
Update on UNHCR's operations in Africa

A. Situational analysis including new developments

Over the past year, new or ongoing displacement, triggered by extreme violence and human rights abuses, has occurred in the Central African Republic, the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, northern Nigeria and South Sudan, demanding a vigorous emergency response from UNHCR and its partners. Level-3 emergencies¹ have been activated for the Central African Republic and South Sudan, as both countries experienced massive internal displacement and neighbouring countries - particularly Cameroon, Ethiopia and Uganda - received large refugee influxes. Meanwhile, protracted displacement continued into the second and third decades for millions of refugees in Africa, notably Congolese (from the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Somalis. Responding to these emergencies, coupled with efforts to find solutions to long-standing refugee situations, has dominated UNHCR's operational priorities in Africa in 2014.

Reflecting a long tradition of hospitality and solidarity, African countries continued to provide safety and protection to millions of refugees. Among the top ten refugee hosting countries worldwide, three – Kenya, Chad and Ethiopia – are on the continent. Nevertheless, there were also cases of *refoulement* and areas where upholding international protection principles was severely challenged.

Across the region, food insecurity was a major concern in 2014. Funding shortfalls, led to cuts in food rations for nearly 800,000 refugees in Africa, threatening to further worsen levels of acute malnutrition, stunting and anaemia, particularly in children. In July, UNHCR and the World Food Programme launched a joint appeal for \$186 million to meet the basic food requirements of 2.4 million refugees depending on food aid in Africa. In addition to funding problems, the outbreak of epidemic diseases, insecurity and lack of access to populations of concern impeded relief efforts.

Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region

Since the conflict in the Central African Republic escalated in December 2013, almost 500,000 people have been displaced within the country, approximately 68,000 of whom are living in poor conditions in 37 sites in the capital, Bangui. Almost 180,000 people fled across borders, bringing the total number of Central African refugees in the region to 415,000 as of mid-September 2014. Some 235,000 are hosted in Cameroon, 95,000 in Chad, 66,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 19,000 in the Congo. The violence in the Central African Republic has also triggered subregional movements, as the country had been home to hundreds of thousands of migrants from Cameroon, Chad and elsewhere. Many of these individuals fled with the assistance of their countries of origin, working together with partners such as the International Organization for Migration.

¹ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has defined a level-3 emergency as a major, sudden-onset humanitarian crisis, triggered by natural disaster or conflict, which requires system-wide mobilization.

In 2014, over 25,000 persons fled renewed fighting in North Kivu and Katanga provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and sought safety in neighbouring countries. To date, 433,000 Congolese refugees are hosted throughout the region, mainly in Uganda (171,000), Rwanda (72,000), the United Republic of Tanzania (64,000), Burundi (47,000), and the Republic of the Congo (23,000). An estimated 2.6 million remain internally displaced. Despite the new waves of displacement in some areas of the country, in other areas, the number of returns continues to grow. Since returns began taking place in 2012, the number has reached 119,000.

East and Horn of Africa

Since December last year, the violence in South Sudan has forced 448,000 people across borders into neighboring countries, bringing the total number of South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda to 492,000 as of September 2014. While efforts to mediate the conflict continue, there are early-warning signs of famine in some parts of South Sudan and UNHCR expects further displacement and people attempt to reach safety and humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, heavy rainfall and flooding in Ethiopia have compounded the already difficult logistical challenges in reaching the refugee-hosting areas.

Finding durable solutions for almost one million refugees and an estimated 1.1 million IDPs from Somalia, continues to be a priority for the Office. The Global Initiative on Somali Refugees was launched by UNHCR last year to explore innovative and sustainable solutions for one of the most protracted refugee situations worldwide. As part of this process, UNHCR co-chaired a ministerial-level meeting held in Addis Ababa on 20 August 2014, which convened the Governments of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Yemen, as well as UN and regional partners. This led to the adoption of the *Addis Ababa commitment towards Somali refugees*, which reaffirms the resolve by affected States to find solutions as well as to maintain and improve asylum space for Somali refugees in the meantime. States also called for international solidarity and burden-sharing, including support for host countries and the country of origin as well as expanded resettlement opportunities for Somali refugees. At the meeting, the Somali Government also reaffirmed its commitment to creating a conducive environment for voluntary repatriation.

