



Transitional Safety Net for Central African Refugees

1 Overview

- ➦ Cameroon is host to 252,344 refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) in the eastern part of the country (East, Adamawa and North regions).¹
- ➦ While refugees in Cameroon enjoy many of their fundamental rights, such as the right to work and the right to education and healthcare, the majority of CAR refugees nevertheless live in extreme poverty in the least developed regions of the country. In reality, refugees struggle to meet their most basic daily needs, such as food, water, shelter or healthcare, and suffer from high levels of chronic malnutrition. Results from vulnerability analyses reveal alarming levels of extreme poverty amongst the refugee population, showing that over 80% are considered 'extremely vulnerable' and in need of assistance, yet current levels of aid fall well below this level.²

UNHCR'S TRANSITIONAL SAFETY NET FOR CAR REFUGEES IN CAMEROON (2018-20):

- Provides basic needs assistance through predictable monthly cash transfers over two years;
- Supports refugees' own pathways to self-reliance and graduation from assistance through livelihoods training and cash grants for income generation;
- Provides immediate cash support to refugee new arrivals;
- Provides additional support for highly vulnerable protection cases;
- Links refugees into national social protection systems;
- Is an example of the humanitarian-development nexus in the implementation and provision of predictable assistance.

¹ UNHCR Factsheet for Cameroon, September 2018.

² American University of Beirut (AUB), [Analysis and Refinement of Targeting Mechanisms for Food and Multipurpose Cash Assistance to Central African Republic Refugees in Cameroon](#), Final Report, 23rd April 2018.



- ③ Without covering the basic needs of CAR refugees and supporting them to move beyond daily survival, refugees are unable to develop meaningful livelihoods, reduce their dependency on aid and become self-sufficient. In this context, transitioning from humanitarian assistance delivered by international humanitarian actors to government and development actor-led systems is highly challenging, as families living below the extreme poverty line will likely use any assistance they receive to meet their immediate needs rather than being able to develop longer-term income-generating activities.
- ③ In September 2018, CAR refugees in the East region received their first monthly cash assistance payments as beneficiaries of UNHCR's new Transitional Safety Net. This innovative project is designed to provide continuous and predictable support to selected CAR refugees over a two-year period, contributing to meeting their basic needs as well as enabling them to start income-generating activities and reduce their dependence on external aid. UNHCR cash assistance is provided in complementarity to WFP's food assistance and in alignment with the national Social Safety Net Project.
- ③ The necessary solution is multi-faceted and UNHCR is working not only to provide assistance to refugees but also to improve their access to land and employment opportunities, to ensure better access to health and education, and to advocate for and monitor refugee inclusion into national social protection systems, among other initiatives. The Transitional Safety Net project, launched in 2018, is part of this comprehensive solution.

2 Vulnerability and needs analysis

- ➔ **High levels of poverty and vulnerability in a protracted and forgotten refugee crisis:** more than 98% of CAR refugees are under the national poverty line and struggle to meet their basic needs in terms of food, non-food items and the financial costs related to health, education and shelter. Using the Refugee Influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment (REVA³), an index that combines food insecurity and poverty, evidence shows that 87% of CAR refugees (over 200,000) are considered highly vulnerable.⁴ High rates of chronic malnutrition have been observed amongst the 70% of refugees living out of camp, as compared to the 30% living in the camps.

The table below summarises the main findings of the joint UNHCR/WFP vulnerability analysis, showing the number of refugees living below different poverty lines.

This is based on observed expenditure, i.e. the % of refugees who spend less than this amount, per person, on a monthly basis (percentage applied to November 2018 statistics).

- ➔ **New refugee arrivals:** due to continuing instability in CAR, approximately 9,000 new refugees are expected to arrive in Cameroon in 2019.⁹
- ➔ **Chronically underfunded humanitarian response:** of the 220,000 refugees considered highly vulnerable, plus the continuing new arrivals, UNHCR estimates that at least 80,000 are not receiving the regular assistance necessary to support their basic needs and livelihoods. In the current response, only 40% of CAR refugees receive monthly food rations from WFP. In addition, approximately 30% of refugees receive monthly

Poverty Line	Value in Central African CFA Franc (XAF)	Value in US\$	% of refugees below the poverty line ⁵	Number of refugees below the poverty line
National poverty line	27,832 XAF	52.67 US\$	98.5%	248,559
National extreme poverty line ⁶	22,219 XAF	42.05 US\$	97.7%	246,540
Minimum expenditure basket ⁷	11,733 XAF	22.15 US\$	91.6%	231,147
WFP Minimum Food Basket ⁸	8,800 XAF	16.66 US\$	85.6%	216,006
REVA classification	% classified as highly vulnerable		87.4%	220,549
Total number of refugees				252,344

³ The Refugee Influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment (REVA) is a vulnerability classification, which includes a food component (based on the food consumption score) and an economic vulnerability component (based on per capita expenditure, excluding value of assistance). Indicated here are those considered 'highly vulnerable' according to this classification.

