



UNITED NATIONS STRATEGY FOR THE GREAT LAKES REGION

**2025-2027
ACTION PLAN**





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This document was prepared by the Integrated Secretariat of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the Great Lakes region (OSESGL), based on extensive consultations with key stakeholders from within the United Nations system and beyond. The proposals, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Secretary-General of the United Nations or those of Member States of the United Nations.

The United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region can be accessed here: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/1168>

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Please cite the report as follows: OSESGL, *United Nations Great Lakes Strategy - Action Plan 2025-2027*, Nairobi, Kenya (2025).

Layout and graphics: Elisa D. Lux and Larry Asego (OSESGL).

Photos: Unless otherwise indicated, the photos used in this Action plan are from contestants in the 2023 UN Great Lakes Photo Contest *"The Great Lakes Region Through Your Lens"*.



Acronyms

AFP	Agencies, Funds, and Programmes
ASM	Artisanal and Small-scale Mining
AU	African Union
AWLN	African Women Leadership Network
CCG	Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures
CCTFA	Central Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency
CNIDH	Commission Nationale Indépendante des Droits de l'Homme (Burundi)
CVR	Community Violence Reduction
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EUROJUST	European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation
EAC	East African Community
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FBA	Folke Bernadotte Academy
GLJCN	Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network
GLR	Great Lakes region
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICG	International Contact Group for the Great Lakes region
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFF	Illicit Financial Flows
IJJ	International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISM	Implementation Support Mechanism
IWT	Inland Waterway Transport
MLA	Mutual Legal Assistance
MONUSCO	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
NAP	National Action Plan
NCTTCA	Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority
NHRI	National Human Rights Institutions
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OROLSI	Office of the Rule of Law and Security Institutions
OSESG-GL	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region
PSCF	Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region
PVE	Prevention of Violent Extremism
RCO	Office of the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations
ReDDS	Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
REC	Regional Economic Community
ROM	Regional Oversight Mechanism
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOP	Standard Operational Procedure
SPG	Senior Policy Group
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training programmes
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNECA	UN Economic Commission for Africa
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOAU	United Nations Office to the African Union
UNOCA	UN Regional Office for Central Africa
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
WFP	World Food Programme
WPS	Women, peace and security
YPS	Youth, peace and security



Photo: Warrior Tsingya

Our vision: A peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Great Lakes region

Supporting Peace and Prosperity in the Great Lakes Region

The United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (referred to as the 'regional Strategy') was approved by the United Nations Secretary-General on 22 October 2020. It was subsequently welcomed by the United Nations Security Council, as well as signatory countries and Guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region in 2021 and 2022, respectively¹. The regional Strategy outlines a set of priorities organized into three pillars: (1) peace, security, and justice; (2) sustainable development and shared prosperity; and (3) resilience to both long-standing and emerging challenges. These priorities define a 10-year plan for United Nations action in the region, until 2030.

Following the adoption of the regional Strategy, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region (OESG-GL) led a series of consultations with key regional stakeholders to identify the most urgent priorities for United Nations intervention. These consultations informed the development of the Strategy's first Action Plan for the period 2021-2023, which translated its objectives into specific initiatives involving over 27 United Nations entities. The selection of flagship initiatives, included in this first Action Plan, was based on criteria such as urgency, measurability, feasibility, and their potential impact on peace, security, and sustainable development in the region.

The Action Plan has been reviewed annually by United Nations entities involved in the implementation process (Implementation Support Mechanism, *ISM*), with updates made approximately every three years.

The current Action Plan, which covers 2025-2027, is the second-to-last iteration before the 2028-2030 Action Plan, which will align with the regional Strategy's goals and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. In updating it, ISM members have ensured that it takes into consideration the current political, security and humanitarian context which has affected the eastern part of the DRC and the wider region, proposing more targeted interventions that support existing national initiatives and increase local ownership as guided by the Senior Policy Group (SPG), which acts as a Steering Committee bringing together UN Principals.

The primary objective of the Action Plan is to transform the vision of a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Great Lakes region outlined in the 2020 regional Strategy into concrete, impactful, and time-bound actions. It is further founded on a *Theory of Change* that presupposes that achieving a « peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Great Lakes region » requires addressing the root causes and drivers of instability in eastern DRC and the region. While achieving this goal will ultimately depend on the Great Lakes countries' ownership and political will, it will also be possible if all stakeholders – including countries, regional organizations, United Nations entities, international partners, and other key actors, such as women's and youth organizations as well as the private sector – work effectively together in a coordinated effort, taking into account the fact that the current crisis affects the pace at which such changes can be achieved. The Action Plan will therefore serve as a tool for coordination, accountability, resource mobilization, and monitoring and evaluation of progress.



The primary objective of this Action Plan is to transform the vision of a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Great Lakes region outlined in the 2020 regional Strategy into concrete, impactful, and time-bound actions.

1. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2021/19 issued on 20 October 2021 and Communiqué of the 10th High-Level Meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the DRC and the region issued on 24 February 2022.

The 2025-2027 Action Plan is structured into two main sections: a detailed presentation of the 10 flagship initiatives covering the peace, security, development and humanitarian nexus, followed by annexes. The annexes include a summary of planned key activities under each flagship initiative, and a monitoring and evaluation tool. The flagship initiatives are organized into three clusters (reduced from five in the previous plan), aligning with the three pillars of the regional Strategy, and focusing on specific, immediate actions for the next three years.

With 10 flagship initiatives, the Action Plan promotes collaboration and cross-border projects with high impact. The reduction in the number of flagship initiatives, from 14 to 10, reflects the need for a more focused approach, considering operational priorities, progress made to date, and the evolving context in the region. Each flagship initiative has been adjusted in response to the region's needs and with the aim of further consolidating tangible progress until 2027.

“ The Action Plan promotes collaboration and cross-border projects with high impact. Each flagship initiative has been adjusted in response to the region's needs. ”

The 2025-2027 Action Plan includes

10 FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES



>27 UN ENTITIES are working together under the regional Strategy

A key deliverable requested by the SPG was the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework, which was prepared by an independent consultant in 2024, in consultation with ISM members and led by the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region. The framework's goal is to provide a unified tool for regular reviews of progress, gaps, challenges, and results, enhancing accountability and supporting informed decision-making.

The budget for the updated Action Plan for 2025-2027 is estimated at **US\$112 million, with US\$26.5 million already secured.** This leaves a **funding gap of US\$85.5 million.**

To make up for this deficit, the United Nations entities involved in the regional Strategy continue to pursue joint and individual resource mobilization efforts. It is envisaged that some of the flagship initiatives will be implemented through joint programmes to attract flexible funding, strengthen collaboration, and enhance programmatic synergies.