West Africa

UNHCR is working to minimize the impact of the Ebola epidemic on staff members and persons of concern in the affected West African States through preventive measures and working within the framework of the established national plans. The voluntary repatriation programme for Ivorian refugees from Liberia has had to be suspended and staff movements in affected countries have been limited. The insurgency in Nigeria continued to generate an acute humanitarian crisis inside the country and across borders. In the States Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe – where a state of emergency has been declared – there are an estimated 650,000 IDPs, while 30,000 people were forced to flee to Cameroon, 15,000 to Niger and 2,000 to Chad. In addition, Niger has recorded the return of some 35,000 nationals who had been living in Nigeria. The crisis in north-eastern Nigeria is also having a serious impact on the security in northern Cameroon, where cross-border incursions by insurgent groups are creating fear.

Ongoing insecurity in northern Mali limited the possibilities for IDPs and refugees from this area to return home. There are currently 140,000 Malian refugees in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. The number of IDPs decreased by more than half since the beginning of 2014, from 254,000 to 126,000. Access by humanitarian organizations to the northern areas which are controlled by armed groups is very limited and, at times, impossible. Despite the political progress that has been made to resolve the conflict, violence broke out in the Kidal region in May 2014. Since then, the number of spontaneous returns has drastically decreased.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions

Comprehensive solutions

While working to address the multiple emergency situations in Africa, UNHCR continued to explore with governments durable solutions for populations of concern. Progress was made in bringing about solutions for several refugee situations through the implementation of comprehensive solutions strategies.

Following a ministerial meeting in Pretoria in April 2013, involving Rwanda and the main countries of asylum for Rwandan refugees, an agreement was reached on an approach to the cessation of refugee status, tailored to the situation in each country of asylum. As of June 2014, Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Congo, Niger, Togo, Senegal, and Zambia officially invoked the cessation clauses. Several other countries started implementing cessation-related activities, without officially invoking the application of the cessation clause. In the first half of 2014, 3,650 Rwandan refugees returned to Rwanda, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with smaller groups returning from Burundi, the Congo (Republic of), Kenya and Uganda. The total number of Rwandan refugees in all of the host countries currently stands at almost 80,000.

At a tripartite meeting held in Luanda in July 2014, UNHCR, and the Governments of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo agreed to launch a voluntary repatriation operation for approximately 30,000 former refugees from Angola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Governments of Namibia and Zambia offered opportunities for local integration to former refugees from Angola, while the Republic of South Africa issued some 2,500 special immigration permits to allow these persons to stay in the country.

UNHCR operations in West Africa moved forward with the implementation of the last components of the comprehensive durable solution strategy for Liberian refugees. The local integration process was finalized in the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria, and over 5,580 passports were issued to former refugees by their countries of asylum. A strategy jointly developed by the UNHCR offices in the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau is aimed at finding solutions for the protracted situation of refugees from the southern Senegalese region of Casamance. Revalidation exercises, including surveys on intentions to return, have been conducted and structured negotiations with the Governments to establish a local integration package have begun. A positive development is the decision of the Government of Guinea -Bissau to approve the request for naturalization of 200 refugees.

Voluntary repatriation

In the Congo, the voluntary operation to assist refugees to return home to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was launched by UNHCR in May 2012, ended in August of this year. During this time period, a total of 119,070 refugees were repatriated, including nearly 10,000 in 2014. The returnees were among some 160,000 people who fled from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to neighbouring countries – 140,000 to the Republic of the Congo and 20,000 to the Central African Republic – when clashes erupted in 2009 between the Munzaya and Enyele communities.

This year, approximately 1,000 Burundian refugees returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and other countries in the region. During the same period, UNHCR organized the voluntary repatriation by air of the first group of 440 Ethiopians from South Sudan.

Local integration

The Government of Zambia continues to implement the local integration of 10,000 refugees who were born and raised in Zambia as second or third generation refugees, notably from Angola and Rwanda. This initiative, which includes the provision of documentation and socio-economic integration interventions, is expected to be completed by 2016. By September 2014, the Angolan Government processed some 3,000 ID cards and issued 340 passports, which enabled the Zambian authorities to start issuing permanent residence permits. Some 500 plots of land are being demarcated in new settlement areas, and 300 applications have already been submitted by the population of concern. Socio-economic projects in the new settlements have already started.

