

## **Update on UNHCR’s operations in southern Africa**

### **A. Situational context**

At the end of 2019, the 16 countries comprising the southern Africa region hosted more than 1 million refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Somalia. The region also hosted some 5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and IDP returnees, nearly all of whom were in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Forced displacement in this country was the main trigger for the 8 per cent rise in persons of concern to UNHCR in the region compared to 2018.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was one of the countries with the highest level of displacement in the world. Following elections in December 2018, the political climate improved with a peaceful transition of power. However, the escalation of military operations against armed groups and the rise of conflicts between communities resulted in intense violence and further forced displacement. Since mid-2018, more than 2 million people were internally displaced in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces in the eastern part of the country. UNHCR declared an internal level-3 emergency in these provinces in November 2019 to activate emergency procedures and access to additional human, material and financial resources. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) also escalated their internal emergency response for the displacement crisis to level-3. The crisis was compounded by Ebola and measles outbreaks; an international public health scale-up protocol was declared for the Ebola outbreak and subsequently extended to February 2020. Humanitarian access remained a challenge due to the security situation on the ground. The United Nations Security Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo until 20 December 2020.

The largest population of refugees and asylum-seekers from the subregion was from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with some 905,000 Congolese hosted across 20 African countries in both emergency and protracted situations as of January 2020. To address the regional refugee aspect of the situation, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa has assumed the role of Regional Refugee Coordinator, and UNHCR is leading the inter-agency response through the [regional refugee response plan](#). The response strategy aims to provide protection and assistance to the most vulnerable refugees, bolster livelihood opportunities and promote a resilience-based approach, as well as to support the needs of local host populations and strengthen peaceful coexistence in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

With regard to the IDP response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR’s interventions are focused on the coordination of protection and shelter clusters, protection monitoring, peaceful coexistence projects, prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence, as well as empowerment and community participation. Supporting voluntary returns through the rehabilitation of shelter and multi-purpose grants remains central.

Although several countries in the region are experiencing economic growth, many continue to struggle with inequality, poverty, natural disasters, drought, food shortages, poor social

protection, xenophobia and a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Mixed movements of refugees and migrants are straining national asylum systems and triggering restrictive policies in the region affecting refugees. UNHCR is supporting governments to reinforce and streamline asylum systems and to improve access to documentation for refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR is also working closely with the relevant authorities to strengthen protection responses and services and to develop social cohesion programmes to foster the inclusion of refugees.

As the region is highly exposed to the effects of climate change and natural disasters, UNHCR continues to enhance its preparedness and response capacity. Following the devastation caused by Cyclone Idai in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in March 2019, UNHCR joined the Inter-Agency Standing Committee system-wide response. This included the deployment of emergency teams to lead protection clusters and ensure that shelter and relief items were airlifted to affected populations. UNHCR, as part of the responsible disengagement from its role in the inter-agency response in Mozambique, will have a limited operational presence in Beira, Sofala province until 30 June 2020, focusing on protection cluster coordination, monitoring and community-based protection.

Several operations in the region are struggling to meet the basic food needs of refugees and asylum-seekers, including in Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In Malawi, worsening food shortages continued to impact 44,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Dzaleka refugee camp as food rations from WFP were reduced by half due to insufficient funding in 2019.

In Mozambique, armed attacks against civilians and local authorities in Cabo Delgado province continued to take place. An estimated 100,000 people are currently displaced by the violence. Humanitarian actors face significant challenges in responding to the urgent needs of approximately 250,000 people, including IDPs, host populations and those remaining in affected communities (some of whom were impacted by Cyclone Kenneth in 2019). Since August 2019, UNHCR, as the national-level protection cluster lead, has provided technical protection support to partners and other relevant actors on the ground.

With the rising number of forcibly displaced people in the region, it is evident that a short-term humanitarian response is inadequate. As recognized in the Global Compact on Refugees, displacement requires a joint humanitarian and development response, underpinned by long-term planning and programming for solutions. Accordingly, UNHCR has been enhancing collaboration with development actors in the region to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development efforts and to ensure that refugees, particularly those living in poverty, are not left behind.

## **B. Achieving the global strategic priorities**

UNHCR is further strengthening partnerships with regional humanitarian and development actors, including the African Union, Southern African Development Community (SADC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Pan-African Parliament, Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Commission and relevant financial institutions. In 2019, UNHCR signed memoranda of understanding with the Southern African Development Community and the Pan-African Parliament to strengthen the protection of refugees and stateless persons in the region, in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Malawi and Zambia are the first countries in the region to implement the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF), demonstrating strong leadership in the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. The first Global Refugee Forum held in December 2019 led to some 80 meaningful pledges and commitments by governments, partners and the private sector from the southern Africa region. UNHCR will support governments in the region with the implementation of these pledges.

In Angola's Lóvua settlement, a comprehensive livelihood strategy is being developed with WFP with a focus on building refugee resilience and self-reliance. In addition, UNHCR and

the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are strengthening local governance, social cohesion and resilience in refugee-hosting communities in Lunda Norte province.

UNHCR and its partners are striving to increase self-reliance and resilience among refugees and host community populations living in extreme poverty through the “graduation approach”.<sup>1</sup> In the southern Africa region, UNHCR is implementing the graduation approach in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Additional resources are required to continue and expand the programme in the region.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a pilot project in North Kivu, co-led by UNHCR and UNDP, will support local efforts to prevent or respond to displacement and to render certain areas conducive to settlement and sustainable voluntary return.

In Mozambique, UNHCR, the Food and Agriculture Organization, UN-Habitat and WFP are collaborating on enhancing livelihood opportunities for refugees residing in the Maratane settlement in the province of Nampula.