⁴ American University of Beirut (AUB), *Analysis and Refinement of Targeting Mechanisms for Food and Multipurpose Cash Assistance to Central African Republic Refugees in Cameroon*, Final Report, 23rd April 2018.

⁵ This % excludes the current contribution of WFP's food assistance to meeting basic needs, i.e. it indicates the % of the population living below the respective poverty lines in a simulated situation in which no food assistance were to be received.

⁶ This is based on the latest national poverty lines, which date back to 2007 (estimated at 22,500 XAF and 17,962 XAF respectively). Using published annual inflation rates from 2008-2015 (Institut National de Statistiques) AUB adjusted these amounts to 2015 currency.

⁷ This survival MEB is based on observed expenditure by CAR refugees who are just above the food poverty line. The average food expenditure of these refugees is 75% of their total expenditure, resulting in a survival MEB of 11,733 XAF / person / month. However, as this MEB is based on observed expenditure rather than an assessment of needs, it should be used with caution as current expenditure levels are likely insufficient to meet basic needs, contributing to high levels of malnutrition and low levels of access to services.

⁸ The cost of the Minimum Food Basket was set by WFP Cameroon in 2015, based on 2,100 kcal / person / day. The national poverty lines are however based on a food basket of 2,900 kcal / person / day (AUB 2018).

⁹ 41,594 CAR refugees arrived in Cameroon before 2014; 117,958 in 2014; 30,005 in 2015; 22,290 in 2016 and 19,312 in 2017. New arrivals continued throughout 2018 and will likely continue in 2019.



multipurpose cash transfers from UNHCR via the Transitional Safety Net. However, this is only operational in two geographical areas, leaving significant gaps in all other areas. Inclusion of refugees in the national safety net system will begin in 2019 with support from the World Bank, initially on a relatively small-scale. While UNHCR plans to scale-up the cash response to over 10,000 refugee households in 2019 (and WFP and other actors continue to provide some other forms of assistance, such as Food for Assets projects), there are still huge gaps in terms of meeting basic needs due to chronic underfunding.

- ③ **High levels of poverty and underdevelopment in refugee-hosting areas:** current assistance to refugees falls well below meeting identified needs. At the same time, there are also high levels of extreme and chronic structural poverty amongst the host population in refugee-hosting areas. While it is understood that refugee status itself creates certain barriers to socio-economic inclusion, the differentiated levels of social assistance for refugees and Cameroonian nationals can create

tension, negatively impact on social cohesion and harden attitudes towards refugees.

- ③ **Unpredictability of current assistance approaches negatively affect refugees' self-reliance:** poor coverage of refugees' basic needs and the unpredictable way in which much humanitarian assistance is currently delivered hinders refugees' own capacity to become self-reliant and invest in appropriate and dignified income-generating activities. Furthermore, there are concerns that, if not properly communicated and managed with a clear exit strategy, the targeting of assistance could create negative incentives for participation in livelihoods activities and perpetuate aid dependency.

3 UNHCR's overall strategy and response

➔ **Humanitarian-development nexus in a protracted crisis:** many CAR refugees in Cameroon have been displaced since 2003 – for nearly 15 years. In view of the limited prospects for return to CAR and the gradual drying up of funding for humanitarian assistance, UNHCR and partners have developed a [Multi-Year Multi-Partner Strategy \(MYMP\) for Cameroon](#) covering the period from 2018 to 2020. The MYMP outlines how UNHCR's strategic partnerships with development actors, specifically the World Bank, can be leveraged to achieve the integration of refugees into existing socio-economic structures while supporting the building of better services for both nationals and refugees. UNHCR has also developed a Livelihoods Strategy for refugees in Cameroon (2018). In this context of transition, while UNHCR and partners continue to provide humanitarian assistance and protection, they are simultaneously working to achieve longer-term development objectives and the inclusion of refugees in national systems.

➔ **UNHCR / WFP collaboration:** in line with the [UNHCR/WFP Joint Principles for Targeting Assistance to Meet Food and Other Basic Needs to Persons of Concern](#), the recent [Cash Addendum](#) and other corporate initiatives¹⁰ between UNHCR and WFP, both agencies have sought coherence and cost-efficiency in their responses and have thus developed a joint 'food and basic needs approach.' Through a shared understanding of food insecurity and socio-economic vulnerability the aim has been to provide a package of assistance that contributes to meeting both food and other non-food needs of the most vulnerable, while working within a context of chronic underfunding for assistance:

- **UNHCR**, while ensuring the protection of refugees, provides improved access to health, education and social services, and delivers monthly cash transfers through the Transitional Safety Net. The Transitional Safety Net contributes to meeting basic needs and supporting livelihoods, in complementarity to WFP's food assistance and in alignment with the national Social Safety Net Project.

