

Inter-Agency Working Group East and Central Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa
Education in Emergencies Working Group, Joining Forces East and Southern Africa and
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

World Refugee Day,

Until Everyone Is Safe

17 June 2026

On World Refugee Day 2026, we stand in solidarity with refugees and host communities across East, Central and Southern Africa, reaffirming their right to seek safety. This year's theme, **Until Everyone is Safe** is rooted in the 1951 Refugee Convention. It reminds us that protection is essential as the cost of inaction is paid by the most vulnerable children, their families and communities. Refugees, especially children and young people, continue to face disrupted learning, reduced access to essential services, and increasing protection risks as support systems come under strain. Displacement often means losing a home, school, income, safety, and support systems all at once.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, the scale of need is severe. By May 2026, the region hosted¹: 25.1 million forcibly displaced people, 6.3 million refugees and asylum seekers and 17.1 million internally displaced people.² As funding reduces refugee children, youth, women and families face greater risks. These include access to basic needs, reduced food support, disrupted learning and weaker protection systems. This is why sustained funding must remain central to the response.³ The most vulnerable children must come first.

A refugee child wakes up today with less food than yesterday, not because of drought or conflict alone but because the world is looking away. 75 years ago, the world made a promise: people forced to flee have the right to seek safety. Today, the promise is being broken, by funding gaps, ration cuts and shrinking humanitarian space across East and Southern Africa. Silence is complicity. Until everyone is safe, the work is not done. Ms. Cathy Rutivi, Regional Coordinator, Africa, Terres des Hommes Germany, Joining Forces Eastern and Southern Africa Region

Education in emergencies must remain a priority as it is a lifesaving and life sustaining intervention that provides safety, sense of normalcy, lifesaving learning and mental relief. School works as an entry point for other services such as nutrition, hygiene, and referrals to specialized services. For refugee children, especially girls and children with disabilities, school is often the only stable space left to provide holistic support, healing, dignity and bold hope. Children kept in school are better protected and better able to imagine a future with life in all its fullness, beyond displacement.⁴

As Holli Ghaisen, Learning Lead and Educator at Amala Education in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya, reflects: ...we must be empathetic enough to find a balance between abiding by the rules and choosing what is best for the learners.

¹UNHCR, [Refugee Data Finder](#) (UNHCR, 10 January 2026) accessed 12 June 2026.

² *Ibid*

³UNOCHA, [Southern and Eastern Africa: A region on the brink demands global solidarity](#) accessed 19 May 2026.

⁴UNHCR, [Education in Emergencies](#) (UNHCR Emergency Handbook, 2 December 2024) accessed 20 May 2026.

This call for empathy and people-centred decision-making reflects the spirit of ***Until Everyone is Safe***, underscoring that refugee children, youth and women must be meaningfully included in the decisions that affect their lives.

Across the region, refugees and refugee-led organisations⁵ continue to demonstrate leadership, resilience and innovation, contributing to their host communities even in the most constrained conditions.⁶

Never before have needs been so vast while resources diminished so sharply...These realities demand not business as usual, but a decisive shift in how we operate, prioritise and partner.

Lilian Dodzo, Regional Leader, World Vision International, Inter-Agency Working Group

To mark World Refugee Day, we shall host a joint webinar on 18th June 2026 to center refugee voices and bring together policy makers, donors, UN agencies, civil society and refugee led organisations.

We call on governments, donors, UN agencies and NGOs to take urgent and coordinated action to:

1. Scale up predictable, long-term **financing** to sustain essential services and prevent further erosion of protection, learning, nutrition, and wellbeing for displaced children and their families.
2. Prioritise needs-based **resource allocation**, and direct funding to contexts where children face the greatest risks to their safety, learning, health and dignity based on lived realities rather than institutional priorities.
3. Ensure children's right to **education** during crises by placing it at the center of refugee response efforts. Guarantee access to safe, inclusive learning, especially for girls and children with disabilities, to support protection, dignity, and long-term resilience.
4. Embed meaningful **participation** of refugee children, youth and women ensuring their perspectives shape policies, programmes and advocacy that positively affect their lives.
5. Strengthen refugee **self-reliance and economic inclusion** by removing structural barriers and co-creating livelihood pathways, so refugees can contribute meaningfully to host communities, not merely survive within them.
6. Strengthen **integrated approaches** across the humanitarian development peace nexus, aligning efforts between governments, donors, UN agencies, civil society, and the private sector to address immediate needs while building long-term resilience.
7. Invest in shared, **resilient service systems** that guarantee equitable access into health, education, water, and protection for both refugees and host communities, building local capacity that outlasts any humanitarian response.
8. Support **community-led resilience** and preparedness, integrating refugees to social protection, early warning systems, and locally driven solutions that reduce vulnerability to future shocks.

⁵UNHCR, '[Regional Overview Eastern and Southern Africa' \(UNHCR, 10 January 2026\)](#)' accessed 20 May 2026;

⁶ UNHCR, '[Engagement and Partnership with Organizations led by Displaced and Stateless Persons](#)' accessed 20 May 2026.