

# Sustainable energy initiatives in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

## Summary

- In response to a request from UNHCR, the GPA Secretariat has compiled energy-related initiatives in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe from its network of partners.
- A selection of energy projects and activities in the three countries is summarised in this briefing note. At present, few are directly related to displacement-affected communities.
- Some initiatives explicitly include energy for refugee communities (such as the ZRHCP in Zambia) or focus on energy access for remote or underserved communities. These could be extended or replicated in displacement settings (such as ASCENT in Malawi and Zambia, Multifunctional Clean Energy Centres in Zimbabwe).
- As well as projects aiming to achieve universal access to energy for households, activities which focus on infrastructure electrification, productive livelihoods, and solar water pumping for agriculture could align with both national objectives as well as supporting displacement-affected communities.

## National overviews

### Malawi

- Electricity access: 16%
- Clean cooking: 2%
- Refugees and asylum seekers: 68,895 (30 Apr 2026)

### Zambia

- Electricity access: 51%
- Clean cooking: 9%
- Persons of concern: 113,054 (30 Sep 2025)

### Zimbabwe

- Electricity access: 62%
- Clean cooking: 31%
- Population of concern: 22,212 (28 Feb 2026)

## Data sources and acknowledgements

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Energy access rates are from the [World Bank Open Data](#) and displaced population figures are from the [UNHCR Operational Data Portal](#).

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## Malawi

In Dzaleka Refugee Camp, [UNHCR](#) supported the installation of a pellet-making machine that turns dry organic waste into clean cooking fuel. It has produced pellets for 1,400 households, reduced dependence on firewood and charcoal, and opened a potential livelihoods opportunity.

[IOM](#) provided 530 energy-efficient cookstoves to households relocated after repeated cyclone-related displacement, including Cyclone Freddy. It also installed and handed over the Champhanda solar mini-grid, providing clean electricity to 30 households for a monthly fee of MWK 1,000 (USD 0.58) for maintenance through a community-managed village energy committee.

The [MECS Programme](#) piloted solar electric cooking in Dzaleka refugee camp for 61 households and six institutional settings from 2022-24. It found that the cookers were well-received by households but many were not operational after 18 months, whilst most cookers in institutional settings remained in constant use.

Malawi is included in the World Bank's [Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Transformation \(ASCENT\) Program in Eastern and Southern Africa](#), totalling \$250 million in the country to achieve universal electrification by 2030 under Mission 300. [The project](#) aims to bring electricity to 4 million people, electrify 1,280 schools and health facilities, and provide modern clean cooking solutions to 650,000 people.

Between 2022-2026, GIZ and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) implemented a [solar home system and improved cookstove project](#) in four countries. As part of this, EUR 4.9 million was invested in Malawi and the project is projected to have provided energy access for up to 224,000 people. It used demand-side subsidies and results-based financing to reduce the prices of energy products for those classified as "poorer" and "poorest" in the Malawi Social Registry and was implemented in seven rural districts (Balaka, Dedza, Dowa, Kasungu, Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, and Salima).

[Wala](#) is a social enterprise which provides solar-powered technologies for irrigation and agriculture. It was [supported through the Efficiency for Access Research and Development Fund](#), managed by Energy Saving Trust, to test new business models for community ownership. Over 150 solar water pumps were sold with 3,000 low-income farmers able to access solar irrigation on credit, 56% of whom were women, and increased income by around \$250.

[SolarAid](#) implemented the [Light a Village](#) pilot which provided 100% electrification of Kasakula, Ntchisi District, reaching 8,813 households using solar home systems through an energy-as-a-service model. Households pay a monthly fee whilst solar system providers are responsible for maintaining the equipment which can help to promote long-term energy access. A webinar on the project is [available here](#).

## Zambia

The [Zambia Refugee and Host Communities Project](#) (ZRHCP) was launched in 2025 by the Government of the Republic of Zambia, through the Ministry of Home Affairs and

## About the GPA

The Global Platform for Action (GPA) on Sustainable Energy in Displacement Settings is a global initiative aiming to ensure SDG 7—access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all—is inclusive of displacement and fragile contexts.

