

MOZAMBIQUE SITUATION POST-ELECTION VIOLENCE

31 December 2024



Ongoing registration of asylum seekers in Nsanje District, near the Mozambique border. After registration they will access essential services provided by various stakeholders. @UNHCR/ Ahmed Abdi Bashir

HIGHLIGHTS

- Since the Constitutional Council's 23 December announcement on October's election results, **there has been a significant escalation in violence and unrest in Mozambique** including widespread looting, and vandalism.
- While initially centered in Maputo and its suburbs as well as Nampula, **in recent days there has been a significant escalation in Cabo Delgado province in the north of the country**. UNHCR has received numerous reports of refugees being caught up in the unrest; in Nampula some foreign owned businesses (which include those owned by refugees and asylum seekers) have been impacted.
- This unrest has **also hampered the ongoing humanitarian response**, with humanitarian access impeded, including in areas affected by the recent Cyclone Chido such as the southern districts of Cabo Delgado and northern districts of Nampula, where all emergency humanitarian operations have been suspended for 72 hours as of 29 December.
- **As of 31 December, close to 3,000 people arriving from Mozambique have so far been identified in Malawi and Eswatini**, with approximately 2,000 (representing roughly 900 households) of these having crossed into Malawi in the past week and a nearly 1,000 into Eswatini. Reports indicate that thousands more may have sought refuge with relatives and the host community.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Security and Political Developments

- **Following the Mozambique Constitutional Council's official confirmation of the victory of the ruling FRELIMO party in October's election on 23 December, there has been a significant escalation in the violence and unrest that has rocked Mozambique since mid-October.** Violent clashes between protestors and police have coincided with a general breakdown in public order – particularly in the Maputo/ Matola area and in Nampula province- resulting in widespread looting, vandalism of public/ private property and road blockages (temporarily impeding access to the airport in Maputo).
- While there remains no verified information on casualties resulting from the unrest, the civil society monitoring group “Plataforma Decide” **have reported a significant increase in recent days, with 176 of the 278 deaths recorded since post-election violence broke out in mid-October occurring between 23-29 December.**
- Despite calls by opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane for peaceful protests and, on 30 December, announcing a five-day pause in protests to ‘allow investigations into alleged human rights violations’, the situation remains unpredictable. Indeed, with Mondlane announcing a plan for further protests during his 26 December Facebook Live broadcast and laying out a timeline for his swearing in as President of Mozambique by a ‘popular court’ on the 15 January, **the political climate is likely to become more unstable in the short-term.**
- On 26 December the UN Secretary General released a statement expressing concern with regards the escalating post-election violence in Mozambique and calling on all parties to exercise restraint and diffuse tensions. Similar sentiments have been expressed by regional stakeholders with Zimbabwe, as the current chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), calling on post-election violence to end and offering the support of the SADC bloc to facilitate a political dialogue. The South African Minister for International Relations and Cooperation calling on all parties to ‘commit to an urgent dialogue’ following the Constitutional Council decision, with the Office of the South African President subsequently sending a Special Envoy to Mozambique on 30 December to engage all stakeholders to deescalate the situation.

Malawi

- **Since 23 December, Malawi's Department for Refugees, UNHCR and partners have identified close to 2,000 people from Mozambique who have arrived in the Nsanje District in the southeast of the country from the bordering Morrumbala District in Mozambique.** New arrivals are currently being hosted in five collective centres- including two schools- which are dispersed across the district. The actual number of Mozambicans to have arrived in Malawi may be higher. UNHCR and partners are currently conducting a joint assessment and registration exercise that will be concluded on 6 January which will provide a clearer picture of the number of arrivals and displacement dynamics.
- **A level one registration has been initiated following a screening by the Malawian authorities.** As of the 30 December, 1,809 people, mostly sheltering at the Tengani Evacuation Centre, have been far.
- The new arrivals relayed **accounts of their houses being burnt and their relatives being beaten** by unidentified groups. Of those registered at the Tengani Centre as of the end of 29 December, 727 (62 per cent) are female, while 268 (23 per cent) are children under the age of four.
- The **Nsanje** District Health Department reported that after an initial screening of the population across all five collective centres, **a large proportion of new arrivals comprise those with specific needs** including persons with chronic health conditions (approximately 14 per cent of arrivals) as well as pregnant, breastfeeding and lactating women (22 per cent).
- UNHCR is working closely with the Department for Refugees in Malawi to strengthen registration, ensure proper screening and better understand the primary factors driving Mozambicans to seek asylum.

