



Scaling Tuseme: Advancing Gender-Responsive Education in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) Communities in Ethiopia.



Executive Summary

Purpose of the study

This policy brief presents insights from a study conducted by the Global Partnership for Education's Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE/KIX) Tuseme Project to **identify key barriers and enabling factors to effective implementation of an adapted Tuseme model in IDP and refugee settings in Ethiopia.**

The GPE KIX: Tuseme – A voice for internally displaced and refugee children project is a partnership between the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the Higher Education Resource Services – East Africa (HERS-EA), and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), UK.

ETHIOPIA NATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

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Brief overview of Tuseme ∨

The Tuseme model, is a participatory empowerment approach, that helps young people “speak out” on challenges hindering their education (Khaita et al 2025). Adapted by FAWE, Tuseme has enhanced the agency and confidence of learners in traditional school settings across Sub-Saharan Africa. However, its effectiveness has not been tested in refugee and IDP settings, which present unique challenges, including *limited resources, transient populations, and the complexities of cultural integration.*

Summary of key findings on enabling/disabling factors ∨

Enabling Factors in Refugee and IDP Settings



- The existing structure of mandated school clubs, teacher and administrative Support
- Student Motivation and Peer Support
- Community and Parental Belief in Education
- Partnerships among existing agencies and external support

Disabling Factors in Refugee and IDP Settings



- Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources
- Lack of Sustainable aid; Weak coordination among the actors
- Low Teacher Morale and Capacity: Time Constraints
- Psychosocial and Safety Issues
- Poverty, and Socio-Economic Barriers
- Low Parental engagement in school activities
- Deep-seated Cultural and Gender Norms

High-Level Implications for Scaling Up the Tuseme Model in Refugee and IDP Settings (Ethiopia) ∨

Scaling the Tuseme model in Ethiopia’s refugee and IDP settings is feasible and strategically aligned with national education priorities, given the existence of established school club structures, motivated learners, supportive communities, and active humanitarian partnerships. These enabling conditions provide a strong entry point for government-led scale-up. However, the evidence also indicates that empowerment programming alone is insufficient in displacement contexts characterized by overcrowded schools, teacher overload, psychosocial distress, poverty, and entrenched gender norms. For Tuseme to achieve transformative impact at scale, it must be systematically integrated into Ethiopia’s ESDP VI framework, particularly under the Education in Emergencies and Equity and Inclusion pillars.

This integration has three key policy implications:



- 1. From research projects to systems –** Tuseme should be embedded within national and regional education planning, budgeting, and monitoring structures to ensure sustainability and equity.



- 2. From participation to protection –** Scaling must be accompanied by strong safeguarding, psychosocial support, and referral mechanisms to protect girls in high-risk displacement settings.



- 3. From school-based action to social norm change –** Effective scale-up requires structured engagement with families and communities to challenge norms that limit girls’ leadership, mobility, and educational participation.

Without addressing these structural constraints, scaling Tuseme risks uneven implementation and limited impact; with them, it offers a powerful tool for advancing gender equity and learner voice in Ethiopia’s displacement-affected education systems.



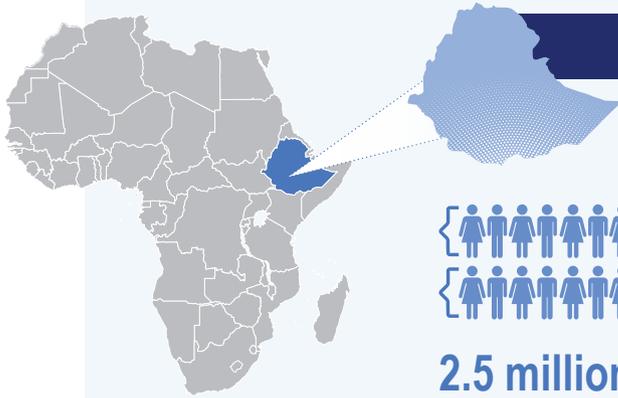
Call to Action for the Government of Ethiopia

