

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

13 March 2018
English
Original: English and French

Standing Committee
71th meeting

Update of UNHCR's operations in Africa

A. Situational context

In 2017, the Africa region continued to host the largest number of persons of concern to UNHCR. By the end of 2016, there were an estimated 19.6 million forcibly displaced and stateless individuals, including 5.1 million refugees and 11.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). In the course of 2017, numbers continued to grow, mainly triggered by the conflict in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an upsurge in violence in the Central African Republic, as well as conflict and food insecurity in Somalia and South Sudan.

The number of refugees in the region is estimated to have increased by at least half a million in the first semester of 2017. The scale of organized or spontaneous repatriation movements which began or continued in 2017, mainly to Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan, did not match the scale of new displacement across borders.

Food insecurity is a major concern throughout the region, which continues to result in displacement and increases the level of vulnerability of refugee populations. With respect to nutrition, of the 94 refugee sites surveyed in Africa, 20 per cent had a prevalence of global acute malnutrition above emergency thresholds. Moreover, a prevalence of stunting above the critical threshold was reported in 31 per cent of the sites, as was anaemia in 52 per cent of sites.

Central Africa and the Great Lakes

Over 426,000 Burundians have sought refuge in the United Republic of Tanzania (253,000), Rwanda (89,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (44,000) and Uganda (40,000). Conditions for large-scale, sustainable return are not yet in place, and UNHCR does not promote repatriation in this context. Burundian refugees remain in need of international protection, and informal surveys further indicate that the majority do not plan on returning at this time. However, UNHCR will continue to assist refugees who wish to return voluntarily.

In the Central African Republic, violent clashes among armed groups and intercommunal tensions have increased sharply since May 2017, with conflict spreading to parts of the country previously unaffected. By the end of 2017, forced displacement reached new levels, with the number of refugees rising to 546,000 and the number of IDPs to 600,000. Of these, some 180,000 were newly displaced in 2017. Nearly one family out of four have now been forced from their homes, and these trends are expected to continue.

As of the end of 2017, the Democratic Republic of Congo was home to 4.4 million IDPs, of whom 1.9 million, or 44 per cent, have been displaced since January 2017, mainly by armed conflict and attacks. Uganda and Zambia registered some 47,000 and 17,000 new arrivals respectively in 2017. The continuing trend of new arrivals in January 2018 suggests that the situation will remain critical in the course of the year. Contingency plans have been established for the possible arrival of up to 95,000 refugees due to election-related violence

– presidential elections are scheduled for December 2018 – and the ongoing conflict in various regions of the country, notably in the Kasai region and Tanganyika and South Kivu provinces, where a system-wide level-3 emergency was declared in October 2017.

East Africa, including the Horn of Africa

The security situation in Somalia remains precarious, with severe drought continuing mainly in the southern and central regions, including in areas of return. Since November 2016, when drought and food insecurity worsened, some 966,000 people have been displaced by their effects. However, voluntary repatriation to Somalia is ongoing despite these challenges and continued insecurity.

A political solution to the South Sudan crisis is urgently needed. The security situation in the country remains volatile despite the agreement reached between the Government and opposition leaders on a cessation of hostilities in December 2017. The conflict has now displaced over one third of South Sudan's estimated 12 million citizens, with nearly 2 million IDPs and some 2.4 million fleeing into neighbouring countries. This reflects an increase of some 1 million refugees in 2017. With the current levels of violence and displacement trends expected to continue in 2018, the number of South Sudanese refugees could rise to 3.1 million.

Southern Africa

The situation in Southern Africa continues to be relatively stable, and efforts to achieve durable solutions are ongoing, in particular local integration in Zambia and voluntary repatriation across the subregion. Progress has been made with respect to the return of approximately 3,000 Mozambican refugees from Malawi, which was facilitated by UNHCR in the framework of a tripartite agreement. Preparations are also being made to support the voluntary repatriation of Zimbabwean refugees who have expressed their intention to return, in particular those residing in Botswana.

West Africa

Five years into the crisis in north-eastern Nigeria, 218,000 Nigerian refugees are living either in camps or with host communities in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The conflict has also resulted in the internal displacement of more than 2.4 million people inside Nigeria but also in Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

In the course of 2017, UNHCR and National Immigration Service of Nigeria estimated that over 100,000 mainly unregistered refugees returned from Cameroon, Chad and Niger. While returns were spontaneous in most cases, there were also reports of forced returns despite advocacy efforts and the commitments made in the framework of tripartite agreements. In March 2017, the Governments of Nigeria and Cameroon signed a tripartite agreement with UNHCR on the voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees. Such agreements are expected to be signed with the Governments of Chad and Niger in 2018.

Of particular concern in Mali is the volatile security situation in the northern and central parts of the country, as well as insecurity in border areas, which has resulted in the establishment of additional security measures in neighbouring countries to safeguard national security. Nevertheless, UNHCR is enhancing efforts to ensure that spontaneous returns are sustainable. In 2018, while new forced displacement is foreseen, return movements may continue to areas where the security situation has stabilized.