As for the previous iterations, the implementation of the current Plan of Action will also be assessed on a regular basis, with a view to making the necessary adjustments where appropriate, building on important lessons learned during the first phase of implementation and the political, security and humanitarian situation in the region.

The UN worked closely with over

30 INSTITUTIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS at local, national, regional and international level



The 2025-2027 Action Plan has an estimated budget of

112million US DOLLARS

SOME HIGHLIGHTS SINCE 2021 OF UNITED NATIONS SUPPORT TO THE GREAT LAKES REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STRATEGY



Sustained support to the **Nairobi and Luanda peace processes**

Advocacy vis-à-vis **international partners** for streamlined and targeted support to regional peace processes



Operationalization of the **Contact and Coordination Group (CCG)** on non-military measures and its Operational Cell

Identification of **Burundian ex-combatants willing to return** from eastern DRC to Burundi



Adoption of a **draft common criminal policy** in response to cross-border crime and of the **2022 Kinshasa Declaration** on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation

Support to **National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)**



Mediation and negotiation training for women to support them in playing a stronger role in peace and political processes

Establishment of a **pool of women mediators** from across the Great Lakes region



Launch of the **Great Lakes Women Entrepreneurs Network** to champion women's roles in economic development



Engagement of investors in North America, Europe and Asia on the **bankability of cross-border projects** in the Great Lakes region as catalysts for growth and shared prosperity



Facilitated consensus around **31 recommendations** to break the link between the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources and armed groups during the high-level workshop held in Khartoum in 2021 in collaboration with the ICGLR



Consultation of some countries in the region on options for support to the **development of national PVE strategies** and the strengthening of early warning capacities

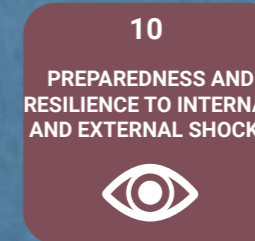
Development of **Uganda's national PVE strategy**



Contributed to Uganda's **Integrated Refugee Response Plan** and provided similar support in the DRC

Voluntary return of refugees

Initiated with ICGLR a **study on statelessness** in the region



Assessed the **socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** in some countries of the region

Continued **advocacy for sustained support** by partners to the region, including through equitable access to vaccines

FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES



Supporting regional peace processes, building on the momentum of the PSC Framework revitalization



Objectives

This flagship initiative supports regional efforts aiming to normalize the relations between the DRC and Rwanda and to provide momentum for enhanced confidence and dialogue to put an end to the recurring cycles of conflicts in eastern DRC and the region.



Rationale

Despite a renewed momentum in regional peace efforts to resolve the persisting security challenges in eastern DRC and the crisis between DRC and Rwanda, the Great Lakes region remains at a crossroads. A political solution involving all concerned regional stakeholders remains essential. Hence there is a need for enhanced concerted support by the United Nations, in cooperation with other international partners, for the ongoing efforts. Building mutual trust among countries in the region remains key for sustaining the current momentum of regional political solutions. The PSC Framework remains the most comprehensive mechanism to instill trust and address root causes and drivers of conflict. Thus, the renewed regional consensus regarding its revitalization needs to be supported to holistically complement the efforts of regional and international peace processes.



Outputs

- Support to the implementation of the Action Plan for the revitalization of the PSCF complementing regional and international peace efforts .
- Technical support, including mediation expertise and logistical support, to ongoing regional and international peace processes.



Impact

- Improved bilateral relations and progressive commitment to peaceful coexistence between the DRC and Rwanda
- Strengthened dialogue and trust among leaders of the region translating into complementary regional peace efforts and reinforced regional cooperation



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

The initiative focuses on all signatory countries of the PSC Framework, especially those facing tensions in their bilateral relations, as well as countries and institutions providing mediation or facilitation such as Angola, the EAC Chairperson and the EAC Facilitator, the SADC and the Panel of EAC-SADC Facilitators. Ensuring the inclusive and meaningful participation of women remains paramount. Thus, including women representatives will be key.



UN Entities

OSESG-GL and MONUSCO, in collaboration with UNOCA, UNOAU.



Partnerships

Key partners are the AU, the ICGLR, the SADC, the EAC, Angola and Togo. In addition to this, efforts will be coordinated with the members of the ICG.



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at US\$1.2 million of which around US\$ 150,000 have already been secured.

Empowering women to advance peace and stability in the Great Lakes region



Objectives

This flagship initiative promotes the meaningful participation of women in peace processes in the region, with a emphasis on the DRC. It aligns with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, prioritizes the implementation of the Great Lakes Region Regional Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2000) and National Action Plans on WPS. Furthermore, it aims to establish unified positions among Women's Rights Organizations regarding root causes of conflicts and institutionalize structures to address the former.



Rationale

Women in the region are disproportionately impacted by conflict and its spillover effects (sexual and gender-based violence, restrictions on education, access to justice, basic services and participation in governance). Women have largely been excluded from peacebuilding processes. The cost and impact of inequality poses a major impediment on the DRC and the region's development agenda. Women's involvement in peacebuilding is therefore crucial for long-term stability in the region.



Outputs

- Women have enhanced capacities and opportunities to participate in conflict prevention and regional peace processes, and to promote social cohesion in the Great Lakes.
- Enhanced capacities of national and regional institutions and mechanisms for the effective implementation and monitoring of WPS agendas, including National Action Plans and their localization.



Impact

- Women in the Great Lakes region are actively shaping peace and social cohesion, supported by strengthened national and regional mechanisms for implementing WPS agendas.



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

The flagship initiative will prioritize the Great Lakes Member States, with a particular emphasis on DRC, as a strategic approach to addressing the pressing challenges faced by the DRC and the region. The primary beneficiaries will be regional and national institutions working on peace and security, women-led organization and women, including young women peace advocates.



UN Entities

UN Women, in partnership with OSESG-GL, MONUSCO, UNFPA, UNDP and UNOAU



Partnerships

Partners include the AU, ICGLR, and its Member States, national and local institutions in the DRC as well as grassroots civil society organizations, peace actors in the DRC and the region, and other development partners.



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at US\$2,500,000 of which US\$345,000 have already been secured.



Empowering young leaders and youth-led organizations, including marginalized young women



Objectives

This flagship initiative promotes and enhances the participation of youth – especially marginalized young women – in peacebuilding processes in the Great Lakes region at social, economic, civic, and political levels. The flagship initiative aims to transform the three main aspects (attitude, behavior and context) that compose the violence of exclusion towards young people, by creating platforms for youth, investing in youth agencies and by enabling a gender-responsive environment.