- 1 This call is aligned with Ethiopia's Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP VI), particularly **the Education in Emergencies (EiE) and Equity and Inclusion pillars**.
- 2 To deliver on **ESDP VI commitments to equitable, inclusive, and resilient education**, the Government of Ethiopia—through the Ministry of Education and regional education bureaus—should **institutionalise the Tuseme model as a gender-responsive, school-based empowerment approach** in refugee- and IDP-hosting schools.
- 3 This requires formally embedding Tuseme within **mandated school clubs and co-curricular programming** under the Education in Emergencies and Equity and Inclusion pillars, rather than implementing it as a stand-alone project. The Government should **strengthen teacher capacity and wellbeing** through targeted training, workload recognition, and psychosocial support for educators working in displacement-affected contexts. Parallel investments are needed to ensure **safe, inclusive learning environments**, including gender-responsive sanitation facilities and access to learning materials.
- 4 National and regional authorities should also **strengthen coordination between education, gender, child protection, and social services**, while mobilising **sustainable domestic and partner financing** to reduce reliance on short-term humanitarian aid. Finally, **engaging parents, community and religious leaders** to address restrictive gender norms, early marriage, and poverty-related barriers is critical to protecting girls' education and ensuring that the voices of displaced learners inform school improvement and education recovery efforts.

To advance ESDP VI commitments to equitable, inclusive, and resilient education systems, national stakeholders **should institutionalise Tuseme within mandated school clubs** in refugee- and IDP-hosting areas; **invest in teacher capacity, psychosocial support, and safe learning environments**; and **strengthen coordination among sectors** and sustainable financing across government, humanitarian, and development actors. Engaging parents and community leaders to address gender norms and socio-economic barriers is critical to protecting girls' education and ensuring that displaced learners' voices inform school improvement and national education recovery efforts.



Background and Context



2.5 million

Due to prolonged conflict and instability, Ethiopia has over 2.5 million people internally displaced within the country (Birra 2025).

Moreover, there are scattered institutional structures at the federal and regional levels. Therefore, there is no well-established international organisation responsible for assisting and protecting IDPs (Birra 2025).

Internal Displacement in Ethiopia



1,919,993

As of August 2024, an estimated **1,919,993 IDPs (437,936 households)** were internally displaced across **2,060 assessed**, accessible sites in Ethiopia (IOM, 2025). (Figure 1; UNHCR, 2025)



123 million

By the end of 2024, some **123 million people around the world were displaced from their homes by conflict, violence or persecution** – the highest figure ever recorded (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2025).



120 million

Of the 120 million girls out of school globally, over half **68 million** are in FCV countries. Ethiopia is listed among the **40 countries** with the lowest primary school enrolment rates for girls, due to this crisis. Among those affected, a significant number are children and adolescents - many of whom face severe challenges in accessing education and basic services (World Bank 2023).

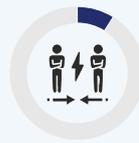
Scaling the Tuseme model in refugee and IDP settings offers a strategic pathway to amplify girls' voices, promote inclusive education, and foster gender-responsive learning environments that support both girls and boys in overcoming adversity.

Primary Cause of Displacement



82.1%

Conflict was the primary cause of displacement for an estimated **1,576,060 IDPs (82.1%)**,



8.6%

followed by **social tension**, which was the primary reason for displacement for an estimated **165,561 IDPs (8.6%)**



4.3%

and **drought** (primary reason for displacement for an estimated **81,659 individuals or 4.3% of the national caseload**) (IOM, 2025).

Challenges Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia face multifaceted challenges, with girls and young women disproportionately affected by educational disruptions. Girls in conflict-affected areas face severe educational barriers, with those in Fragile Conflict Violent (FCV) settings **2.5 times more likely to be out of school** (World Bank 2023).



Study Overview:

Overarching objective

The study aimed at identifying and analysing key socio-cultural barriers and enabling factors for the effective implementation of an adapted *Tuseme* model in IDP and refugee settings in Ethiopia. This study was designed to answer three key questions:

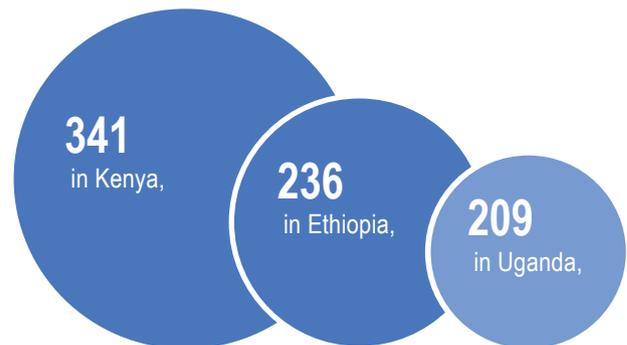


1. Can Tuseme be adapted to refugee and IDP settings?
2. What enabling factors could support Tuseme's adaptation?
3. What disabling factors might hinder Tuseme's effectiveness?



