021, worked together with the Government of Somalia on the implementation modalities of the Kampala Convention in Somalia.

In 2021, the Protection Cluster put forward a Centrality of Protection Strategy and Action Plan to mainstream protection in responses. A UNHCR shelter and settlement strategy is also in place to enable a harmonized and effective response.

UNHCR continues to lead the Protection Return Monitoring Network (PRMN), which has been operational since 2006 with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) as the implementing partner, as well as locally sub-contracted partners who collect data on displacements and returns of populations as well as protection incidents underlying such movements across the country. PRMN has an extensive information network and has been central to the collection of displacement, returns and protection data. In 2021, PRMN scaled up its efforts to provide real-time information to stakeholders through regular dissemination of datasets to UN agencies, Protection and ES/NFI clusters as well as timely dissemination of regular displacement updates and flash reports to inform stakeholders on displacement situations, protection issues and priority needs to inform proper planning and effective humanitarian response. There will also be an effort to create complementarity between PRMN and the Protection Cluster-led Somalia Protection Monitoring System (SPMS) which is a non-incident based protection monitoring system responsible to monitor and identify trends and patterns of violations of rights and protection risks for populations of concern also for the purpose of informing effective programming and advocacy.

UNHCR implements a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening self-reliance among IDPs and vulnerable host communities to create better access to inclusive socio-economic opportunities through the Graduation Approach (providing skills trainings) and integrated community-based livelihoods projects; building national/state capacity in urban planning functions with a focus on environmental sustainability and gender equality; creating access to micro-finance; supporting social capital; and inclusion into social protection mechanisms.

UNHCR has strengthened its engagement within relevant interagency coordination forums such as Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and the Inter-agency Task Force to address protection, assistance and solutions needs of IDPs. UNHCR also actively participates in solutions-oriented initiatives and activities led by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and the National Durable Solutions Secretariat of the Ministry of Planning.



*Ayan Muude Adawe has been displaced from a settlement in Bossaso, Somalia several times due to heavy rains.*

© UNHCR/Omar Mustafe Mohamed

## SOUTH SUDAN

As of 31 December 2021, there were over 2 million IDPs in South Sudan, dispersed around the country. About 89% of the IDPs live within host communities and in spontaneous settlements. In 2021, some 760,000 individuals were impacted by severe flooding which affected several states. The displacement situation presents a combination of protracted and cyclical IDP situations with constantly changing patterns due to concurrent conflicts, natural disasters, adverse effects of climate change and a very limited capacity of the government to respond. An estimated 8.3 million people need humanitarian assistance in the country.

UNHCR continues to register a significant number of persons willing to return to their Area of Origin (AoR) or alternative locations. As of December 2021, a total of 2,218 households (8,410 individuals) had requested to return from the Protection of Civilian (POCs) and collective sites, citing need for family reunification, improved security and desire to leave congested IDPs sites as main reasons. Other IDPs are not ready to return due to ongoing floods and conflict in some areas of return.

South Sudan has been experiencing major flooding across the country. It is estimated that some 780,000 individuals have been affected particularly in Unity State, Upper Nile and Jonglei. Despite the 2018 Revitalized peace agreement, sub-national violence persists. Worsening economic outlook, food insecurity coupled with COVID-19 restriction movements has affected many people in various parts of the country, pushing them further into displacement.

### UNHCR response

UNHCR's response is geared to address protection risks of persons of concern, empower communities to mitigate protection risks and strengthen community resilience and engage government, partners and diverse actors for sustainable solutions, including protection centered returns according to international principles and guidelines.

In South Sudan, UNHCR is leading the Protection and Shelter Clusters, and co- leads CCCM both at the national level and in certain field locations specifically in Unity, Upper Nile, Jonglei, Western Bahr El Gazal and Central Equatoria. UNHCR also implements specific CCCM activities in Mangala, Phangak, Ulang and Nassir.

As the lead protection agency, UNHCR conducts protection monitoring with partners, responding to individual protection needs through protection desks and ensures the distribution of material assistance. UNHCR identifies persons with specific needs (PSNs) and provides limited and targeted cash assistance to vulnerable persons. It also conducts protection incident tracking through partners in the camps and IDP collective sites.

