ACSPR
African Centre for Social and Population Research

Shaping Africa's Future with Evidence, Equity, and Innovative Impact

The Humanitarian Crisis in Uganda

Global Context: The Shrinking Humanitarian Space

Humanitarian organizations worldwide are facing an unprecedented funding crisis, exacerbated by global inflation, new geopolitical conflicts, and shifting donor priorities. In 2026, the gap between humanitarian needs and available resources is at its widest point in decades.[1]

Funding Landscape

- **Global Gap:** UN-coordinated appeals received just **43%** of required funding in 2025[2]
- **Major Cuts:** US foreign aid freeze impacting $72B global portfolio[3]
- **Displacement:** Record 120M+ forcibly displaced worldwide[4]

Policy Shifts

- **Donor Fatigue:** Traditional donors reducing multi-year commitments[5]
- **Localization:** Push for 25% of funding to go directly to local actors[6]
- **Nexus Approach:** Shift from emergency aid to development-humanitarian-peace nexus[7]

Great Lakes Region

- **Population in Need:** 2.5M people require urgent assistance in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania[8]
- **Cross-Border Displacement:** Spillover from DRC, South Sudan, Sudan conflicts[9]
- **Climate Shocks:** Recurrent floods and droughts eroding resilience[10]

Humanitarian Snapshot: Great Lakes Region (2026)

[1] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2026). *Global Humanitarian Overview 2026*. New York: OCHA.

[2] OCHA. (2026). *Global Humanitarian Overview 2026: Mid-Year Update*.

[3] United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (2026, January 20). *Foreign Assistance Pause Notification*. Washington, DC: USAID.

[4] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2025). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2024*. Geneva: UNHCR.

[5] Development Initiatives. (2025). *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2025*. Bristol: Development Initiatives.

[6] Grand Bargain Secretariat. (2025). *Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework Annual Report*. Geneva: Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

[7] OECD. (2025). *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Progress Review*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

[8] OCHA Regional Office for Southern and Eastern Africa. (2026). *Great Lakes Region Humanitarian Snapshot*. Nairobi: OCHA.

[9] UNHCR Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa. (2026). *Regional Displacement Update*. Nairobi: UNHCR.

[10] World Food Programme (WFP). (2025). *Climate Risks in the Great Lakes Region*. Rome: WFP.

People in Need:	2.5 million
Refugees in Uganda:	Nearly 2 million
UNICEF Funding Required:	$34 million
Children Targeted for Screening:	397,674 for wasting

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Continental Overview: Africa

Africa hosts more than one-third of the world's forcibly displaced people, with conflict, climate change, and economic instability driving humanitarian needs across the continent.

- **Displacement:** Over 40 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees across Africa[11]
- **Horn of Africa:** Ongoing drought and conflict in Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan creating regional instability
- **Sahel Region:** Worsening security situation driving displacement into coastal West Africa
- **Food Insecurity:** 140+ million people facing acute food insecurity across the continent

Regional Spotlight: The Great Lakes

The Great Lakes region remains one of Africa's most complex humanitarian emergencies, characterized by protracted displacement, recurring disease outbreaks, and chronic underfunding.

Drivers of Crisis

- **Conflict Spillover:** DRC, South Sudan, Sudan violence driving cross-border displacement[12]
- **Disease Outbreaks:** Cholera, measles, mpox spreading among vulnerable populations[13]
- **Malnutrition:** Rising acute malnutrition rates across refugee settlements

Regional Response

- **Coordinated Approach:** UN agencies scaling up cross-border response
- **Community-Based Delivery:** Working through local partners to maximize reach
- **Preparedness:** Early action to mitigate climate shock impacts

In-Depth Focus: Uganda

Uganda hosts nearly **2 million refugees**, making it Africa's largest refugee-hosting country and one of the largest in the world. For years, the country's progressive refugee policy has been a global model. Today, that model is under acute threat.