Rationale

The Great Lakes region's history of conflict has profoundly impacted its youth. By addressing root causes such as poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities, governments, civil society, and the private sector can reduce the appeal of extremism and violence among youth. The flagship will review key lessons learned coming from the YPS work done at global, regional and national levels to formulate a transformative and supportive YPS agenda for the Great Lakes Region.



Outputs

- Strengthened capacity of academic institutions and community youth-friendly centers to provide YPS leadership academy, with gender parity and a dedicated track for young women peacebuilders with annual cohorts beginning by 2026
- Convene a Regional YPS Innovation Challenge and provide small grants to the winning innovative youth-led solutions and initiatives with a gender perspective and afterwards implementation/monitoring
- Enhanced awareness on the YPS agenda in the GLR by amplifying youth-led YPS initiatives in the region (Youth Peace Award)



Impact

- Increased competencies for youth, and especially young women and the most marginalized, to meaningfully engage with local and national infrastructures for peace.
- Enhanced agencies and networks for young leaders and youth organizations to influence peacebuilding at all levels.



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

The flagship initiative will primarily be implemented in the Great Lakes countries most affected by the conflict, specifically in the eastern DRC, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania. It will target young men (15-25 years) and women, including marginalized groups in these countries who are the most impacted by the conflict.



UN Entities

UNFPA in collaboration with OSESG-GL, UNICEF, UNOAU and UNDP



Partnerships

Key partners are the ICGLR Multifunctional Youth Forum, the AU, academic institutions and universities, colleges and/or TVETs in the region, youth-friendly community centers, private sector and donor community.



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at around US\$790,000 of which around US\$245,000 have already been secured.



Photo: Amaury Falt-Brown



Strengthening regional security cooperation through non-military measures



Objectives

This flagship initiative seeks to mitigate the threat posed by foreign armed groups in eastern DRC through the implementation of non-military strategies that facilitate their repatriation within the framework of the Contact and Coordination Group (CCG). By fostering confidence-building measures among regional countries, the initiative aims to enhance collaboration and to create a supportive environment for sustainable peace and security.



Rationale

Over the last two years, the signatory countries of the PSC Framework have intensified military efforts to quell the threat posed by foreign armed groups to human security in the region. Recognizing that military action alone is insufficient to address the threat posed by foreign armed groups, this project aims to complement military efforts with targeted non-military measures.



Outputs

- Strengthening Regional Security Cooperation through Enhanced Consultation and Regular Meetings.
- Facilitate the successful repatriation of foreign armed group members to their countries of origin while implementing robust measures to prevent their recruitment into armed groups.
- Enhance the reception and reintegration capacities of receiving countries for ex-combatants while fostering improved collaboration among DDR commissions in the region through the CCG sub-working group on DDR.



Impact

- Strengthened cooperation among CCG members in dismantling armed groups.
- Improved confidence, neighborly relations, and security cooperation.
- Establishment of the CCG as a platform for dialogue on dispute resolution and the search for solutions.



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

This flagship initiative will be implemented in Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania.



UN Entities

OSESG-GL, in collaboration with DPO OROLSI, IOM, UNDP, UNOAU and MONUSCO



Partnerships

Partners include the AU, ICGLR, SADC and the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA).



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at US\$2.6 million of which around US\$650,000 have already been secured.



Fighting impunity for cross-border crimes



Objectives

This flagship initiative supports ICGLR Member States in investigating and prosecuting crimes that impact peace and stability in the Great Lakes region, thereby contributing to the fight against impunity. Key objectives are to facilitate cross-border judicial cooperation through the adoption and roll-out of a policy on cross-border crime and to enhance the capacities of judicial actors, in line with the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance (2019) and the Kinshasa Declaration on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation (2022).



Rationale

Impunity for cross-border crime remains a major challenge, impacting bilateral relations and regional dynamics and vice versa. This flagship initiative responds to a call by the Justice Ministers of ICGLR Member States in 2022 for the development of a common policy on cross-border crime and a request by Heads of State from the region during the 11th high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Framework Agreement, held on 6 May 2023, that the fight against impunity be intensified through the full implementation of the Kinshasa Declaration.



Outputs

- Operationalization of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network (GLJCN)
- Adoption by ICGLR Member States and roll-out of a regional policy on cross-border crime
- Strengthening of national judicial capacities through sensitization sessions, trainings, and mentoring



Impact

- Improved confidence among ICGLR Member States and increase in cross-border judicial cooperation.
- Increased cross-border investigations and MLA.
- Reduction of impunity for cross-border crime.



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

The flagship initiative focuses on all 12 ICGLR Member States. The main beneficiaries are the national judicial authorities represented in the GLJCN and other national-level actors. Addressing impunity for cross-border crimes also contributes to overall stability and security for local populations.



UN Entities

OSESG-GL and DPO/OROLSI, in collaboration with MONUSCO, OHCHR and UNODC, among others



Partnerships

Key partners are the ICGLR Secretariat, the GLJCN, and the ministries of Justice of the ICGLR Member States. Other external partners include the International Institute for Justice (IJ), and the EUROJUST Genocide Network.



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at US\$2 million of which US\$500,000 have already been secured.



Strengthening the ASM gold sector's contribution to peace and development in the Great Lakes region



Objectives

This flagship initiative supports the ICGLR ASM Gold Strategy for the formalization and the improvement of business environment in the ASM gold sector as a pathway for peace and development in the Great Lakes region. Key objectives include supporting the ongoing process of formalization through an improved due diligence and business performance, strengthening the fight against illicit financial flows (IFF) and providing economic opportunities for the youth and ex-combatants.



Rationale

The illicit exploitation and trade of ASM gold by armed groups in eastern DRC continues to undermine regional economic and political stability. Despite recent efforts to formalize the sector at national and regional levels, cross-border illicit trade of ASM gold is still depriving governments of revenues needed to boost economic development and provide critical public services. The roll-out of a chain of custody system in all ICGLR Member States, supported by downstream actors, is needed.



Outputs

- Development of multi-stakeholder supply chain initiatives to strengthen ICGLR ASM Gold traceability, certification and monitoring.
- Implementation of the Community Violence Reduction (CVR) pilot projects in Nzibira (South Kivu), South Irumu (Ituri) and Rubaya (North Kivu), in accordance with the results of a feasibility study conducted in 2023 jointly by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the OECD.



