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High Commissioner’s Programme**

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Update on UNHCR’s operations in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region

A. Situational analysis including new developments

Throughout 2019, countries of the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region of Africa continued to face large scale forced displacement. While most refugees and asylum-seekers in the region were from South Sudan, there were also significant numbers from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. Some 220,000 people were granted international protection in the region during the year, bringing the total number of refugees and asylum-seekers to some 4.6 million. The region hosts some 67 per cent of the refugees on the continent and 20 per cent of the global refugee population.

Governments have generally maintained an open-door asylum policy and embraced the Global Compact on Refugees by adopting progressive national frameworks and promoting the inclusion of refugees into national health, education and social protection systems. In 2020, UNHCR will continue to seek to broaden international support and partnerships to ease pressure on refugee-hosting countries, enhance the inclusion of refugees and their self-reliance, and redouble efforts to pursue comprehensive solutions for all forcibly displaced populations in the region. Responses to internal displacement will also be strengthened, with three of the nine countries included in the High Commissioner’s new Initiative on Internal Displacement being located in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region (Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan).

National elections will be held in several countries in 2020, including Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. While these elections could pave the way for solutions for the displaced from those countries, they will also require preparedness measures to be put in place for potential additional displacement.

East and Horn of Africa

Other developments in the East and Horn of Africa that may increase the prospects for solutions for forcibly displaced populations in 2020 include the de-escalation of the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the decrease of armed hostilities in South Sudan and the democratic transition underway in Sudan. However, despite these positive prospects, the immediate needs of 7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan remain vast and intra-communal tensions, often exacerbated by natural disasters, continue to impede safe return and reintegration for many.

In Ethiopia, while continuing to lead the multi-agency response for four distinct refugee situations through the county refugee response plan, UNHCR devised a new Protection and Solutions Strategy in late 2019 to respond to internal displacement. Working with the government and other stakeholders in support of the National Durable Solutions Initiative,

UNHCR has initiated Quick Impact Projects as part of an area-based assistance model and has strengthened protection monitoring and analysis. In 2020, work will continue to reinforce cluster leadership and expand operational presence and engagement throughout the country. UNHCR will also continue to support the return of Ethiopian refugees from Kenya and explore opportunities for return of Ethiopian refugees from Djibouti and South Sudan.

Despite the fragility of peace in South Sudan, some refugees and IDPs have begun to return on their own. However, localized conflict and a critical humanitarian situation have kept 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees in exile in six neighbouring countries, and nearly 1.5 million people internally displaced. In 2020, UNHCR's will continue to mobilize support for the inter-agency Regional Refugee Response for the South Sudan situation, the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan and integrated community-based interventions for IDPs, refugees and returnees to ensure sustainable returns.

The political transformation in Sudan in 2019 has created a dramatically new operational context for UNHCR to engage in protection and solutions for refugees, IDPs and returnees. To pursue these opportunities, UNHCR will need to scale up its presence in the country in 2020 so that it can strengthen efforts to make the refugee response more comprehensive and inclusive with the full range of government stakeholders and inter-agency partners. The Office would also focus on increasing access to displaced populations in opposition-controlled areas and exploring possibilities for return for Sudanese refugee in Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan.

In Somalia the combination of conflict and extreme weather events such as recurrent droughts and floods continued to affect the resilience of Somali households and cause forced displacement, which required an emergency response in 2019. The operational context will be further shaped in 2020 by the planned drawdown of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the transfer of its responsibilities to the Somali national army. The creation of conditions conducive for the eventual voluntary and sustainable return and reintegration of over 700,000 Somali refugees and approximately 2.6 million IDPs in the coming years will require the maintenance of security, the rule of law and humanitarian access.

During 2019, refugees and returnees continued to be part of mixed movements from and within the Horn of Africa. In 2020 UNHCR will continue to work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and established national migration coordination mechanisms to ensure protection sensitive responses.