Refugee Demographics

- **Total Refugees:** Nearly 2 million
- **Children:** Approximately 850,900 refugee children
- **New Arrivals:** Over 140,000 arrived in 2025 from neighboring countries[14]
- **Major Settlements:** Bidibidi, Imvepi, Rhino Camp, Palabek, Kiryandongo

Key Challenges

- **Funding Gap:** Only 6% of required funding secured for 2026
- **Health Services:** IRC forced to cut services for 1 million refugees
- **Per Capita Assistance:** Dropped from $16 to

[11] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). (2025). *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2025*. Geneva: IDMC.
[12] International Crisis Group. (2025). *Great Lakes Conflict Analysis*. Brussels: ICG.
[13] World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Africa. (2026). *Disease Outbreak News*. Brazzaville: WHO AFRO.
[14] Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) Uganda & UNHCR. (2026). *New Arrivals Report*. Kampala: OPM.

$5 per refugee per month

- **Education:** 180,544 refugee students at risk due to aid freeze

Health System Collapse

Health Crisis Indicators

Disease Outbreaks (2025):	6+ in refugee settlements
Medicine Stock-Outs:	Up to 30%
Acute Malnutrition:	5.4% → 7.8% across 12 locations
Clinics Closed:	Services cut in 11 settlements
Daily Patient Load:	100+ per clinician (double standard)

The health response in refugee settlements faces a convergence of crises:

- **Service Closures:** IRC has closed health services across 11 refugee settlements, affecting refugees and local communities alike
- **Overwhelmed Facilities:** Remaining facilities see clinicians managing over 100 patients per day, double the accepted standard, compromising quality of care
- **Maternal Health:** Termination of key nutrition and maternal health programs increases risk of maternal and neonatal deaths
- **Immunization:** Weakened disease surveillance and reduced immunization services heighten outbreak risks for measles, cholera, and mpox

Education Under Threat

The US foreign aid freeze has devastated refugee education in Uganda. Finn Church Aid (FCA) has suspended over **$4.4 million** in programs.

- **Students Affected:** 180,544 refugee students denied access to education
- **Staff Impact:** 73 staff laid off, including 50 teachers
- **Services Suspended:** Catch-up classes, learning spaces construction, child protection, menstrual hygiene initiatives. Education desks at reception centres for new refugees put on hold

Food Insecurity and Nutrition

- **WFP Response:** France contributed 2 million to support 70,000+ people in 2026
- **New Arrivals:** Emergency assistance for nearly 40,000 newly arrived refugees includes high-energy biscuits and cash-based transfers
- **Stunting:** One out of every four children in Uganda is stunted, impacting long-term learning and productivity
- **Therapeutic Food:** Local production of METU-1 (sorghum, groundnuts, sugar, oil) to treat moderate acute malnutrition

Legislative and Policy Framework

Key Policy Frameworks

Refugee Act 2006 — Refugee Regulations 2010 — Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) — UN-Uganda Cooperation Framework 2026-2030

- **Open-Door Policy:** Uganda maintains progressive refugee policy despite funding constraints
- **Government Appeal:** Minister Lillian Aber calling for increased partner funding for food relief, resilience, affordable housing, and service delivery
- **Development Framework:** UN-Uganda Cooperation Framework 2026-2030 prioritizes inclusive human development, climate-smart ecosystems, and rights-based governance
- **CRRF Secretariat:** Shrinking funding threatens Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework coordination

Barriers to Effective Response

Barrier	Description
Funding Cuts	Only 6% of required funding secured; US aid freeze suspending $4.4M in education programs.
Health System Strain	30% medicine stock-outs
Malnutrition Crisis	Rise from 5.4% to 7.8% acute malnutrition across 12 locations
Education Disruption	180,544 refugee students at risk; 50 teachers laid off
New Arrivals	Continued influx from DRC, South Sudan, Sudan straining limited resources

Way Forward

Despite the severe challenges, opportunities exist to stabilize and strengthen the humanitarian response:

- **Diversify Funding:** Appeal to non-traditional donors (EU, Asian partners, private sector)
- **$34M UNICEF Appeal:** For 900,000+ children and caregivers
- **Local Production:** Scale up METU-1 therapeutic food
- **Resilience Building:** Link emergency aid to long-term development

Urgent Action Required

Uganda's refugee health system faces collapse, placing nearly **2 million lives** at grave risk and undermining one of the world's most important refugee protection frameworks.[a,b]

[a] IRC. (2026). *Urgent Action Alert: Uganda Refugee Crisis.* Kampala: IRC.
[b] UNHCR. (2026). *Global Appeal: Uganda Situation.* Geneva: UNHCR.