

Update on UNHCR operations in West and Central Africa

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

By June 2024, the number of forcibly displaced, returnees and stateless persons in the region rose to 13.7 million. This trend was driven by an increase in internally displaced persons in the Niger and Nigeria, with Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Nigeria accounting for most internally displaced persons in the region. A growing number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Chad, Mali and the Niger was observed, with Chad hosting the largest number of refugees, followed by Cameroon. Women and children account for 82 per cent of the 2.4 million refugees in the region.

Insecurity and increasing competition for resources, which were intensified by the effects of climate change, poverty and inflation, contributed to an increase in forced displacement and protection risks.

The Sudan situation (the Central African Republic and Chad)

Chad continues to host the largest number of Sudanese refugees, with nearly 144,000 arrivals in 2024 and over 630,000 arrivals since the latest conflict in the Sudan erupted in April 2023. Before this time, Chad had already been hosting 579,000 refugees, mainly from the Sudan. The Central African Republic also received approximately 30,000 refugees and some 6,100 Central African returnees from the Sudan by June 2024. From the onset of the influx, UNHCR has been supporting the Governments of Chad and the Central African Republic, including the local authorities, in providing life-saving assistance and protection services in spontaneous settlements. In addition, UNHCR is expanding existing settlements and establishing new ones as well.

The Sahel+ situation

As of June 2024, the number of forcibly displaced persons and returnees in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger exceeded 3.4 million, including some 550,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition to significant internal displacement in the central Sahel, the number of people fleeing to neighbouring countries continued to rise. In 2024 alone, 43,000 arrivals from Burkina Faso were registered in Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, bringing the total number of arrivals to over 100,000 since 2021.

Also, Mali hosts over 56,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Burkina Faso, and around 130,000 Malians fled to Mauritania as of June 2024.

There are over 865,000 forcibly displaced people in the Niger, with 407,000 being internally displaced. In addition, since January 2024, nearly 17,000 refugees and asylum-seekers arrived in the Niger, including approximately 11,000 from Nigeria and over 3,000 from Mali. UNHCR is conducting protection and border monitoring, delivering basic needs, and supporting State development and livelihoods interventions for displaced persons.

The Lake Chad Basin situation

As of June 2024, the Lake Chad Basin region had over 3.6 million forcibly displaced people, including 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. There are nearly 400,000 Nigerian refugees residing in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger. In 2024, violence in the Far North Region of Cameroon forced over 1,800 people to flee to Nigeria's State of Adamawa, which already hosts over 32,000 asylum-seekers. UNHCR facilitated the return of 13,000 Cameroonian refugees from Chad, and 30,000 Nigerian refugees from Cameroon, Chad and the Niger.

The Central African Republic situation

Approximately 450,000 internally displaced persons remain in the Central African Republic, and over 740,000 Central African refugees are in neighbouring countries. In the Central African Republic, 118,000 internally displaced persons and 12,000 refugees returned as of June 2024. UNHCR facilitated the voluntary return of Central African refugees from Cameroon, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2024 plan and the updated plan for the West and Central Africa region – by impact area

Attaining favourable protection environments

São Tomé and Príncipe ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa and the Organization of African Unity's Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. In July 2024, Cameroon signed a decree adopting the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

UNHCR advocated and supported States to ensure access to documentation for internally displaced persons, refugees and stateless persons. In Burkina Faso, nearly 17,900 birth certificates and 19,300 national identity cards were issued, with 70 per cent provided to internally displaced persons. Côte d'Ivoire facilitated 740 refugees in obtaining biometric passports, in line with its pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023. Ghana issued 830 identity cards to former refugees, reducing the cost of the identity cards by 90 per cent. In the Niger, UNHCR facilitated the issuance of 1,100 birth certificates for displaced children in Agadez. In Nigeria, the Ministry of Interior committed to grant citizenship to the children of naturalized Nigerians, which UNHCR supported by issuing 500,000 birth certificates. UNHCR also funded civil status documents for some 5,300 persons at risk of statelessness. Since these efforts began, over 170,000 civil status documents have already been issued as of mid-2024.

In March 2024, UNHCR supported the first regional dialogue on national security and refugee protection in the Gulf of Guinea, a forum for intergovernmental exchange on reconciling national security and refugee protection. The second dialogue in June 2024 focused on the protection of refugee herders in the subregion.