- **WFP** provides food assistance in the form of monthly food distributions, increasingly using the cash-based transfer modality, where market conditions permit. WFP also provides nutrition support to both refugees and the host population.

4 Role of the Transitional Safety Net

- ➔ **Multipurpose cash for basic needs:** UNHCR's cash assistance takes the form of regular monthly payments via mobile money. These can be cashed out at local mobile money vendors, providing the refugees with money that they can spend in local markets on food, kitchen items, clothes, shoes, soap, toiletries and sanitary items, or any other essential goods.
- ➔ **Supporting livelihoods:** once a year, families also receive a larger cash grant to invest in livelihoods activities of their choice (for example: buying seeds, tools and small livestock or starting a small business). Financial training and support are also provided to start income-generating activities.
- ➔ **Protection and referral to social services:** the delivery of cash assistance provides an ongoing connection between refugees and UNHCR's community-based protection staff and partners. When families or individuals are identified as having specific vulnerabilities, referrals are made to appropriate social services and additional support is given, including topping-up cash assistance for specific protection cases.
- ➔ **Alignment with national social protection:** refugees are eligible for inclusion in the national system from 2019 (with support from the World Bank [IDA18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities](#)). At present, coverage of the government's Social Safety Net remains low and the project has not fully scaled-up. UNHCR's Transitional Safety Net approach is complementary:

¹⁰ Four joint corporate initiatives complement the 2011 MoU between UNHCR and WFP: Self-Reliance Strategy (Sep 2016), Cash Addendum (May 2017), Targeting Principles and Guidance (April 2018) and Data-Sharing Addendum (October 2018).

aligning with the national system through providing the same transfer value, duration and using a similar targeting approach.¹¹ The Transitional Safety Net thereby increases coverage of the Government system in parallel to a phased approach to refugee inclusion. This harmonised approach ensures that families supported by UNHCR receive the same amount of assistance as the refugees and Cameroonians supported through the national social safety net. Further, geographic coverage of refugees by the Transitional Safety Net will be aligned where possible to the geographical coverage by the World Bank IDA 18 programmes. This is perceived as fair by local authorities, refugees and Cameroonians alike, thereby reducing tension between refugees and the local host population, many of whom also live in extreme poverty.

➔ **UNHCR / WFP joint approach and transfer values:** both agencies have a joint targeting approach for assistance, including vulnerability analysis and selection criteria. UNHCR's Transitional Safety Net, in line with the national social safety net, provides basic needs cash assistance of 10,000 XAF / family / month. WFP food assistance, set currently at 70% of the minimum food basket,¹² has a monetary value that is higher than that of UNHCR's cash transfers. Therefore, on account of the greater value of WFP assistance, the most vulnerable refugees are prioritized for WFP's food assistance (approximately 40% of the population) while UNHCR's cash assistance targets the next level of vulnerable refugees (30% of the population) in selected geographic areas. UNHCR is custodian of all refugee registration data and produces updated assistance lists for both agencies on a monthly basis, in this complementary and joint approach.

➔ **Flexibility for new arrivals and future crises:** UNHCR has integrated a 'crisis modifier' into the Transitional Safety Net, so as to respond to the needs of new arrivals into Cameroon, as well as potential future crises. This necessitates a contingency budget for up to 2,571 households and a system of pre-identified indicators in order to trigger a scale-up of the response.

This crisis-modifier prepares for two different scenarios:

- In the event of **new refugee arrivals**, cash assistance is provided to families for a duration of 12 months (horizontal scale-up), before their situation is assessed via the standard targeting mechanism of the programme;
- In the event of **increasing needs for existing families** (due for example to a failed harvest or price hikes) transfer amounts can be increased for existing beneficiaries for a limited amount of time (vertical scale-up). UNHCR is working with WFP on potential seasonal responses.

The experience of the Transitional Safety Net therefore informs joint government-international actor efforts to integrate shock-responsive mechanisms into the national social safety net, enabling the scaling-up (and down) of assistance in response to natural disasters, acute seasonal vulnerability and/or price hikes, as well as forced displacement.

➔ **Geographical focus and expanding coverage in 2019:** the Transitional Safety Net has been implemented in two areas in 2018. The first round of payments in Kette commune (East region) reached 500 households in September and a further 1,365 households have received their cash assistance in Touboro commune (North region). The project is rapidly scaling-up to other areas, with the aim of reaching 6,000 CAR refugee households (approximately 21,000 refugees) in 2019.