Great Lakes

The majority of displaced people in the Great Lakes region continues to emanate from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Democratic Republic of the Congo Regional Refugee Response Plan for over 910,000 Congolese refugees is led by UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Southern Africa in close collaboration with the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region given the large numbers of Congolese refugees being hosted in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

A key development in the region in late 2019 was the establishment of the Emergency Transit Mechanism in Rwanda, following the Government's offer to the African Union to host up to 30,000 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers who will be evacuated from detention centres and highly insecure conditions in Libya. More than 300 evacuees had arrived in Rwanda by January 2020, with a range of options for durable solutions and complementary pathways to admission being pursued, such as resettlement, family reunification, voluntary return to the country of origin or a previous country of admission, as well as the possibility to settle in Rwanda.

In 2019, the situation in Burundi remained complex with some refugees returning, while people also continued to seek asylum abroad. Some 21,000 refugees were assisted to return voluntarily, mostly from the United Republic of Tanzania, where refugees reported increased pressure on

them to do so. In November 2019, the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees, which comprises UNHCR and the Governments of Burundi and United Republic of Tanzania, met in the United Republic of Tanzania, where the two governments reaffirmed their commitment to upholding the voluntary character of refugee returns and ensuring free and unhindered access to returnees in Burundi. At the start of 2020, the countries of the Great Lakes Region are host to approximately 333,000 Burundian refugees, including 10,500 who arrived in 2019. UNHCR leads the response for Burundian refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania through the inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan. The reintegration of Burundian returnees continues to be coordinated through the Burundi Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan, co-led with UNDP.

Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa and, in 2019, it continued to receive refugees from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. Uganda's open settlement model and commitment to the inclusion of refugees in the country's development planning continue to have a positive impact on more than 1.3 million refugees and their hosts. Efforts will continue in 2020 to mobilize support for the government-led integrated sector response plans covering education, health, job creation, and environmental protection in refugee-hosting areas. Special emphasis will be placed on improving the quality of data and data analysis to inform programming, with the results of a dedicated refugee profiling exercise to be shared with all actors.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Promoting a favourable protection environment

While the protection environment for refugees in the East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region remained generally hospitable in 2019, there were concerning instances in which refugees or asylum-seekers were forced to return to their country of origin. Furthermore, in several countries UNHCR faced restrictions in accessing refugees, returnees and other people of concern. In 2020, UNHCR will continue to work closely with States to strengthen asylum institutions and refugee protection capacity, especially where the quality, including accessibility, of asylum procedures has deteriorated.

UNHCR's Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region in Nairobi includes a Data Identity Management and Analysis unit that will support country operations in working with governments to establish or strengthen national registration systems and ensure inter-operability between data systems.

In 2019, UNHCR spearheaded inter-agency efforts to scale up cash-based interventions where feasible, with approximately 20 per cent of UNHCR's assistance in the region now delivered through such interventions. Multi-purpose cash for livelihoods, repatriation and reintegration, education and shelter, as well as services for people with specific needs, remained critical in support of self-reliance efforts. In 2020, UNHCR will continue to focus on the expansion of cash assistance and to enhance its quality to achieve protection outcomes, improve access to services and enable financial inclusion and social protection.

The prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse continues to be prioritized throughout the operations in the region, with UNHCR and partner staff being sensitized on the importance of establishing complaints and feedback mechanisms through various learning initiatives. The strengthening of anti-fraud and integrity systems has been undertaken in several operations in the region including in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, and these efforts will continue in 2020.

Operationalizing the Global Compact on Refugees

States from the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region were well represented at the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) at both Head of State and ministerial levels, and made over 30 pledges in the six key focus areas of the GRF. Those pledges clearly indicate that most countries in the region remain committed to the inclusion of refugees in national and local development plans and national systems, and that they continue to prioritize solutions, as well as burden and responsibility sharing with the rest of the international community.