In Zimbabwe, UNHCR aims to strengthen its partnership with the African Development Bank in the livelihood and energy sectors for refugees and host communities.

#### *The search for durable solutions*

UNHCR has placed emphasis on integrating relevant aspects of the Global Compact on Refugees in the planning and programming in the region. It is expected that more possibilities will be available in 2020 to advance comprehensive refugee responses, whereby settlement approaches, with refugees living side-by-side with host communities, will be implemented in Malawi and Mozambique, and further developed in Zambia.

#### *Voluntary repatriation*

In 2020, UNHCR will continue to prioritize support for voluntary repatriations in the region in close collaboration with governments. Return operations will focus on Zimbabwean refugees in Botswana; refugees from the Central African Republic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congo (Republic of); refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Congo; and refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Angola. Planning is also underway for the return of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Zambia.

In 2019, UNHCR organized approximately 8,000 voluntary returns in the region and assisted a further 14,800 self-organized voluntary returns to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

#### *Local integration*

While prospects for voluntary repatriation remain limited, UNHCR hopes to advance local integration. Socioeconomic inclusion, as well as education, self-reliance and livelihood programmes, can help facilitate this. These efforts are being made in cooperation with host governments and other relevant stakeholders through strategic partnerships and a whole-of-society approach. UNHCR is also enhancing activities with regard to the issuance of residence permits to ensure lawful stay and establishment of pathways to naturalization.

Some countries of asylum are working towards integrating former refugees who wish to remain, and UNHCR is helping to facilitate this process. In Zambia, UNHCR is advocating the issuance of residence permits for 10,000 former Angolan refugees and 4,000 former Rwandan refugees as part of the legal integration process. Namibia is also in the process of formalizing the residency and inclusion of former Angolan refugees.

---

<sup>1</sup> The “graduation approach” is a sequenced, multi-sector intervention that supports the poorest and most vulnerable households to achieve sustained income and move out of extreme poverty within a specified period.

### *Resettlement*

Resettlement continues to be an important durable solution for operations in the region despite a number of challenges. Against the 2019 resettlement quota of 4,410 places for southern Africa, UNHCR submitted 3,494 cases (79 per cent). A total of 1,261 resettlement departures took place to Australia, Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States of America. Most of the resettled refugees were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (88 per cent), followed by Burundians (7 per cent), Rwandans (3 per cent), and Ethiopians and Eritreans (0.4 per cent). In 2020, the resettlement quota for the region was reduced by almost 70 per cent to 1,500 places. Due to the reduced quota, operations will refocus their activities on complementary pathways and local integration.

### *Promoting a favourable protection environment*

UNHCR will continue advocating accession to, and ratification of, international and regional instruments on refugees, IDPs and stateless persons. In the Congo, the adoption of a national asylum law is under consideration, while the Seychelles has requested technical support in drafting a national legal asylum framework that could serve as a model for other Indian Ocean island States. Mauritius and UNHCR agreed on standard operating procedures to prevent refoulement, facilitate refugee status determination and identify solutions. UNHCR will also support ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention) and its incorporation into national laws and policies.

UNHCR will provide protection and multi-sectoral emergency assistance to populations of concern and host communities, anchoring the response in national services and systems, development plans, multi-year strategies and regional protection frameworks and policies. Particular attention will be paid to the needs of women and children.

Cash is, along with other assistance and services, an integral element of UNHCR's protection and solutions strategies. In southern Africa, UNHCR operations are committed to shifting from in-kind assistance to cash-based interventions (CBI) in 2020, and to use cash as a vehicle for the financial inclusion of refugees. UNHCR operations in Angola, South Africa and Zambia implement CBI as part of their regular programmes. The operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has increased its cash programme from 8 per cent in 2019 to 12 per cent in 2020. Similarly, the cash programme for the Congo operation has increased from 3 per cent in 2019 to 11 per cent in 2020.

### *Mixed movements*

UNHCR is working closely with the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and governments in the region to assist in the development of comprehensive and protection-sensitive asylum and migration strategies in line with the "10-point plan in action on refugee protection and mixed migration." UNHCR is also engaged with the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA) process to harmonize legal frameworks and promote regional cooperation towards the protection of refugees and stateless persons.

In line with UNHCR's strategy to address mixed movements in Africa, UNHCR will be implementing a joint project with the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Efforts will support a programme funded by the European Union in SADC countries from 2020 to 2025: "Strengthening of institutional mechanism for migration management in southern Africa."

### *Statelessness*

Ending statelessness is a key area of focus at the country and regional levels. In 2019, an action plan to eradicate statelessness in the SADC region was submitted to the SADC Public Security Committee. Furthermore, the seventieth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme and the Global Refugee Forum generated approximately 50 commitments from countries in the region to end statelessness by 2024. The Congo and

Eswatini have adopted national action plans to end statelessness that provide for nationality law reform, and in the case of Eswatini, for the removal of gender discrimination from the nationality law. In Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Zambia, national plans have been drafted and await formal endorsement by their respective governments. Angola recently acceded to the conventions on statelessness, while Comoros, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia and Zambia have pledged to accede to one or both of the conventions. Nationality law reform, data collection, the increase of birth registration and the development of statelessness determination procedures remain priorities in the region. UNHCR will continue to provide support and expertise to all countries in the region, as well as to SADC, to implement their pledges.

### **C. Financial information**

The comprehensive needs budget for the southern Africa region for 2020 that was approved by the Executive Committee at its annual plenary session in October 2019 amounted to \$301.2 million; this remained unchanged as of end January 2020.

---