B. Achieving the global strategic priorities

(i) Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions

Comprehensive solutions

The comprehensive solutions strategy for the Rwandan refugee situation came to a formal end in December 2017, as States had agreed upon during a ministerial conference in September 2016 in Geneva. In 2017, approximately 19,000 Rwandans repatriated mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, with some 250,000 Rwandan refugees and former refugees who remain outside the country, UNHCR will continue to engage bilaterally with host countries to support solutions, particularly voluntary repatriation and local integration.

Voluntary repatriation

Despite ongoing challenges related to drought, food insecurity, conflict and lack of services in Somalia, some 111,000 Somali refugees have returned home, mainly from Kenya (75,000), Yemen (35,000) and Djibouti (600) from December 2014 to January 2018. In the course of 2018, UNHCR aims to work with countries hosting large numbers of Somali refugees to ensure that they can return voluntarily based on a free and informed decision.

UNHCR assisted with the repatriation of some 29,000 Ivoirian refugees since 2015. In 2017, some 8,200 have returned, and a further 5,000 are expected to repatriate from Liberia in 2018. In Cameroon, the voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees who are from areas of the north-eastern State of Adamawa will begin in February 2018 under the framework of the tripartite agreement.

If the trend of spontaneous returns continues, some 72,000 refugees from the Central African Republic are expected to repatriate in 2018. In the Central African Republic, UNHCR facilitated the return of some 1,500 Sudanese refugees in December 2017 and January 2018. In Sudan, nearly 1,000 Chadians were assisted in their return. In 2018, UNHCR will prepare operational plans to further support the voluntary repatriation of Chadians in the framework of the tripartite agreement signed by the Governments of Chad, Sudan and UNHCR in mid-2017. The Republic of Congo is organizing a return movement of 600 refugees from the Central African Republic while continuing to work towards enabling the eventual return of Rwandans.

Since the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees convened a meeting in August 2017, UNHCR has assisted some 13,000 Burundians who expressed their intention to return home from the United Republic of Tanzania. These efforts will continue in 2018. In 2017, Burundian refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were also supported in their voluntary return, and UNHCR will consider extending similar assistance to refugees in Rwanda while keeping in mind that the situation in Burundi remains fragile. A number of refugees have returned spontaneously.

Local integration

In December 2017, Guinea-Bissau granted citizenship to refugees living in a protracted situation in the country. An estimated 7,000 refugees will benefit from this durable solution.

Resettlement

In 2017, with fewer resettlement places available globally, UNHCR submitted for resettlement the cases of 22,000 refugees in Africa, representing a 51 per cent decrease

compared to 2016. Approximately 16,000 refugees were resettled from the region, including more than 7,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who were living in host countries, mainly in the Great Lakes subregion. Based on resettlement quotas currently confirmed, UNHCR aims to submit the cases of approximately 25,000 vulnerable refugees for resettlement in 2018.

(ii) Promoting a favourable protection environment

The Africa region has taken important steps towards the implementation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Zambia are participating in the implementation of the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF). With the support of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which played an important convening role during the development of the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia, the CRRF is being applied in the context of the regional response to the situation of Somali refugees.

IGAD Member States in the region continue to demonstrate strong support for the New York Declaration and the application of the CRRF, with Malawi and Rwanda expressing interest in the application of the framework and initiating discussions with UNHCR in this regard. In the course of 2018, UNHCR will provide assistance to countries rolling out the CRRF, in collaboration with the African Union and relevant regional bodies and economic communities.

The application of the “new way of working” commitment is bringing tangible results, including through the implementation of the CRRF. In Uganda, the Government remains steadfast in its commitment to an open door policy, freedom of movement and the accommodation of refugees in settlements. In Ethiopia, the Government has taken legislative steps towards universal birth registration and the provision of access to civil documentation for refugees. In Djibouti, the Government adopted a new refugee law that aims to enhance refugee access to education, employment and eventual naturalization. In December 2017, IGAD Member States convened a regional conference on refugee education in Djibouti and adopted a declaration and action plan to advance access to education for refugees.

Mixed movements

In 2017, the number of arrivals in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea stood at some 172,300. Many were nationals from Côte d’Ivoire, Eritrea, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, and Nigeria.

Statelessness

Building on the progress of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) on the reduction of statelessness, ECOWAS and ICGLR Member States committed to further enhancing their work in this regard through the implementation of their regional plans of action (i.e. the Banjul Plan of Action and the IGCLR Plan of Action respectively) in 2018 and beyond.

In September 2017, a meeting of experts representing African Union Member States was convened in Mauritius to discuss and review the draft Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Specific Aspects on the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa, the adoption of which would constitute an important milestone.

C. Financial information

The comprehensive needs budget for Africa in 2018, which was approved by the Executive Committee at its annual plenary session in October 2017, amounted to \$2.6 billion. By January 2018, the budget increased by \$162.7 million, mainly due to supplementary budgets established in response to the situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.

According to preliminary data collected on activities undertaken in 2017, most of these were related to protection, assistance and emergency response, accounting for the greater part of UNHCR's expenditure in the region. Provisional data also shows that expenditure which went towards the facilitation of voluntary repatriation, the provision of support to Governments in implementing naturalization processes and resettlement processing, among other activities related to durable solutions, as well as education, was limited. In 2018, UNHCR will continue to prioritize life-saving activities, particularly in emergency situations, over more sustainable activities due to funding constraints.