Eswatini

- As of 31 December, **at least 950 individuals have arrived in Eswatini and are being sheltered at the critically overcrowded Malindza Refugee Reception Centre (MRRC).** On 29 December 399 people

arrived at the MRRC, the highest single figure for daily arrivals since post-election violence broke out in Mozambique.

- Among **those arriving in Eswatini are people who had refugee or asylum seeker status in Mozambique**. The verification and registration of new arrivals is ongoing.
- The **ongoing unrest, and concerns over insecurity** are the main factors for their flight. Some of them report their businesses or shops being looted. Of the 333 new arrivals recorded prior to 24 December, over half were under the age of 18- with 22 per cent under the age of five- and 57 per cent are women and girls.

NEEDS & RESPONSE

Malawi

- Those who have arrived in Malawi left Mozambique at short notice, with few belongings, and endured a treacherous journey to reach safety. According to the joint assessment conducted at the Tengani Evacuation Centre between 28-29 December critical needs include:
 - **Food:** As of 29 December, food has been provided to the most vulnerable new arrivals (see below). However, many new arrivals have been dependent on the generosity of the local community and / or relatives living near the centre. In some cases, individuals have crossed back into Mozambique to collect basic food items such as maize and potatoes, before returning to Malawi. According to the local chief in Tengani, as of the morning of 28 December more than 5 children have fainted due to lack of food. The inter-agency assessment team observed that scores of children and elderly persons appear malnourished.
 - **Shelter & Core Relief Items (CRIs):** Many people are sleeping outside the evacuation centre due to a lack of space inside. Initially this population lacked tents, or other basic shelter material that could provide a degree of comfort and security. At the same time, the site itself lacks basic protection safeguards such as lighting.
 - **WASH:** WASH infrastructure at the centre is extremely limited, with the 1,170 new arrivals sheltering at the site sharing one latrine and one communal bathroom between them. With a lack of sanitation facilities, the population is reportedly using the nearby Shire River for sanitary purposes. This presents considerable hygiene-related risks- including contamination of water sources- and protection risks, particularly for women and girls who are without access to private, segregated or proximate WASH facilities. Access to clean water is limited, with new arrivals sharing the one functional borehole at the site with the host community. As well as insufficient in quantity, this could also aggravate community tensions around access to resources.
 - **Protection:** People report being separated from their loved ones as they fled their homes having made a treacherous journey on foot from Mozambique, which included a crossing of the Shire River. Protection risks include exposure to GBV due to lack of lighting and non-segregated WASH facilities, as well as potential recourse to harmful coping strategies given the limited access to basic food items.
- The local authorities with the support UNHCR, and other partners NGOs, are working to provide life-saving assistance as quickly as possible. **The** Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) donated an initial 325 bags of maize flour and 20 bags of beans to the District Commissioner, with distribution undertaken on 29 December to the most vulnerable. On 28 December, **UNHCR donated an initial batch of relief items** to the local council, comprising 600 blankets, 100 20-liter jerrycans, 200 kitchen sets, 100 solar lamps, 100 basins, 600 sleeping mats, 200 tarpaulins and 400 bars of soap. UNHCR has also mobilized an initial 500 tents, with an additional 300 family-sized tents to be received in the country in the coming days. WFP has also indicated that, should new arrivals continue, it can provide cash-based assistance. At the same time, efforts to truck water to new arrivals are currently being spearheaded by the Malawian Defence Forces, with UNICEF ready to support.
- The Nsanje District Council has identified **a preliminary site for a proposed settlement- Nyamithuthu Settlement- to transfer new arrivals as well as those already sheltering in one of the five collective centres**. The local authorities maintain that the establishment of a new settlement is critical in better coordinating the provision of assistance and basic services- with the existing collective centres dispersed over a wide area- and to empty the two schools serving as collective centres ahead of the start of the new school year in January. Clearing of the Nyamithuthu site began on 27 December, with five communal tents erected by the Malawi Red Cross to process arrivals. At present it is understood that there is no

water supply on site, which would in turn necessitate water trucking to the settlement. The District Commissioner was tasked to identify a government partner to provide water trucking to the newly identified site. UNHCR continues to advocate for an integrated and sustainable response to those affected- including by supporting the hosting capacity of family and friends amongst the local community - and encourages the establishment of a settlement only as a last resort.