Methodology

The study methodology comprised a multi-country (Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) qualitative design that allowed country-specific context-sensitive insights. Data were collected using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students, teachers, and parents and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with government officials and education stakeholders. Specifically, the research **engaged over 784 participants across the three countries**, including:



with 4 schools per country (n=12).

The four schools in Ethiopia comprised Fitewrari Gebeyehu and Haylemariam Mamo Secondary schools in Debreberhan and Sherkole and Wumba secondary schools from the refugee settings in Assosa. (*Khaita et al, 2025; FAWE, HERS-EA & ACER, 2025 a; FAWE, HERS-EA & ACER, 2025 b*).





Key Findings: Enabling and Disabling Factors

Enabling Factors in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) Settings (Figure 2)



- **Strong Institutional Commitment and Structures:** Teachers and school administrators demonstrate high levels of dedication, personal motivation, and professional commitment to student development. This is reinforced by existing institutional structures, including mandated school clubs and a history of active student-led organisations, which provide a stable and ready platform for introducing and sustaining new initiatives.



- **High Student Motivation and Peer Support Systems:** Students exhibit strong intrinsic motivation to learn, socialise, and achieve their academic and personal goals. They show a clear willingness to voice their opinions and actively participate in club activities. Robust peer-to-peer support further strengthens collaboration, inclusivity, and collective engagement within the school environment.



- **Positive Parental Attitudes and Community Engagement:** Parents largely view education as a critical pathway to self-improvement and future success for their children. In several settings, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and community-based organisations actively collaborate with schools, contributing resources and fostering a supportive and enabling learning environment.



- **Established Partnerships and External Support Networks:** Schools have a proven track record of collaboration with external organizations and non-governmental organizations. These partnerships create viable pathways for program implementation, sustainability, and resource mobilisation through external assistance and local community contributions.

Disenabling Factors in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) Settings



01

Inadequate Infrastructure, Overcrowding, and Resource Constraints: Schools in refugee and IDP contexts are frequently overstretched, with overcrowded classrooms that exceed institutional capacity. Limited physical infrastructure and learning resources significantly undermine effective teaching, learning, and the implementation of extracurricular programs such as Tuseme clubs.

02

Fragile Program Sustainability and Weak Coordination: Donor funding is often short-term, fragmented, or narrowly targeted, creating dependency and leading to program discontinuation once external support ends. Inadequate coordination among schools, local leadership structures, and non-governmental organisations further weakens program coherence, reach, and long-term effectiveness.

03

Low Teacher Morale and Limited Capacity: Teachers commonly face heavy workloads, inadequate remuneration, and a lack of compensation for extracurricular responsibilities. These conditions contribute to low morale, burnout, and reduced willingness or capacity to initiate and sustain additional programs beyond core instructional duties.

04

Psychosocial Distress, Safety Concerns, and Behavioural Challenges: Students experience significant psychological and emotional distress linked to conflict, displacement, and uncertainty about the future. Persistent insecurity, including ethnic tensions and safety risks, disrupts schooling, while limited parental and community engagement exacerbates behavioural and emotional challenges among learners.

05

Socio-Economic Hardship and Time Constraints: Poverty, unpaid labour, and household responsibilities restrict student participation—particularly for girls—in empowerment and extracurricular initiatives. Long travel distances to school and competing demands on students' and teachers' time further limit consistent attendance, regular meetings, and sustained engagement in club activities.

06

Limited Parental Engagement and Awareness: Parental involvement in school activities within refugee and IDP settings remains low, largely due to insufficient awareness of the benefits of engagement and limited communication from schools. Many parents are unaware of the positive educational and developmental impacts of programs such as Tuseme clubs, reducing community-level support.

07

Restrictive Cultural and Gender Norms: Entrenched cultural practices and traditional gender roles constrain girls' participation in leadership and empowerment initiatives. The disproportionate burden of domestic chores, alongside harmful practices such as early marriage, continues to contribute to absenteeism and high dropout rates among female students.