Impact

- Disruption of the link between the smuggling of ASM gold and the financing of armed groups in eastern DRC and the region
- Enhanced regional trade of ASM gold and improved contribution to the achievement of SDGs in the region



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

The flagship initiative focuses on all 12 ICGLR Member States. The main beneficiaries are the ASM gold cooperatives, governments, regulatory bodies and other actors of the gold sector. Women, youth and ex-combatants will benefit from CVR pilot projects in eastern DRC.



UN Entities

OSESG-GL, DPO and UNODC, in collaboration with MONUSCO, United Nations country teams in the DRC, international and national NGOs, among others



Partnerships

Key partners are the ICGLR Secretariat, the Ministries of mining and regulatory bodies to fight IFF of the ICGLR Member States. Other external partners include the ASM cooperatives, among others.



Resources

The flagship initiative budget is estimated at US\$685,000 of which US\$250,000 has already been secured.

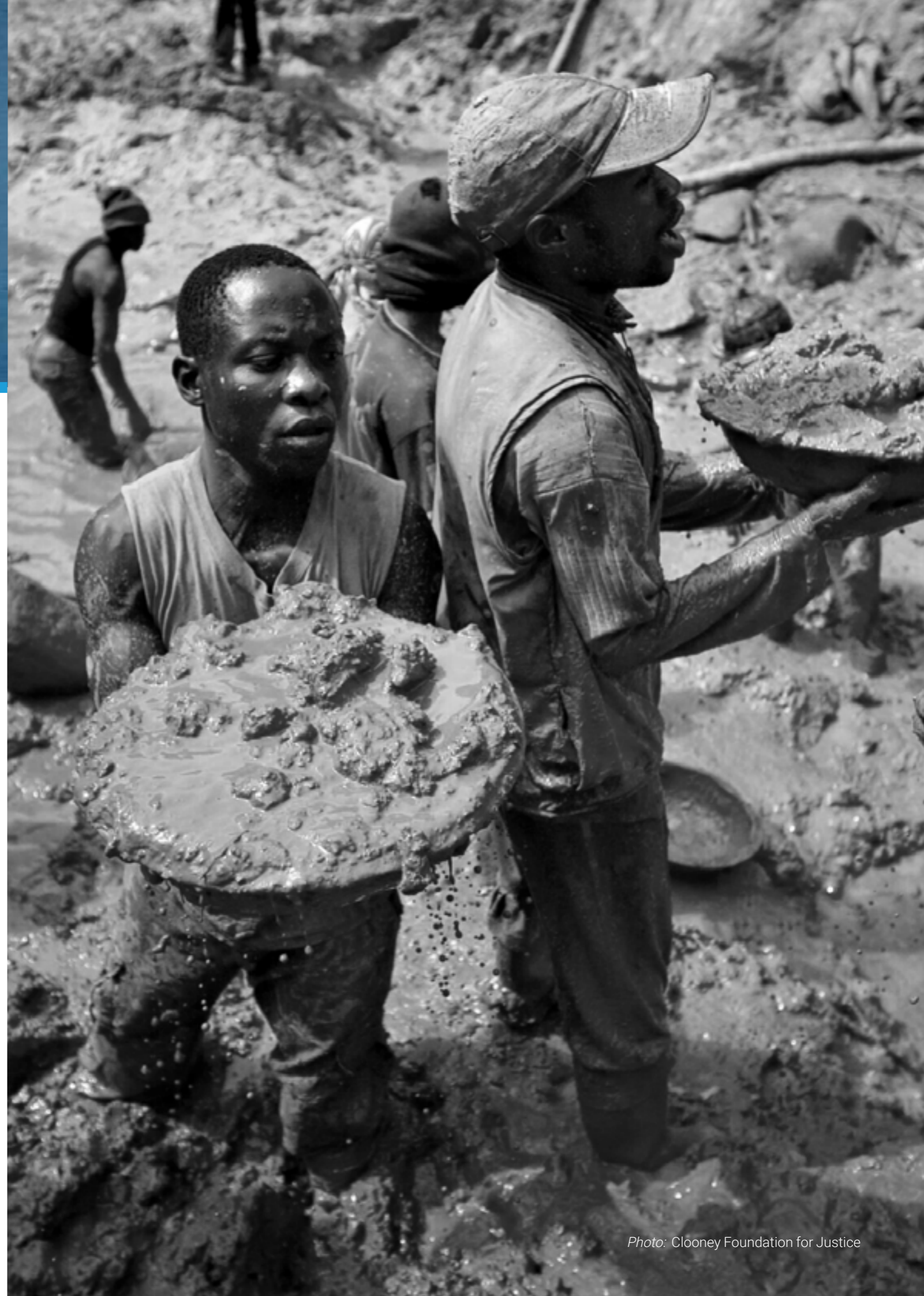


Photo: Clooney Foundation for Justice



Harmonizing inland transport policies for regional cooperation



Objectives

This flagship aims to support member states of the Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority (NCTTCA) and of the Central Corridor Transit Transportation Facilitation Agency (CCTFA) in their efforts to harmonize inland waterways transport policies within the multimodal transport corridors through technical expertise and advice on the development of a regional Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) master plan, thereby facilitating intra-regional trade, contributing to regional economic integration, cooperation and increasing efficiency of the transport sector in the East African region. This initiative is aligned with the Tripartite Programme on Transport and Transit Facilitation (PTFTT), involving COMESA, EAC and SADC, in support of the harmonisation of transport policies, regulations and systems among Member States.



Rationale

Inconsistent fees and tariffs in the 2010 transport regulations and 2011 merchant shipping regulations hinder the harmonization of IWT in Eastern Africa. Identified challenges include outdated navigation maps, low port utilization, inadequate vessels and financing, limited private investment, and unharmonized IWT policies in the region. This harmonization will increase the efficiency of transport corridors by reducing cost and time spent on transporting goods and services and by promoting regional cooperation. Ultimately, the activities carried out under this initiative will create conditions conducive to the emergence of special economic zones, which could serve as levers for development and peacebuilding by stimulating local economies, encouraging legal cross-border trade and promoting regional integration.



Outputs

- Crafting of a roadmap for Harmonizing Inland Waterways within Multimodal Transport Corridors
- Development of an Action Plan for integrating cold chains into Inland Waterway Transport (IWT)
- Designing of a Strategic Plan for Inland Waterways within Multimodal Transport Corridors



Impact

- Enhanced capacity of select Eastern African Member States to harmonize IWT policy frameworks within multimodal transport corridors.
- Strengthened regional economic integration, cooperation and development.



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

This flagship initiative will be implemented in Eastern African countries and members of the Northern and Central Corridors, namely Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.