Opportunities in 2020 to build on progress made in operationalizing the Global Compact on Refugees include: i) the engagement in Rwanda of development partners such as the World Bank in the government's Strategic Plan for the Inclusion of Refugees; ii) the launch of a Refugee Education Inclusion Policy in Kenya, which will enable a shift towards the management and staffing of all camp schools through national systems; and iii) the Government of Djibouti's Livelihoods Strategic Plan to promote refugee and host livelihoods. Furthermore, the Government of Ethiopia is in the process of finalizing a ten-year National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy, which will be implemented through area-based approaches. The government in South Sudan aims to increase access to quality education and expand economic opportunities for refugees and their hosts, and to address environmental degradation through a reforestation programme in refugee-hosting areas. In Sudan, the government has committed to progressively integrate refugees in national education and health systems and to adopt a self-reliance policy for refugees.

UNHCR also encouraged and worked with regional organizations including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the East African Community to make pledges at the GRF. The IGAD Support Platform was launched as one of three global GRF support platforms that aim to galvanize additional support for member States' efforts in rolling out a more comprehensive responses to refugee situations.

In 2020, UNHCR will work to follow up on the implementation of these pledges and seek to match them with financial and technical support from the international community and other stakeholders. The Office will also seek to enhance partnerships with new actors in support of Global Compact objectives, such as the private sector.

Securing solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons

In 2019, UNHCR worked with governments through tripartite mechanisms to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of a total of some 25,000 Burundian refugees (mainly from the United Republic of Tanzania), Somali refugees (mainly from Kenya) and Rwandan refugees (mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo). In 2020, UNHCR will continue to assist refugees who wish to return, and pursue additional tripartite mechanisms where relevant, while continuing to emphasize the need for governments, humanitarian and development actors to work together to ensure the availability of basic services and address social cohesion issues and constrained UNHCR access in some areas of return.

Opportunities to pursue solutions for IDPs in the region were bolstered by South Sudan's accession and Somalia's ratification of the African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). Somalia's Government adopted a national framework on IDPs and returnees, and similar national frameworks are being revised or are soon to be adopted by other countries in the region. In Ethiopia, UNHCR is working with national stakeholders to mainstream peacebuilding initiatives to support social cohesion among displaced populations at the community-level. UNHCR's role leading the protection cluster will be pivotal to address key issues such as access to land, housing and property.

While voluntary repatriation remains the preferred eventual solution for most refugees in the region, some who have spent a protracted period in exile have expressed the wish to integrate locally. Legal pathways to local integration are accessible to refugees under the existing legislation in some countries in the region and several local integration efforts are being pursued for long-staying refugee populations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. In the meantime, UNHCR's focus for most refugees in the region in 2020 will continue to be on supporting governments to fulfil pledges made at the GRF aimed at greater socio-economic inclusion.

In 2019, UNHCR submitted nearly 25,000 refugees for resettlement from the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region, a decrease of 10 per cent as compared to the previous year. In November 2019, the submission of new referrals to the United States was suspended due to the decrease in the admission ceiling. UNHCR will redouble its advocacy efforts with all countries to increase the strategic use of resettlement and complementary pathways of admission as a means of international responsibility sharing with the region.

Statelessness

During the High-Level Segment on Statelessness at the seventieth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in October 2019, States in the region made strong commitments to eradicate statelessness in their respective countries. For example, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda each committed to adopt national action plans to end statelessness by 2024. The ICGLR Secretariat pledged to support the adoption of the consolidated action plan on the eradication of statelessness, and to steer the development of a regional policy on birth registration to prevent statelessness. In 2020, UNHCR will support governments with the implementation of these pledges and continue to provide technical and policy support to ensure laws and practices are consistent with international and regional standards on the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

C. Financial information

By the end of 2019, funding received for the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region stood at 45 per cent of the \$1.831 billion required. The 2020 comprehensive needs budget for the region approved by the Executive Committee at its annual plenary session in October 2019 amounts to \$1,798 million. As at 31 January 2020, the needs for the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes were 7 per cent funded after considering the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.

In a region that hosts the largest number of refugees on the African continent, and where more than 80% of refugees still reside in camps and settlements, more support will be needed in 2020 to bring assistance and services up to standard while investing in inclusion and solutions up front. The impact on displaced populations of floods and droughts caused by climatic changes in the region is also likely to create additional funding needs in 2020.