Implications for Scaling to Refugee and IDP Settings/ Government Policy

- This study revealed that socio-cultural pressures, including early marriage, domestic labour expectations, and poverty, continue to drive school dropout among girls in refugee and IDP communities. Despite strong teacher commitment, infrastructural deficits such as inadequate learning materials, lack of inclusive sanitation facilities, and absence of science labs hindered effective service delivery. Gender norms remain a persistent challenge, with leadership and assertiveness often associated with boys, while girls are steered toward domestic roles.
- The research underscored the acute gender disparities in forced displacement settings. Girls faced compounded vulnerabilities, including early marriage, gender-based violence, limited mobility, and restricted access to education. These challenges were exacerbated by harsh socio-economic conditions and entrenched cultural norms that deprioritised girls' education and leadership potential. The urgency to address these disparities was clear.
- Expanding the Tuseme approach within refugee and IDP contexts presents a deliberate and evidence-informed strategy for strengthening girls' agency, advancing equitable participation in education, and cultivating gender-responsive learning spaces (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2012). Consistent with research on transformative gender pedagogy and learner-centred empowerment models, such environments not only elevate girls' voices but also contribute to positive educational and psychosocial outcomes for both girls and boys as they navigate conditions of displacement, marginalisation, and adversity.
- Research from East Africa demonstrates that participatory, gender-responsive approaches that foreground learner voice and leadership are particularly effective in addressing entrenched gender norms, psychosocial stressors, and structural barriers to education in refugee-hosting contexts (FAWE, 2022; UNHCR, 2019). By institutionalising dialogue, critical reflection, and student-led action, the Tuseme model aligns with regional commitments to gender-transformative pedagogy and inclusive education frameworks that benefit both girls and boys (INEE, 2020).
- Evidence from refugee education programming in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda further suggests that such approaches contribute to improved retention, resilience, and school engagement, while fostering safer and more responsive learning environments capable of supporting learners facing conflict, displacement, and protracted adversity (Kirk & Winthrop, 2017; UNESCO, 2018).



Policy Recommendations for Ethiopia Ministries of Education – Aligned with Ethiopia’s Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP)

To support the scale-up of the Tuseme model in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) communities, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and partners should align implementation with the ESDP’s strategic priorities as follows:



Policy Brief Matrix – Aligned with Ethiopia’s Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP)

A. Mapping Tuseme Recommendations to ESDP Pillars and Indicative Indicators

Recommendation	Relevant ESDP Pillar(s)	Indicative ESDP Indicators / Focus Areas
Institutionalize Tuseme Clubs nationally	Pillar 1: Equity, Access, and Participation Pillar 4: System Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender parity and participation of girls in schools Availability of gender-responsive school programs Institutionalization of non-formal and co-curricular initiatives
Expand advocacy and awareness on girls’ leadership and voice	Pillar 2: Quality and Relevance Pillar 1: Equity and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender-responsive pedagogy and school culture Community engagement in education Reduction of harmful gender norms affecting participation
Reduce economic barriers to girls’ participation	Pillar 1: Access, Retention, and Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retention and completion rates of vulnerable learners Support mechanisms for disadvantaged and displaced students Transition rates for girls in fragile contexts
Strengthen coordination and stakeholder capacity	Pillar 4: System Strengthening and Governance Pillar 5: Partnerships and Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional school leadership and management structures Coordination mechanisms with NGOs and CSOs Capacity development of teachers and school committees

ESDP - Ethiopia’s Education Sector Development Plan; CSOs - Civil Society Organizations; NGOs- Non-Governmental Organizations

B. Policy Action Matrix: Scaling Tuseme in Refugee and IDP Contexts

Key Actors	Priority Actions	Expected Outcomes (ESDP-Aligned)
Ministry of Education (MoE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formally recognize Tuseme Clubs within national education policy Integrate Tuseme into gender and equity strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable, nationally recognized girls’ empowerment model Improved gender equity in displacement-affected schools
Regional Education Bureaus (REBs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support rollout of Tuseme in refugee- and IDP-hosting schools Monitor implementation and outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved access and participation for displaced girls Consistent program quality across regions
School Leadership & Management Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate time and space for Tuseme activities Support teacher facilitators and student leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger school-level ownership Improved student voice, leadership, and engagement
Teachers / Tuseme Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate regular club sessions Mentor girls in leadership, advocacy, and life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced psychosocial well-being and confidence of girl Improved retention and participation
Parents & Community Structures (PTAs, Elders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in awareness sessions Support girls’ participation and reduce domestic burdens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased parental engagement Reduced resistance to girls’ leadership and education
NGOs & CSOs (e.g., FAWE, UAF-Africa)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide technical support, training, and advocacy Mobilize resources and link Tuseme to livelihoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened partnerships Improved sustainability beyond donor cycles
Development Partners / Donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide flexible, multi-year funding Align support with ESDP priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced program fragmentation Long-term impact in fragile and displacement contexts