UN Entities

This flagship will be implemented by UNECA in collaboration with FAO



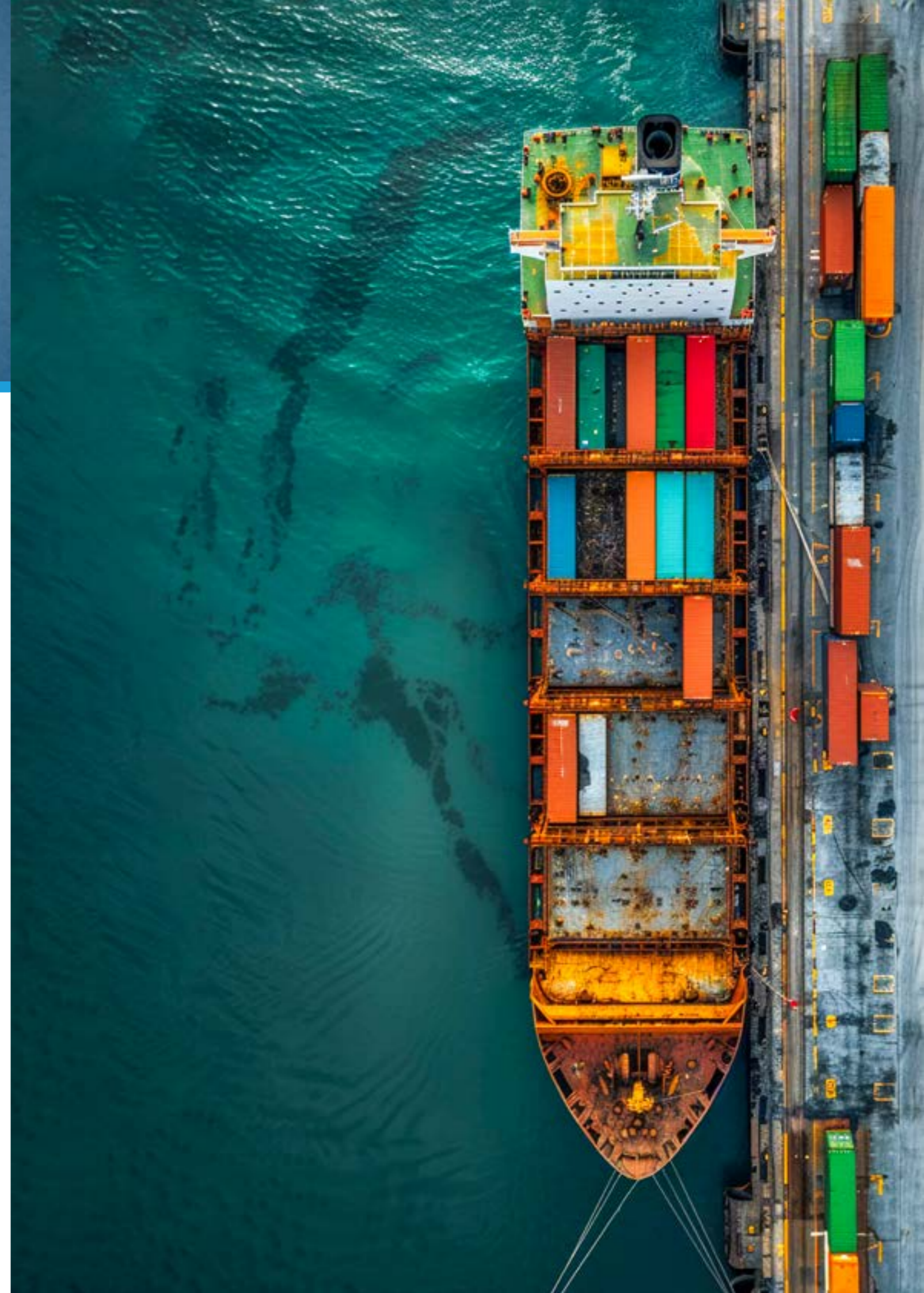
Partnerships

Key partners are the Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority and the Central Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency.



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at US\$ 500,000, of which US\$ 241,000 have already been secured



Supporting the sustainable reintegration of Burundian returnees



Objectives

This flagship initiative aims to end the forced displacement of the remaining 257,000 Burundian refugees in the region. This flagship involves implementing a comprehensive solutions plan in each country of asylum. It will do so by enabling a promotion phase of safe and dignified voluntary returns to Burundi in 2025 and alternative durable solutions to the ones unable to return up to 2027.



Rationale

The security situation in Burundi has stabilized, making return and reintegration a tangible solution within reach, with more than 250,000 refugees already returned since September 2017. Conditions for return and sustainable reintegration are increasingly met to ensure an end to forced displacement for most displaced Burundians. Strengthened and sustained efforts need to be pursued to resolve this displacement situation.



Outputs

- Support to the return of 55,400 refugees in need of assistance in 2025, by organizing return convoys from all the countries of asylum including pre-departure preparations, transport, and transit facilitation.
- Organization of reintegration activities, including reception, documentation and transfer to provinces, and priority return packages
- Advocacy with host governments to gain support for the implementation of a comprehensive solutions plan for Burundians unable to return.



Impact

- Reduction in forced displacement.
- Accelerated, safe and dignified return of displaced Burundians, and sustainable reintegration.
- Establishment of alternative durable solutions for those remaining in need of international protection.



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

Promotion of voluntary return will be implemented until 2025 in total 9 countries including the DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and several countries in Southern Africa. A comprehensive solutions plan will then be implemented in 2025-2027, providing alternative durable solutions to the remaining Burundian refugees in these countries.



UN Entities

UNHCR, in collaboration with FAO, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, and others



Partnerships

Key partners are the ICGLR and its Member States, ReDSS, refugee-led organizations of returnees as well as the *Commission Nationale Indépendante des Droits de l'Homme* (CNIDH), Save the Children, We World GVC, AU, and the Danish Refugee Council, among others.



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at US\$ 62.1 million of which US\$17 million have already been secured.

Enabling sustainable solutions for Congolese and Rwandan refugees



Objectives

This flagship initiative supports the development of resettlement opportunities, facilitates family reunification for persons in need of international protection, and expands refugees' access to safe and regulated complementary pathways for admission to third countries. It strengthens tripartite mechanisms to intensify voluntary repatriation for Rwandan refugees and to explore prospects for local long-term solutions for those not wishing to return. It also promotes International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standard travel documents issued to refugees by host States.