Some 18,000 Angolans who have opted to remain in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are in the process of obtaining the necessary documents for their legal stay in the country. The Government of Namibia is also issuing permanent resident permits to 1,600 Angolans who remained in the country, after the final repatriation of 3,000 Angolans was completed in 2012.

The Government Benin issued 10-year residence permits to 4,000 refugees, mainly originating from Togo. In a further step, some 40 refugees are now in the process of being naturalized. In eastern Sudan, the transitional solutions initiative achieved considerable results, particularly in enhancing health care and education services for refugees in protracted situations and host communities.

Resettlement

Resettlement continued to be an essential protection tool and responsibility-sharing mechanism in the search for durable solutions in Africa. Collaborative efforts with all concerned stakeholders resulted in a record number of more than 28,000 resettlement submissions for refugees in Africa in 2013, an 81 per cent increase compared to 2012. In the first half of 2014, some 12,700 submissions were made, mainly from Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Resettlement departures from Africa increased considerably, with almost 8,700 in the first half of 2014. Resettlement continues to be strategically important in ensuring asylum space and agreeing complementary solutions, in particular for protracted situations in Africa.

Progress continues to be made on the enhanced resettlement programme of at least 50,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo out of the Great Lakes Region, which started in 2012, with 25 per cent of the target reached. In the first half of 2014, UNHCR processed over 5,700 Congolese.

Promoting a favourable protection environment

Across the region, many States continued to provide asylum and meet their international protection obligations to large numbers of refugees. At the same time, capacity, access, security, political, policy, legal and other factors presented obstacles in some countries. In regard to mixed migratory movements or situations where States put into effect immigration control policies or measures to remove irregularly present migrants or persons no longer in need of international protection, UNHCR works closely with the authorities to ensure that no refugees or asylum-seekers are inadvertently caught up in the process. Given the complex challenges of trafficking and related abuses reported in the subregion, the Government of Sudan, UNHCR and IOM developed the Strategy on Smuggling and Trafficking in the Horn and East Africa.

The majority of States in Africa have ratified or acceded to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of 1969. National refugee legislation or decrees exist in 40 African countries, and 16 States are in the process of developing or revising national refugee legislation.

Progress continues to be made in Africa on preventing and reducing statelessness. Côte d'Ivoire and the Gambia acceded to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, while

Guinea acceded to the 1961 Convention. In Côte d'Ivoire, efforts continued to reduce the large number of stateless persons and persons of undetermined nationality. With these accessions and other recent steps taken by African States, 20 per cent of the pledges to address statelessness made at the 2011 ministerial event² have been implemented. In order to strengthen the response to statelessness on the continent, more needs to be done in critical areas such as: mapping of stateless populations, reform of nationality laws and accession to the statelessness conventions.

During the 55th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) in Luanda, Angola (May 2014), a resolution was adopted on Drafting a Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Right to Nationality in Africa. With a view to implementing this resolution and the Resolution on the Right to Nationality adopted by ACHPR in 2013, an action plan being developed between UNHCR in Addis Ababa and ACHPR will look at the issue of statelessness on the African continent.

With respect to IDP protection, five additional sub-Saharan African States (Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Rwanda and Zimbabwe) ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) in 2013, joining the 17 States which had already ratified it. On 17 June 2014, the Democratic Republic of the Congo adopted legislation authorizing the ratification of the Kampala Convention.

C. Financial information

The 2014 comprehensive needs assessment budget for Africa approved by the Executive committee in October 2013 was \$1,893.4 million. Due to additional emergencies and deepening crises requiring UNHCR's response, the budget increased to \$2,595.4 million by the end of August 2014. The increase is mainly due to supplementary budgets requested for the emergencies in Central Africa Republic, northern Nigeria and South Sudan. As of early September 2014, only \$834 million in funding which had been earmarked for Africa had been received.

² More information on the ministerial intergovernmental event may be obtained from www.unhcr.org/ministerial.