ESDP - Ethiopia’s Education Sector Development Plan; CSOs - Civil Society Organizations; FAWE – Forum for African Women Educationalists; IDP – Internally Displaced Persons; NGOs- Non-Governmental Organizations; PTA- Parent Teachers Association; UAF-Africa - Urgent Action Fund–Africa

Next Steps in the Research

The next steps in the research will comprise

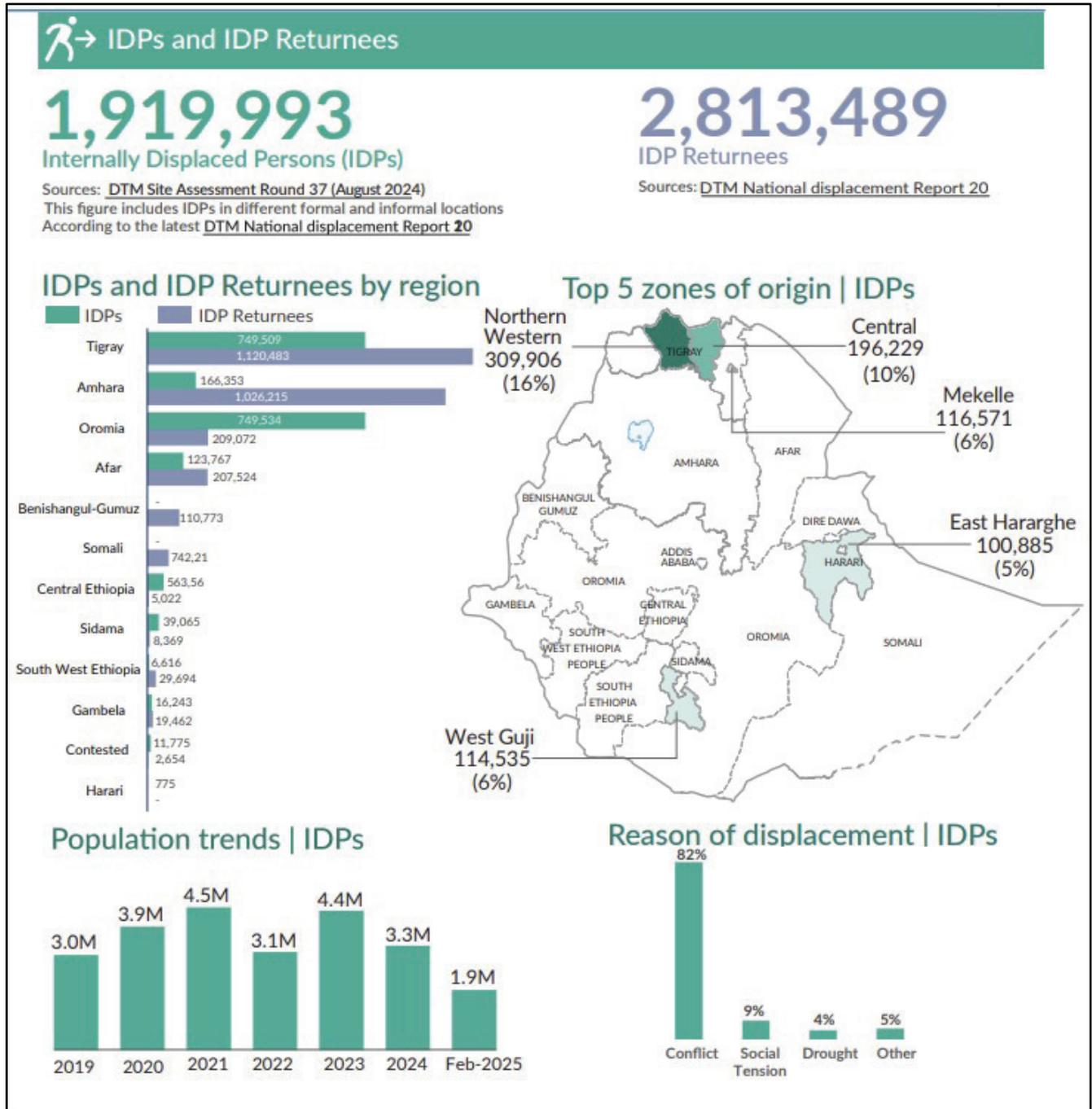
- 1) development of a Tuseme Adapted Model that can be implemented in refugee and IDP settings
- 2) Deployment of the adapted Tuseme model in target refugee and IDP schools with ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities
- 3) Evaluation of validity of findings and impact of the Adapted Tuseme Model and
- 4) Learning and dissemination of findings.