Eswatini

- **Those new arrivals identified and screened continue to be transferred to the critically overcrowded Malindza Refugee Reception Centre (MRRC).** This facility is currently hosting close to 1,000 individuals- some for a prolonged duration- significantly exceeding its designated maximum capacity of 250. Amidst this overcrowding, all facilities within the center are currently being used as overflow sites to host new arrivals including, for instance, the hall, library and warehouses. The Ministry of Home Affairs is currently leading efforts to fast-track the establishment of the Ndzevane refugee sit, with the hope that this facility may be ready to receive new arrivals by the second week of January.
- Beyond the need for additional space to host new arrivals, other priority needs include:
 - CRIs: There is an urgent need for additional CRIs, particularly, shelter materials, mattresses and hygiene kits, as existing stocks were quickly depleted.
 - Food: Despite recent donations of food supplies, the population in the MRRC is only receiving two hot meals per day provided by the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) underlining the need for regular supplies of food items amidst ongoing arrivals,
 - Protection: Limited staff to support registration efforts has led to a significant delay, in turn contributing to significant overcrowding at the MRRC (which is designed for short-term stays). An increase in registration capacity, would help to decongest the MRRC and support more sustainable responses to new arrivals in out of settlement settings. UNHCR is sending a registration staff (anticipated to arrive on Friday) to support the government's efforts and bolster protection screening.
 - Health: On 31 December, Ministry of Health started health screening of new arrivals and delivered medical supplies .
 - WASH: At present the ratio of latrines to population is far below the 1:50 persons emergency threshold.
- The local authorities, with the support of the UN and international NGOs, have provided assistance and basic services to new arrivals at the MRRC:
 - Food: On the 28 December the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) donated rice, cooking oil, sugar beans and the Inyatsi Group provided R50,000 worth of food parcels and toiletries
 - Health: As of 31 December, the Ministry of Health initiated health screening of new arrivals and delivered medical supplies. In addition, UNFPA distributed 400 dignity kits to adolescents at the site.
 - CRIs: Through an implementing partner, UNHCR has mobilized US\$10,000 to support the purchase of CRIs to deliver to the population at the MRRC. On 31 December Caritas also donated R100,000 worth of blankets and mattresses.
- **On 27 December the Eswatini Minister of Home Affairs [requested additional support to meet critical gaps in assistance](#)**, specifically highlighting the need for tents, clothes, dignity kits, toiletries and food. She encouraged partners to coordinate the provision of assistance with the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA). On 30 December, [the Prime Minister of Eswatini issued a statement](#) updating on the Government's response to the Mozambique situation and further calling on 'all partners and stakeholders to support in responding to this humanitarian challenge.'
- An **official request from the Government of Eswatini** will be shared with partners soon to enable activation of the response from other UN agencies.

Mozambique

- **Refugees and asylum seekers are increasingly being caught up in the violence and unrest in Mozambique.** On 24 December one refugee was tragically killed in crossfire in Nampula city as he was reportedly on his way to Maratane refugee settlement for safety. A further two refugees in Nampula were reportedly injured by a stray bullet from Police trying to disperse protestors, with one subsequently

evacuated to Malawi on 25 December for treatment (UNHCR is following up to ensure they receive the require medical assistance).

- Escalation of violence in Nampula has **seen shops and businesses including those owned by refugees and asylum seekers- destroyed and looted**. This has led many refugees and asylum seekers who live in Nampula city to relocate to the Maratane settlement for safety, putting strain on already overstretched services. UNHCR and the Mozambique National Institute for Refugee Assistance (INAR) are coordinating with refugee leaders to provide accommodation and mobilizing the community to support them through the provision of food and other basic assistance.
- **The situation has left refugees who were once self-reliant in a situation of desperation**, having lost their businesses and livelihoods. As a result, there is a need for increased entrepreneurial support and scale-up livelihood interventions. In the meantime, UNHCR and partners are providing psychosocial support to this population.
- There has also **been an reports of unrest around** UNHCR's warehouse in Maratane. UNHCR is closely coordinating with the police, INAR, local authorities, and refugee leaders, to enhance security around the warehouse.
- The UNHCR's protection team in Mozambique is **closely monitoring the situation of refugees and asylum seekers**, through phone communication and via the Maputo Protection UNHCR hotline, in-person individual counselling, meetings with community leaders (when the security situation allowed), collaboration with the government's refugee agency INAR (the National Institute for Refugee Assistance) and UNHCR legal partner CEMIRDE.
- **UNHCR has also seen ongoing programmes increasingly disrupted**. For example, in Nampula, three UNHCR supported Instant Network Schools (INS) which served both refugees and nationals have been affected; one has been burnt down, while a further two have been vandalized with 75 tablets looted.