Rationale

It is urgent to find a long-term solution for Rwandan refugees in DRC and Congolese refugees in Rwanda, especially for the latter whose return to DRC is difficult due to the security situation in east and north Kivu (DRC). In 2025, UNHCR estimates that 158,045 refugees from the DRC and 5,080 refugees from Rwanda will need resettlement to address their protection needs and provide a solution to their predicament. The majority are in protracted forced displacement, and many were born in asylum. While third-country solutions serve to demonstrate international solidarity, repatriation remains a key objective.



Outputs

- Facilitation of case processing by resettlement States.
- Intensification of the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees.
- Support to local integration of refugees who do not wish to return.



Impact

- Safe and dignified return and reintegration of refugees.
- Resettlement, family reunification and access to complementary pathways for refugee admissions to third countries.
- Development of a legal long-term alternative for refugees.
- Protection of refugees and provision of opportunities for employment and higher education.



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

The flagship initiative focuses on Rwandan refugees living in the DRC, and Congolese refugees in Rwanda. UNHCR will also prioritize refugees for resettlement consideration, as per the 2025 Projected Global Resettlement Needs, and explore third-country solutions, to save lives, restore family unity and respond to immediate protection needs.



UN Entities

UNHCR, in collaboration with FAO, IOM, OSESG-GL, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, and UN Women



Partnerships

Key partners are the host governments, Save the Children, ActionAid International, African Initiative for Relief and Development, Actions et Interventions pour le Développement et *l'Encadrement Social*, among other organizations.



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at US\$13.7 million of which US\$2.1 million has already been secured.



Promoting durable solutions to displacement due to disasters and conflict



Objectives

This flagship initiative promotes durable solutions to displacement due to disasters and conflicts in the Great Lakes region, while seeking to reduce associated risks and vulnerabilities. Displaced and host communities will receive assistance through multisectoral assistance, including on social cohesion, livelihoods, mental health and psychosocial support. Additionally, the capacity building of local authorities, inclusive governance, and data production will be supported.



Rationale

Forced displacement from conflict and disasters significantly affects local populations and states across the region. Building on the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions, OCHA Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and institutional frameworks of participating organizations, this initiative is key to identifying solutions to the challenges faced by displaced populations and their host communities. In doing so, it seeks to ensure displaced people access to their rights and foster regional stability.



Outputs

- Promote social cohesion, access to basic services, governance and decision making for displaced, returnee and host populations through the engagement of community-led structures and decision-making processes.
- Support adoption of nationally owned policies, procedures and build capacities of local authorities to support solutions to displacement
- Strengthen the generation and analysis of data for solutions.

Photo: Kevin Ochieng



Impact

- Better access to basic services for both internally displaced persons and host communities.
- Enhanced social cohesion and stronger resilience of these communities.
- Increased use of displacement data and its analysis by decision-makers to inform the delivery of assistance and identify solutions.



Geographic Focus and Beneficiaries

The main implementation areas of the initiative will be Burundi, the DRC, and Uganda, targeting displacement-affected communities, including internally displaced people and host communities. Particular attention will be paid to vulnerable groups, women and youth, ensuring inclusive support that sustainably addresses their challenges.



UN Entities

IOM, in collaboration with UNDP, UNOAU and others



Partnerships

At the country level, the flagship initiative will be implemented in close cooperation with national and local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and affected communities.



Resources

The flagship initiative is budgeted at US\$26.2 million of which US\$5.2 million have already been secured.



OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES UNDER EACH FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE

The list below summarizes some of the key activities that will be carried out by the United Nations entities and partners involved in the Action Plan within the three year-span of implementation. This list is not exhaustive. A full list can be provided by the Integrated Secretariat upon request.

Flagship Initiative # 1: Supporting regional peace processes building on the momentum of the PSC Framework revitalization

- Provision of technical support, including mediation expertise and logistical support, to ongoing regional peace processes
- Support regional efforts for the revitalization of the PSC Framework aimed at addressing the root causes of conflicts in eastern DRC, including through the effective monitoring of progress in the implementation of commitments made;
- Facilitate coordination meetings between national, regional and international stakeholders involved to enhance complementarity of regional and international peace initiatives and ensure effective support;

Flagship Initiative # 2: Empowering women to advance peace and stability

- Support the activation of the Great Lakes Regional Network of Mediators and the establishment of the African Women Leadership Network (AWLN) Chapter for the Great Lakes to advocate for conflict prevention, social cohesion and engagement in regional political dialogues/peace processes.
- Organize and facilitate high level advocacy platforms for women in the region with key regional and political interlocutors to share experiences and perspective on their role in conflict prevention and regional peace processes.
- Support the revitalization of the Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and institutionalizing of the Regional Women's Forum secretariat to strengthen their roles in contributing to the PSC Framework and the WPS agenda.
- Operationalize the regional gender barometer to assess the impact of women's participation in peace processes and track progress on the WPS agenda in the region.

Flagship Initiative # 3: Empowering young leaders and youth-led organizations

- Map academic institutions and community centers that work on youth, peace and security (YPS) matters based on agreed criteria (Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, DRC) with a view to strengthening their capacities as needed, including with regard to a dedicated track for young women peacebuilders;

- Convene a regional YPS Innovation challenge and provide small grants to the winning innovative youth-led solutions and initiatives with a gender perspective, and ensure effective afterwards implementation/monitoring of the winning initiatives;
- Enhance awareness on the YPS agenda in the Great Lakes region by amplifying youth-led initiatives in this area (Youth Peace Award), including through the organization of information and experience sharing in-person and online forums, as well as documentation of and sharing of good practices on designing and implementing National Action Plans on youth, peace and security ;

Flagship Initiative # 4: Strengthening regional security cooperation through non-military measures.

- Support regular confidence-building meetings between the heads of intelligence and security services to discuss security challenges, share intelligence, and coordinate responses;
- Through the Contact and Coordination Group (GCC) and its Operational cell, facilitate the repatriation of foreign armed group members to their countries of origin while implementing robust measures, including awareness campaigns, to prevent further recruitments;
- Enhance the reception and reintegration capacities of receiving countries for ex-combatants, including through resource mobilization and technical assistance, while fostering improved collaboration among DDR commissions in the region;
- Encourage cross-border collaboration initiatives among neighboring countries to address transnational security issues effectively.

Flagship Initiative # 5: Fighting impunity for cross-border crime

- Support regular consultations amongst judicial experts from the region, including through the annual meeting of the ICGLR Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network (GLJCN)
- Establish a database of relevant legal instruments as well as of mutual legal assistance and extradition requests
- Promote the adoption by ICGLR Member States and roll-out of a regional policy on cross-border crime, including collaboration on specific cross-border cases;
- Support the strengthening of national judicial

capacities through sensitization sessions, training for GLJCN members as well as peer-to-peer learning and mentoring events on joint investigations and mutual legal assistance.