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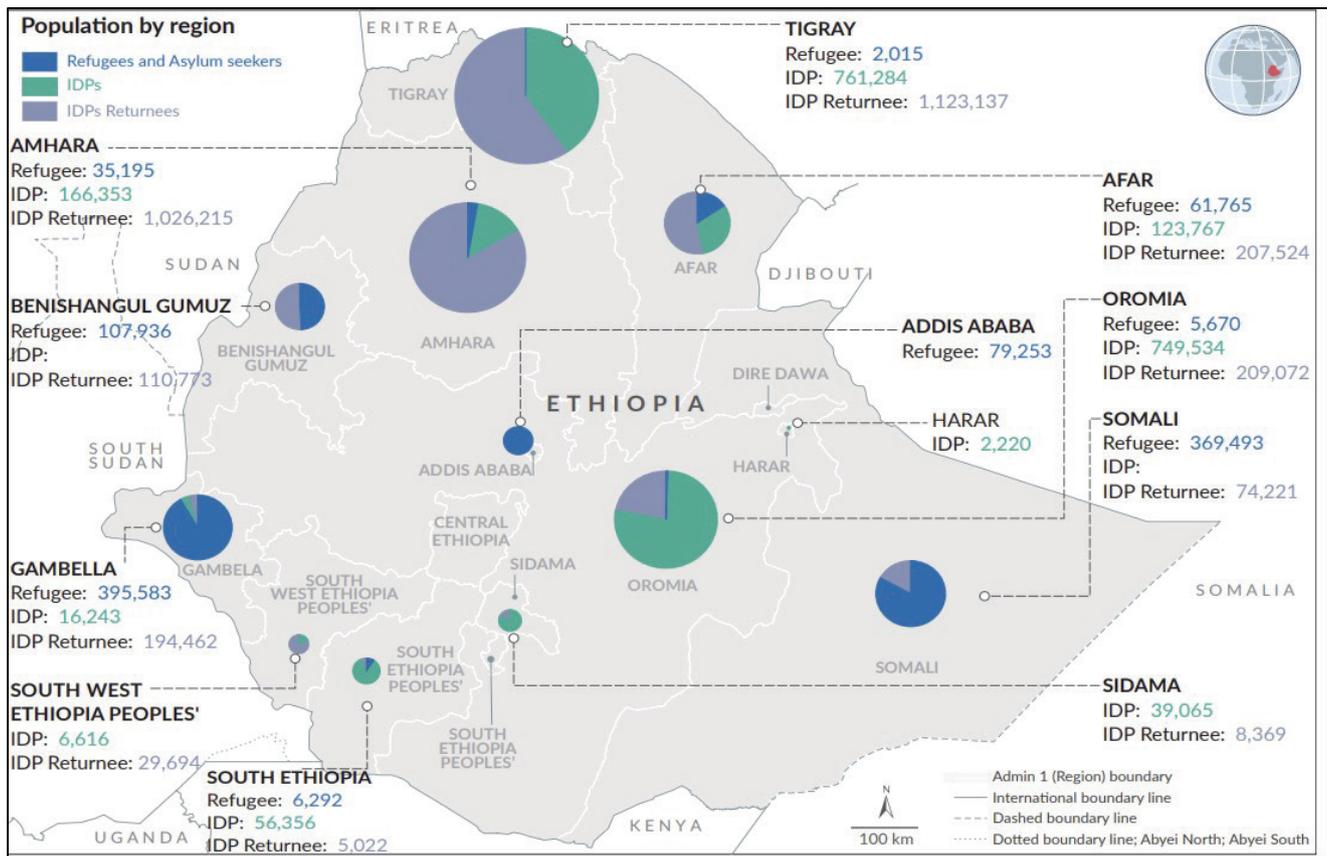
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Figure 1: Population of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Ethiopia as of February 2025



Source: UNHCR (2025). *Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons as of February 28, 2025*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Figure 2: Population of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ethiopia by region in 2025



Source: UNHCR (2025). Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons as of February 28, 2025. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).



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