The GPA Secretariat convenes a global network of over 100 partners working collectively toward this shared objective. It is financially supported by the IKEA Foundation and the European Union's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), and receives in-kind support from NORCAP and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) through the Transforming Energy Access (TEA) platform.

The GPA is advised by a group of 14 global humanitarian and development partners, including UNHCR, IOM, WFP, FAO, UNDP, UNEP-CCC, Mercy Corps, Practical Action, SNV, GIZ, NORCAP, MECS, SEforALL, and the Clean Cooking Alliance.

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Internal Security (MoHAIS), and was developed jointly by the Government and the World Bank with technical support from UNHCR. It includes energy-related provisions for schools, households, and businesses in Meheba refugee camp.

Under the ZRHCP, the electrification of communities component for Meheba (\$3 million, implemented through the Rural Electrification Agency) will expand the grid to the camp. It will connect public facilities, businesses, and households in at least six settlements (three in the refugee settlement and three in the surrounding communities, identified through community consultations). People provided with access to electricity (inclusive of electricity for public infrastructure) is one of the project development objective indicators.

A project between UNHCR and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa equipped six schools and four rural health centres with off-grid solar power in Mayukwayukwa (which also received 100 solar streetlights) and Mantapala settlements. It aimed to improve service delivery for both refugees and host communities, as well as aligning with Zambia's national development goals.

Zambia is included in the World Bank's ASCENT project, totalling \$200 million in the country to achieve universal electrification by 2030 under Mission 300. It aims to expand electricity access, especially in remote and underserved areas, through on- and off-grid electrification, productive uses of energy, and financing mechanisms.

UNEP-CCC has been supporting the Government of Zambia to revise its Nationally Determined Contribution Implementation Framework and Investment Plan. This includes the target of universal energy access, scaling up energy generation capacity, and supporting resilient agriculture.

With funding from the Global Fund, UNDP is working with the Ministry of Health to install solar power systems at over 422 health facilities and at three medical warehouses based on a smart health systems approach. This includes performance-based payments for operations and maintenance, smart sensors to monitor health facility operations, and internet connectivity.

In 2023, the Ministry of Energy affirmed its commitment to support the development of the Solar Electric Cooking Partnership (SOLCO), an international multi-stakeholder initiative which aims to transition displaced and host community families from biomass-based cooking methods to solar-powered electric cooking.

SEforALL works with partners to deliver a comprehensive country programme aligned with Zambia's national energy and development priorities. The programme has a memorandum of understanding with the Rural Electrification Authority, signed in September 2025. It helps to attract private sector investment and developers, accelerate productive uses of energy in rural communities, strengthen institutional capacity for planning and coordination, and develop innovative financing models.

## Zimbabwe

Two NORCAP energy experts are deployed to UN-Habitat and support the implementation of the Harare Sustainable City Initiative, funded by the Government of Sweden, which focuses on improving living conditions for urban and peri-urban poor communities. A key component is the establishment of Multifunctional Clean Energy Centres (MCECs), which are community-based renewable energy hubs powered primarily by solar photovoltaic systems and battery energy storage. The MCECs support productive economic activities for livelihoods and essential community services, especially for women and youth, including through ICT centres, water kiosks, phone and battery charging services, salons and barber shops, welding workshops, solar installation and training services, electronics repair, solar lantern distribution, carpentry workshops, and the promotion of e-cooking devices.

With funding from the Global Fund, UNDP is working with the government to install solar power systems at 186 health facilities and at two medical warehouses.

Members of GOGLA's Agri-Energy Coalition (organisations focusing on energy, water, agriculture, nutrition, climate, and finance) are contributing to an event on the water-energy-land nexus expected to be hosted in Zimbabwe in August/September 2026. The event is under the RE4Agri project which aims to support energy for smallholder farmers and receives funding from the EU via LEAP Energy for Africa-Europe energy cooperation.