Flagship Initiative # 6: Strengthening the ASM gold sector's contribution to peace and development

- Support the development of multi-stakeholder supply chain initiatives to strengthen ICGLR ASM Gold traceability, certification, and monitoring, including through the convening of high-level Workshop on "Strengthening the ICGLR Regional Initiative on Natural Resources through lessons learnt from the Kimberley Process" .
- Implement the Community Violence Reduction (CVR) pilot projects in Nzibira (South Kivu), South Irumu (Ituri), and Rubaya (North Kivu), notably through sensitization campaign targeting armed groups and at-risk youth and engagements with local leaders, civil society and ex-combatants to promote community dialogue.

Flagship Initiative # 7: Harmonizing inland transport policies for regional cooperation

- Enhance the capacity of some Eastern African Member States to harmonize Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) policies within multimodal transport corridors, including through the conduct of diagnostic studies on existing policies and regulations to identify gaps and opportunities;
- Conduct a case study along Lake Victoria to assess the infrastructure, capacity, and challenges related to cold chain logistics within the IWT context.
- Develop an action plan with recommendations for improving cold chain integration in IWT, focusing on infrastructure, regulations, and best practices.

Flagship Initiative # 8: Supporting the sustainable reintegration of Burundian returnees:

- Support to the return of refugees, by organizing return convoys from all the countries of asylum including pre-departure preparations, transport, and transit facilitation, including by maintaining the current return package to ensure adequate support for returnees;
- Organization of reintegration activities, including civil documentation and transfer to provinces, and shelter kits for the most vulnerable returnees;
- Advocacy with host governments to gain support for the implementation of a comprehensive solutions plan for Burundians unable to return;
- Organize joint resource mobilization through the multi-year, multi-partner Return and Reintegration Operation Plan to enhance stakeholder involvement;
- Organize regular refugee coordination meetings with asylum countries to discuss and monitor refugee programmes including voluntary repatriation and reintegration.

Flagship Initiative # 9: Enabling sustainable solutions for Congolese and Rwandan refugees

- Facilitate resettlement processing of Congolese refugees to resettlement countries including follow-up on cases that are pending with resettlement countries
- Advocacy with resettlement countries for additional resettlement slots (or resubmission of resettlement cases previously accepted by the US Refugee Admission Programme to other resettlement countries);
- Support the voluntary repatriation of refugees, including through the organization of tripartite meetings to improve the return conditions as well as effective reception, registration and reintegration of Rwandan returnees to their places of origin;
- Support to local integration of refugees who do not wish to return, including to Congolese of Rwandan descent who wish to acquire Rwandan citizenship pursuant to the Rwanda Nationality law;

Flagship Initiative # 10: Promoting durable solutions to displacement due to disasters and conflict

- Establish and strengthen inclusive and participatory local governance and local conflict prevention, mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms including capacities for early warning
- Establish joint local cooperatives, village loans and savings associations to enhance and diversify livelihoods and strengthen financial resilience, with a specific focus on women and women led initiatives.
- Strengthen or build government and civil society capacities on migration, conflict sensitivity, environment and climate change and the use of the risk information portal for stakeholders.
- Strengthen the generation and analysis of data for solutions to displacement, including through training of national stakeholders, and the conduct of community-based vulnerability and risk mapping.



Photo: Alexander Bee, IOM

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework provides guidance and tools for measuring progress in attaining the expected results across the 10 flagship initiatives of the 2025-2027 Action Plan, identifying challenges in implementation and drawing lessons from the overall implementation of the regional Strategy. The main approach will be compilation of results based on the M&E frameworks at project level, which are populated and maintained by implementing agencies.

Specific objectives include tracking and assessing progress of implementation, identifying gaps, challenges, lessons learned, and opportunities. This will increase accountability to all relevant stakeholders and inform on resources use and mobilization efforts with evidence-based recommendations. The findings will guide the process of recalibrating the Action Plan and future implementation.

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change for this Action Plan is derived from the core assumptions made under the regional Strategy. Its purpose is to explain why the selected interventions are expected to achieve the desired change for the Great Lakes region. The underlying assumptions stem from the contextual analysis of the regional Strategy and are intended to guide the programming pathways of the UN entities responsible for implementation.

These underlying assumptions provide general guidelines for the flagship initiatives, and each implementing entity is expected to specify why its interventions are expected to produce the desired changes. The aim is to clarify the underlying assumptions, identify the required evidence, and link them to the results set by the regional Strategy.

Given the interdependence of peacebuilding challenges in the Great Lakes region, initiatives are encouraged to coordinate their actions and explore the connections between their approaches. Ultimately, the success of the regional Strategy will depend on coherent and concerted action by United Nations entities and their partners.

Underlying assumptions

The Theory of Change assumes that achieving a « peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Great Lakes region » requires **addressing the root causes and drivers of instability in eastern DRC** and the region holistically. As the regional Strategy identifies, there is a multitude of different root causes, ranging from

grievances over historical legacies and related political instrumentalization of ethnicity, as well as grievances over exclusion from access to land, power and resources, compounded by weak governance system, limited or absent State authority and access to justice. To address these root causes, **trust among States of the region seems key.**

The successful implementation of the Strategy will depend heavily on **countries' ownership and political will to translate commitments into transformative results.** Thus, the issue of mistrust between states remains an important driver of instability in the region.

In addition to this, the persistent activities of armed groups in eastern DRC are both a manifestation of this distrust and drivers of regional instability. The issues of illegal exploitation of and trade in strategic minerals and other natural resources are other key drivers of instability, having a multiplier effect on other causes and drivers, including socio-economic grievances and land disputes. Thus, it is necessary to **tackle the incentive structures of armed groups and criminal networks.**

Furthermore, the peaceful development and prosperity of the region are hampered by violence, prolonged forced displacement, and population vulnerability. Therefore, **a holistic approach leveraging the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential** to address these challenges effectively.

Finally, a range of potential external or internal shocks, including public health related or climate change-induced crises present a risk to durable stability and development of the region.