Flooding and insecurity have pushed some partners out of the locations where they normally provided protection services, causing gaps in protection and assistance. Strong advocacy is ongoing with WASH partners to improve WASH facilities. UNHCR continues to distribute face masks, soap, buckets, mosquito nets and sanitary kits to the most vulnerable populations.

UNHCR also continues to co-lead the Solutions Task Force both at the national and state level together with the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. The main role of the taskforce is to support displaced populations within the country with access to durable solutions either through return or local integration. To enhance law and policy development processes, advocacy and capacity building, UNHCR conducted trainings, workshops, and roundtable discussions with the government and other relevant stakeholders within the operation to operationalize the state level task forces. Participatory assessments were conducted with IDPs as a process of building partnerships with IDP men and women of different age groups and backgrounds and thereby promoting meaningful participation through structured dialogue to gather accurate information used to inform planning interventions for the displaced population.





Awadiya Balou, 21, braids her three-year-old daughter Aboba's hair, while holding her one-year-old son, Sebit, at the Mahad IDP site in Juba, South Sudan. © UNHCR/Andreea Campeanu

## BURUNDI

As of 31 December 2021, the IDP population in Burundi was estimated at 113,000 persons across all provinces, approximately 1 per cent of the population of Burundi. This is the only operation where IDP numbers have reduced in the last year. Many are residing within host communities, some living in makeshift or temporary shelters and have serious protection needs.

In 2021, humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities in Burundi increased significantly from the previous year due to the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and the significant return of Burundian refugees from neighbouring countries.

The year was marked by the recurrence of numerous natural disasters, particularly those related to climate change, which continue to generate the majority of humanitarian needs. More than 83 percent of internal displacement in the country is linked to natural disasters.

The many shocks facing the country continue to affect already fragile and vulnerable communities. Flooding caused by the continued rise in water levels in Lake Tanganyika and the overflowing of the Rusizi river pose a particularly difficult challenge for households formerly displaced and affected by the various flood cycles that have occurred since the beginning of 2020. At the same time, the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to undermine the most vulnerable populations and slow down the country's economic and human development.

Since January 2020, UNHCR's Protection Monitoring system noted an increase in the number of Burundian refugee returnees who were not found in the return areas during monitoring exercises, indicating possible onward movements internally or externally. In 2020, an estimated 31% of returnees were not found at their respective return areas. This trend continued in 2021, with an estimated 24% of people not found in areas of return. Despite the different tools and systems in place to verify the reasons behind these onward

movement trends, it is challenging to obtain verifiable information and confirm the possibility of returnees forcibly displaced internally for political or security reasons after return versus moving to pursue economic opportunities elsewhere.

There is a lack of a comprehensive national institutional framework of IDP protection, mainly affecting those displaced by the political and social-economic crisis since 2015. This population is also the most exposed to protection risks due to the sensitivity of their profile and lack of support by authorities and may not be willing to return to areas of origin.

### UNHCR response

While the inter-agency cluster system has not been activated in Burundi, UNHCR leads the protection cluster coordination through the Protection Working Group (PWG). The NFI/Shelter and CCCM coordination groups are led by IOM whilst UNHCR is co-facilitator together with UNDP of the Durable Solutions Technical Working Group.

In order to improve the protection response and mitigate protection risks affecting IDPs, returnees and other vulnerable groups in Burundi, the PWG proposed to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) an action plan, which was approved in March 2021. The plan is divided in 4 strategic areas identified as critical to be developed to assure the centrality of protection in humanitarian action and achieve progress towards sustainable solutions.

One of the strategic areas of this action plan is to strengthen information management systems within the PWG, so that data collection systems currently in place by different actors can be reinforced, harmonized, analysed and coordinated towards one framework (common indicators, joint analysis, etc.), that can effectively support advocacy efforts and progress towards durable solutions.

In 2022, UNHCR plans to step up its coordination roles within the inter-agency system to initiate and guide the response to IDPs needs by all relevant partners, in line with the principle of the centrality of protection and protection mainstreaming.

UNHCR Burundi is advocating for the ratification of the Kampala Convention, following the signing on 23 October 2009, and the contextual introduction, by the end of 2019, of a formally recognized and comprehensive system of IDP protection with a durable solutions perspective. This system will have to include a National Action Plan for IDP Protection and Prevention of Internal Displacement, in line with the National Reintegration Strategy endorsed by the Government of Burundi in 2017.

### LINKS:

IDP Initiative

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