➔ **Common Cash Facility:** UNHCR has negotiated highly competitive transfer fees (0.3%) with the financial service provider that delivers mobile money to CAR refugees. UNHCR has developed this 'Common Cash Facility' as an open platform for others: the terms of the contract and the delivery mechanism are available for the benefit of all interested humanitarian and development actors. UNHCR's role is to facilitate and coordinate a multi-partner approach through this delivery mechanism. Other organisations still maintain total control of their cash assistance and no funds pass through UNHCR's financial management systems.

¹¹ For the unconditional cash transfer component of the National Social Safety Net Project, beneficiaries receive a total of 360,000 XAF over a period of two years: monthly consumption support of 10,000 XAF / household to cover basic needs and one transfer of 80,000 each year to support livelihoods investments (5 x 20,000 + 1 x 80,000 = 180,000 each year, for an estimated household size of 5 individuals).

¹² 100% of the WFP food ration is 8,800 XAF / person / month and 70% of the WFP food ration is 6,160 XAF. WFP rations are calculated on an individual basis whereas UNHCR and the national Social Safety Net provide a household ration. UNHCR data shows the average household size to be 3.5.



- ➔ **Exit strategy for humanitarian assistance:** the comprehensive approach of the Transitional Safety Net, in close coordination with other actors (Government, WFP, World Bank and NGOs), sets out an exit strategy for the current model of humanitarian assistance and for the Transitional Safety Net itself. In the context of this protracted crisis, where shocks are likely to recur in the future, the Transitional Safety Net project is designed as a transitional measure within the humanitarian-development nexus to accompany the shift from a humanitarian approach to a shock-responsive nationally-owned safety net approach. The exit strategy of the Transitional Safety Net works at numerous levels: from the perspective of the refugees themselves to that of the donors funding assistance.

The exit strategy has three main components:

- **GRADUATION:** supporting refugees' own pathways to self-reliance and graduation from assistance, through predictable and regular cash transfers for basic needs and livelihoods investment, as well as training on income-generating activities and support for financial inclusion.

- **Cash for Protection:** it should be noted that for the most vulnerable of families and those with specific needs (e.g. single elderly, disabled, chronically ill), graduation may not be a realistic option and UNHCR will likely continue to support a small caseload of protection cases with cash transfers and social support.
- **INCLUSION IN NATIONAL SYSTEMS:** refugee inclusion in national social protection systems, including the Government-led Social Safety Net, focusing on refugee-hosting areas. The same eligibility criteria are applied to nationals and refugees alike (with support from the World Bank's IDA 18 Refugee-Sub Window).
- **DONOR STRATEGIES:** by working in collaboration with the national system and also building its capacity, the Transitional Safety Net helps pave the way for donors to shift, in a phased approach, from funding external actors (such as UNHCR) to deliver humanitarian aid to providing direct support to the Cameroonian government to assist refugees and refugee-hosting areas. This shift is in-line with the approach of the World Bank (under the IDA 18 Refugee Sub-Window).

5 Financial requirements and budget:

Quantifying needs and costing: with the available poverty and vulnerability analysis combined with updated registration data, UNHCR can quantify unmet needs and cost the necessary response, within a given time-frame.

Supporting one family for two years with the Transitional Safety Net costs US\$ 815. Below is a budget breakdown:

Transitional Safety Net: Budget for 2019	Total (US\$)
Cost of mobile telephone	13.87
Basic needs cash assistance (24 months)	424.31
Livelihoods grant (yearly x 2)	213.30
Total cash assistance	651.47
M&E, social support and training costs (20% of the total)	162.87
Total cash assistance + support	814.34

In 2019, UNHCR will continue to support the 1,500 households already receiving cash assistance in 2018 under the Transitional Safety Net and scale-up to add another 10,000 households. In addition, funds are sought to provide cash and livelihoods assistance to all new CAR refugees arriving in Eastern Cameroon for a period of 12 months (budget shows an estimate for 2,571 households of new arrivals).

The estimated operational assistance budget for 2019 (excluding staffing costs such as M&E, support to beneficiaries and training) is US\$ 5.5m of which UNHCR has already committed operational funds of US\$ 2.5m.



© UNHCR/Astrid de Valon

Transitional Safety Net: Budget for 2019	Total (US\$)
Cost of mobile telephones (10,000)	138,655
Cash assistance (11,500 HH x 12 months)	2,439,764
Livelihoods grant (11,500 x 1 per year)	1,226,479
Cost of telephones for new arrivals (2,571)	35,648
Cash assistance for new arrivals (2,571 HH x 12 months)	545,446
Livelihoods grant for new arrivals (2,571 x 1 per year)	741,695
Total cash assistance	4,660,191
M&E, social support and training costs (20% of the total)	1,165,048
Total cash assistance + support	5,825,238



MORE INFORMATION

UNHCR Cash-Based Interventions Section,
Division of Programme Support and Management,
UNHCR Geneva, hqcash@unhcr.org



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency