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**Update on UNHCR's operations in Africa****A. Situational context**

The number of people displaced by conflict and persecution in sub-Saharan Africa continued to grow, bringing the total number of persons of concern to UNHCR in the region to an estimated 20 million. Instability in Burundi, Nigeria and South Sudan triggered significant displacement. Meanwhile, security incidents in parts of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Somalia also caused displacement (although in some instances only temporarily), and millions of refugees originating from these countries remained in exile, with limited prospects for return.

Food insecurity remained a serious concern, affecting displaced populations across the continent. Since 2014, the number of refugees affected by cuts to food assistance rose sharply, from less than 800,000 to approximately 2 million. This upwards trend is expected to grow, unless adequate funding is made available.

*Central Africa and the Great Lakes*

The exodus of Burundian refugees continued, with some 390,000 now hosted in the region (218,000 in the United Republic of Tanzania, 84,000 in Rwanda, 33,000 in Uganda and 37,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and over 10,000 in other countries). In the United Republic of Tanzania, some 500 to 700 refugees arrived on a daily basis since the beginning of 2017.

The security situation remained tense in the western and central parts of the Central African Republic, with kidnappings and clashes between armed groups resulting in internal population movements and waves of new arrivals into neighbouring countries. Over the past six months, over 43,000 people were newly displaced internally. Although 460,000 Central Africans remained in exile and 434,000 were internally displaced, UNHCR and the Government assisted thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) with voluntary return to the capital, Bangui.

*East Africa, including the Horn of Africa*

The South Sudanese refugee crisis was the largest emergency on the continent. Almost half a million South Sudanese made their way to neighbouring countries during the second half of 2016, many arriving with alarming levels of malnutrition. The total number of South Sudanese refugees now stands at over 1.5 million, with close to 700,000 in Uganda, 342,000 in Ethiopia, 305,000 in Sudan, 89,000 in Kenya, 68,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 4,900 in the Central African Republic. Uganda, which continues to receive between 2,500 and 3,500 new arrivals every day, is now the largest host country in

sub-Saharan Africa. The 2017 South Sudan regional refugee response plan<sup>1</sup> articulates the protection and humanitarian needs of an anticipated 1.9 million South Sudanese who are expected to have sought asylum by the end of 2017.

The East and Horn of Africa continued to host some 900,000 Somalis and 440,000 Sudanese in protracted situations, in addition to 1.1 million IDPs in Somalia and another 1.8 million in Sudan. The subregion was also affected by drought, which triggered the internal displacement of tens of thousands of people and forced thousands across the Ethiopian border since the beginning of 2017.

#### *Southern Africa*

Mixed movements, including of asylum-seekers, continued to affect the southern Africa subregion, particularly South Africa. Xenophobia remained a problem, with sporadic attacks against foreigners reported.

Some 9,000 Mozambican refugees and asylum-seekers are currently still in Malawi and Zimbabwe. UNHCR teams in Zimbabwe are verifying and registering new arrivals in the border areas, where a few families are being received each week.

#### *West Africa*

The security situation in northern and central Mali remained volatile, with a number of terrorist attacks having taken place, including along the border with Burkina Faso and Niger. Some 140,000 Malian refugees remained in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger, and almost 37,000 Malians were internally displaced.

While the scale of the Nigeria emergency remained significant, even more concerning was the depth and complexity of the protection issues affecting over 200,000 refugees in Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and 2.7 million internally displaced Nigerians. In February 2017, UNHCR participated in the “Oslo humanitarian conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin”, which sought to mobilize international solidarity and responsibility-sharing to address the crisis.

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

### **(i) Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions**

#### *Comprehensive solutions*

During the high-level summit of the United Nations General Assembly to address large movements of refugees and migrants, as well as the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, held in New York in September 2016, African States made numerous commitments towards refugee protection and solutions. As articulated in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) is now being piloted in Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia and the United Republic of Tanzania, in close coordination with the national authorities and an array of partners, including other UN agencies and stakeholders. The inclusive approach of the CRRF, involving governments, United Nations humanitarian and development agencies, international financial institutions, private sector partners, and host and refugee communities, is expected to greatly enhance refugee protection and contribute towards the identification of sustainable solutions and a more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/589497987.html>.

Building on the UNHCR-facilitated “Global initiative for Somali refugees”, aimed at finding solutions for Somali refugees in the East and Horn of Africa as well as in Yemen, the High Commissioner appointed a Special Envoy for the Somali refugee situation in September 2016. The Special Envoy was tasked with mobilizing humanitarian, diplomatic and fundraising efforts, at the national and regional levels, to help bring about solutions for Somali refugees and asylum-seekers.

Progress was made on the implementation of the comprehensive solutions strategy for Rwandan refugees, which recommended cessation of refugee status for Rwandans who fled between 1959 and 1998. A ministerial meeting held in Geneva in September 2016 affirmed the deadline of 31 December 2017 for UNHCR’s withdrawal from this refugee situation. Intensified efforts to bring about durable solutions for the remaining caseload (approximately 260,000 Rwandans who fall under the cessation clause remain outside Rwanda, mainly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) will continue throughout the year.

#### *Voluntary repatriation*

Spontaneous and assisted voluntary returns to Somalia will continue in 2017, despite the fragile security and socio-economic environment in the country, including limited infrastructure rehabilitation and constraints on the delivery of basic public services. Additional resources from both humanitarian and development actors are vital in creating the conditions conducive for safe, dignified and sustainable returns. During a population verification exercise carried out in August 2016 in the Somali refugee camps in Kenya, some 69,000 refugees expressed their interest in returning voluntarily. In November 2016, the tripartite agreement between the Government of Kenya, the Federal Government of Somalia and UNHCR was extended to the end of May 2017, in order to continue to provide a legal framework for voluntary returns from Kenya to Somalia. Between December 2014 and mid-February 2017, more than 45,000 Somali refugees were supported by UNHCR to voluntarily return home from Kenya. In December 2016, UNHCR also facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 68 Somali refugees from Djibouti. Meanwhile, in Ethiopia, cross-border discussions began aimed at supporting the voluntary repatriation of around 1,500 Somali refugees living in Dollo Ado/Melkadida. Given the dire security and humanitarian situation in Yemen, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) collaborated on joint evacuations to voluntary return thousands of registered and unregistered Somalis at risk in Yemen.

In Côte d’Ivoire, more than 20,000 Ivorian refugees have returned home since resumption of the return process in December 2015. The remaining Ivorian refugees are currently in Liberia (19,000), Ghana (11,000) and Guinea (3800), and UNHCR plans to assist the voluntary return of some 13,700 people during the course of the year.

Support for voluntary repatriation was provided to over 5,500 Rwandan refugees who returned in 2016, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. An enhanced return package was made available, and information campaigns on voluntary repatriation continued. It is expected that there will be an increase of returns from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2017.

Approximately 8,000 persons spontaneously returned from Malawi to Mozambique in 2016, and a tripartite agreement reiterating the importance of adherence to protection standards and the legal framework for voluntary repatriation will be concluded between the two countries and UNHCR in 2017.

As of February 2017, the number of spontaneous refugee returns to the Central African Republic reached 34,000. The return trends, mainly from Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, decreased in the last quarter of 2016 due to the resumption of fighting in

Bambari, Bria and Kaga Bandoro. There were also spontaneous returns to Burundi, mainly from the United Republic of Tanzania, and these are expected to continue during the course of 2017.

#### *Local integration*

In the context of the regional legal framework, including the Protocol relating to free movement of persons, residence and establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), solutions are being explored with States to facilitate the local integration of refugees through assisted processes for naturalization or alternative legal residence status. In 2017, UNHCR will pursue local integration strategies for Mauritians in Senegal, Togolese in Ghana and Ghanaians in Togo.

Local integration will also continue to be pursued in countries hosting Rwandan refugees who are affected by the cessation clause and who do not wish to return. The focus in 2017 will be on Rwandans in the Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, where prospects for local integration have emerged.

#### *Resettlement*

In 2016, UNHCR submitted for resettlement the cases of some 43,900 refugees from sub-Saharan Africa; some 37,500 departed to their resettlement countries. This represented a 13 per cent increase in submissions compared to 2015 and a 179 per cent increase compared to 2012. The majority of refugees referred for resettlement were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Eritrea and Somalia, as in previous years. In 2016, UNHCR exceeded the 50,000 submissions target under the multi-year plan agreed to in 2012 to enhance resettlement opportunities for Congolese refugees in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

Notwithstanding this positive growth, the future of resettlement from Africa continues to rely on the commitment of quotas by resettlement countries and support for resettlement processing. In 2017, the prospect of diminished available quotas for resettlement is of great concern to the Office.

### **(ii) Promoting a favourable protection environment**

#### *Asylum*

Countries in Africa largely maintained full respect for the principle of asylum by keeping their borders open and protecting refugees from forced return. However, there were a number of isolated incidents of refoulement in 2016, contrary to international refugee law and despite high-level interventions by UNHCR.

The civilian and humanitarian character of asylum remained a concern in some countries, where UNHCR strongly encouraged host governments and partners to implement strategies to maintain the civilian character of camps and separate armed elements from the refugee population.

#### *Mixed movements*

The mixed movement of refugees and migrants remained a challenging phenomenon for the whole region, with the main routes extending from the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa towards Southern Africa; from the Horn of Africa towards Yemen and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries; and from West Africa and the Horn of Africa towards Europe. Despite the risks involved, including dangers posed by networks of people smugglers and human traffickers, hundreds of thousands of people continued to follow these routes, including refugees and asylum-seekers who sought protection and safety elsewhere. While the problem received heightened attention in the context of the southern Mediterranean route and

movements towards Europe, within Africa, the dangers posed by these movements were not of lesser concern and magnitude.

Restrictive approaches to cross-border movements, solely motivated by security considerations, resulted in many asylum-seekers and refugees being turned away at borders and, in some cases, having to pay more and undergo greater risks to travel on alternative routes. Widespread and systematic detention as a response to irregular onward movements, including of refugee children and their families, as well as unaccompanied minors, posed serious protection and human rights concerns.

In 2017, UNHCR's operations in Africa will carry out a range of activities to ensure that migration management in the region is protection-sensitive, in line with UNHCR's "10-Point plan of action for refugee protection and mixed migration", as well as the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

#### *Statelessness*

Important advances to address statelessness occurred in Africa over the past six months. Under the auspices of the Abidjan Declaration on the eradication of statelessness, new national action plans on statelessness were under development in a number of West African countries, including in Nigeria and Togo. A directive by President Kenyatta of Kenya in October 2016 resulted in almost 1,500 formerly stateless individuals of the Makonde tribe being registered as nationals of Kenya. In December 2016, Madagascar became the first country since the launch of UNHCR's #IBelong campaign to reform its nationality law, allowing Malagasy mothers to pass on their nationality to their children on an equal basis as Malagasy fathers. This brought the number of countries in Africa that retain provisions preventing women from passing on their nationality to their children on an equal basis as men down to six, with Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia also in the process of reviewing their nationality legislation. The Government of Burkina Faso was working with UNHCR to implement a documentation project for undocumented nationals living in Côte d'Ivoire who were at risk of becoming stateless. Guinea-Bissau was the most recent State to have acceded to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, bringing the global number of States parties to 89 and 68 States respectively.

### **C. Financial information**

The 2017 comprehensive needs assessment budget for Africa, approved by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in October 2016, was US\$ 2.34 billion. By January 2017, the budget increased by US\$ 319 million, reflecting supplementary budgets in response to the situations in South Sudan (US\$ 278 million) and Nigeria (US\$ 41 million).

## Update – Africa

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In 2016, activities related to protection, assistance and emergency response accounted for approximately 70 per cent of UNHCR's expenditures in Africa. The Office was only able to allocate some 5 per cent of funding to solutions and livelihood interventions and around 7 per cent on education. In 2017, UNHCR will continue to prioritize life-saving protection activities and assistance to people displaced by conflict and persecution in the region. However, increased resources will be necessary to strengthen durable solutions for hundreds of thousands of displaced persons across the continent.

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