Cyclone Chido Response

- Since mid-December, **UNHCR has been supporting the Government of Mozambique to respond to the devastating Cyclone Chido**, which has impacted an estimated 447,551 people in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces in the north of the country. In a marked shift towards local ownership of the response, the Government of Mozambique has begun to take a lead in coordinating the inter-agency response under the IASC cluster system. UNHCR was one of the first agencies on the ground to respond and supported over 2,600 individuals within the first 48 hours at the largest accommodation centre in Pemba; people were provided with CRI kits and vulnerable individuals, including the elderly and persons with disabilities, were identified and referred for support, particularly mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS). In addition, UNHCR, in coordination with community leaders, provided protection awareness, conducted registrations, and established community representation to facilitate communication and ensure safety. UNHCR continues to play a critical support role, leading multi-sectoral rapid needs assessments in many affected districts, scaling up protection interventions such as mobile protection desks and referral services. Through the protection desk in Chiure for instance, UNHCR distributed 1,500 PSEA hotline cards and provided group counseling. Protection desks in Nampula and Cabo Delgado have provided protection counseling for immediate concerns and facilitated referrals to local authorities and partners for survivors and affected populations Finally, UNHCR has distributed 826 CRI kits to date, reaching over 4,000 individuals, with more distributions planned.
- The Protection cluster also activated the implementation of anticipatory actions as per the Emergency Preparedness and Response plan and carried out the following ahead of the landfall of the cyclone: disseminated early warning messages; developed a list of the emergency protection units; shared guidelines on vulnerability criteria for consideration and supported PSEA networks and Linha Verde hotline with the dissemination of related posters and messages; shared a practical guide for managers of the temporary accommodation centres and; disseminated the updated referral pathways for Chiure and Mecufi..
- In recent days, a **deterioration of the security situation in the north of the country has significantly impeded the humanitarian response of UNHCR and partners to the cyclone**. As of 29 December, the humanitarian response in Cabo Delgado was suspended for 72 hours following the looting of humanitarian supplies, while humanitarian actors have been unable to access Erati District in Nampula Province since 26 December, which was also heavily impacted by the cyclone. This has disrupted the operations of one of UNHCR's protection partners who was providing protection assistance in the district after the cyclone hit. With the region, particularly Cabo Delgado, already experiencing a multi-faceted

crisis, there are concerns that post-election violence could also lead to an intensification and expansion of the conflict between Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) and the Government amidst a general breakdown in public order.

COORDINATION & PARTNERSHIP

- UNHCR welcomes the leadership of the host governments of Malawi and Eswatini in coordinating the response to new arrivals, consistent with the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) which emphasizes the primacy of government leadership.
- In Malawi, the initial response has been coordinated at the local level, with the Nsanje District Council under the leadership of the District Commissioner- bringing together an emergency coordination committee to oversee the provision of assistance in close proximity to new arrivals. This committee takes a multi-stakeholder and whole of government approach, comprising international humanitarian organizations including UNHCR, UNICEF and the Red Cross, alongside government departments including the Department for Refugees, Malawi Immigration, the Malawi Defense Forces (MDF) and the local health authorities.
- In Eswatini, the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), in close coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) has coordinated the response to new arrivals at the MRRC. The NDMA has also activated a national emergency coordination cell. In consultation with humanitarian organizations and the UN Country Team (UNCT), the NDMA, is in the process of developing an Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan which has been tabled at the inter-ministerial cabinet meeting for consideration. The UN stands ready to scale-up support to the Government of Eswatini, pending a formal request for assistance.
- In Mozambique, the overall humanitarian response in the country continues to be coordinated under the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster system, largely coordinated by the UN and INGOs. At the local level, Area Humanitarian Country Teams (AHCTs) are coordinating the response, ensuring the engagement of key local responders. For the refugee response in Nampula and Mpauto, coordination is led by the government under the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), with support from UNHCR.
- On 31 December UNHCR issued a media release about the situation available [here](#).

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