“ **The successful implementation of the Strategy depends heavily on countries' ownership and political will to translate commitments into transformative results.** ”

The Action Plan's Theory of Change proposes long-term outcomes in line with the constitutive clusters identified. For the Action Plan to effectively contribute to the attainment of the vision of a “peaceful, inclusive and prosperous region”, the following overarching programming approach is proposed:

1. Dialogue and inclusive processes to strengthen trust and to enhance cooperation:

Effective and sustained dialogue among countries, communities, and citizens is crucial for fostering trust, addressing grievances, and promoting peace, stability, and prosperity. Inclusive political processes and trust-building initiatives, including the participation of youth and women, are fundamental for enhancing regional cooperation and integration, thereby strengthening peaceful relations among Member States.

2. Reducing the threat of armed groups and criminal networks as drivers of instability:

The persistent presence of armed groups in eastern DRC fuels regional suspicions and undermines peace efforts by perpetuating insecurity, illegal exploitation of resources, and human rights abuses, leading to mass displacement and hampering socioeconomic development. Reducing these threats will enhance confidence in regional peace processes and reduce insecurity. Strengthening regional security and judicial cooperation through non-military measures is expected to build trust between States, thereby increasing the chances for successful regional peace efforts and yielding peace dividends.

3. Promoting sustainable, transparent management of natural resources, as well as trade and investment to enhance socioeconomic development and prosperity:

Illicit exploitation and trafficking of natural resources undermine long-term stability and development. Addressing these issues can disrupt negative forces' recruitment and supply networks. Transforming natural resources into drivers of shared prosperity can generate jobs, revenues, tax income, infrastructure, and basic services, while fostering cooperation between countries. With strategic minerals crucial for the green energy transition, transparent management of natural resources is essential. This approach is expected to boost cross-border trade, facilitate transportation, investments in regional value chains, and economic cooperation.

4. Finding durable solutions to forced displacement:

The displacement situation has reached unprecedented crisis levels due to escalating violence in the DRC. Finding durable solutions for the large number of IDPs and refugees is essential for social cohesion, stability, and development, as it will enable peaceful coexistence.

Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria for the Action Plan 2025-2027 aim to assess its implementation progress. The criteria focus on several key areas.

Firstly, the evaluation will look at **results and impact**. This involves assessing the results achieved, sharing impact stories, identifying key enablers, and recognizing challenges faced.

Secondly, **institutional arrangements** will be considered. This includes examining mechanisms and relationships that facilitated or hindered results, and identifying collaboration with various entities, including non-UN partners.

Thirdly, the focus will be on resources. This entails evaluating the **technical and financial resources** available, identifying challenges in mobilizing additional resources, and assessing efforts to address these challenges.

Fourthly, learning will be a key focus. This involves identifying **lessons learned**, understanding changes in programming, assessing activities implemented, and suggesting tools for monitoring and evaluation.

Fifthly, ownership will be evaluated. This includes **assessing community involvement** in activities and the impact on communities.

Lastly, **sustainability** will be measured. This involves determining whether the benefits of implemented activities are likely to continue after their completion.

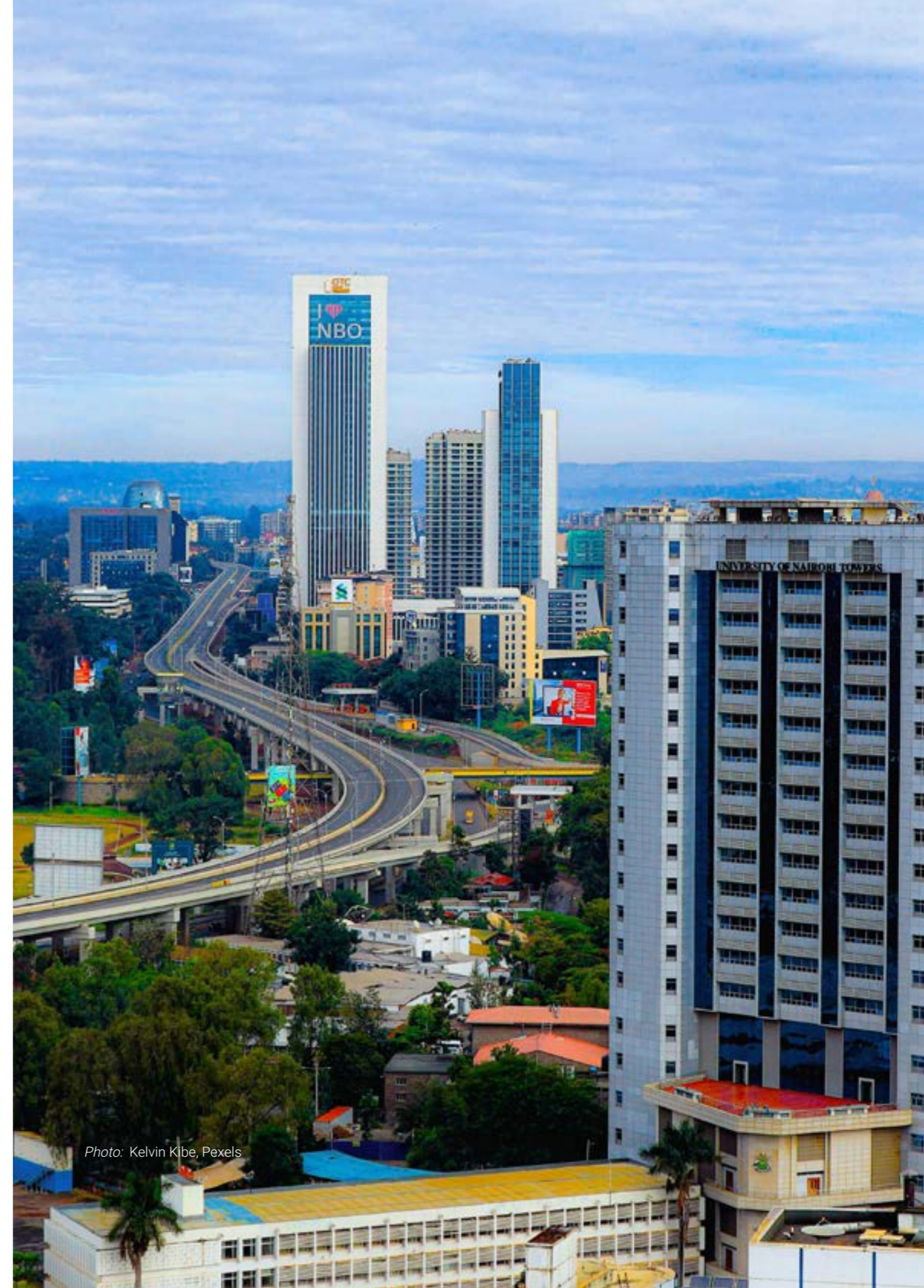


Photo: Kelvin Kibe, Pexels