Realizing rights in safe environments

UNHCR continued emergency preparedness and response activities in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, through support for shelter, livelihoods, the prevention of and response to gender-based violence, and education, as well as through the provision of cash and in-kind support.

In Chad, six new settlements were opened, and 10 existing settlements were expanded. Nevertheless, the rainy season and high transportation costs hindered refugee relocation. In July 2024, floods in the Sila province caused severe damage in two of the four settlements, displacing thousands of refugees and host community

members. In this context, UNHCR launched a digital platform to centralize communication on key figures to coordinate the humanitarian response, map partner presence and store assessment reports by UNHCR and partners. To support potential community-based partnerships, 410 refugee associations were also mapped.

In Burkina Faso, UNHCR distributed 4,000 emergency shelter tool kits and 5,000 core relief kits to 700 survivors of gender-based violence and others. The United Nations Emergency Response Team, which comprises UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, provided shelter, dignity kits and water, sanitation and hygiene kits to over 47,000 new internally displaced persons and host community members.

In Mali, UNHCR delivered emergency response to support asylum-seekers arriving in the hard-to-reach regions of Kidal, Menaka and Bandiagara. Of the nearly 73,000 new arrivals from Burkina Faso since October 2023, over 44,000 were registered in 2024, while approximately 10,300 households were assisted with multipurpose cash grants.

In the Niger, UNHCR distributed emergency cash for shelter to 2,500 forcibly displaced persons and 5,000 core relief items. UNHCR provided health care, education, sanitation and fertilizers to Maradi village, a *village d'opportunités* (village of opportunities), which received nearly 1,000 Nigerian refugees from border locations in 2024. Fertilizers were provided to 500 farmers and seeds to 160 households with a view to fostering peaceful coexistence. In addition, UNHCR supported the Niger by providing 3,000 core relief kits to authorities in Zinder as part of the response to floods, which affected some 140,000 people, including forcibly displaced persons.

In Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, UNICEF and WFP developed a joint response plan for refugees, asylum-seekers and host communities. The plan aligns with national development strategies, and encompasses data collection, emergency assistance, protection and support for community resilience.

UNHCR enhanced its interventions for refugees travelling in mixed movements through the route-based approach, prioritizing protection and solutions from the start. In Chad, Mali and the Niger, UNHCR strengthened border and protection monitoring, community-based identification and referral mechanisms. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the mixed movements scholarship programme supported some 440 Sudanese refugees and members of the local Chadian community in pursuing bachelor's degrees in law, geography, history, biology and education. Cash-based interventions helped cover expenses, such as tuition fees, food, accommodation and transport.

UNHCR adjusted its approach to engagement in the Sahel with a new Sahel+ strategy that articulates six key operational shifts: transitioning from emergency response to early self-reliance and resilience; focusing on community interventions rather than individual assistance; shifting from in-kind aid to cash-based support; strengthening partnerships with development actors; boosting the capacities of local actors; and expanding the geographic scope of its response to include the coastal countries of Algeria and Mauritania. The four thematic areas – asylum and mixed movements, urbanization, youth and gender, and climate action – were being prioritized as part of this new strategy.

Through Project 21, the regional protection monitoring system, UNHCR strengthened the protection monitoring capacity of 30 partners, 60 per cent of which were local and national organizations. Data collected from over 56,000 households in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, the Niger and Togo was collected and analyzed in cooperation with humanitarian, development and peace partners. The findings showed that 70 per cent of displacements were caused by armed conflict.

UNHCR launched a new learning platform, the eCentre for Africa, in May 2024 to strengthen the capacity of local authorities and non-governmental organizations to prepare for, and respond to, humanitarian crises in Africa. Over 36 local humanitarian partners and practitioners from 10 operations in the region participated in the first workshops that focused on leadership in emergencies, humanitarian negotiations, and emergency preparedness and response.

Preparedness efforts to respond to mpox, previously known as monkeypox, included enhancing health and infrastructure for water, sanitation and hygiene in camps, and engaging displaced communities in the promotion of hygiene in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Ghana, Liberia, the Niger and Nigeria. UNHCR also advocated the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in national health response plans.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

In 2024, insecurity led to the closure of over 10,000 schools, leaving 2.2 million children without access to education. Burkina Faso was the country most affected, with over 5,300 schools closed and over 818,000 children unable to attend classes. In a positive development, approximately 40,200 newly arrived Sudanese refugee children in Chad (39,000) and the Central African Republic (1,200) were able to attend schools. In Chad, 470 Sudanese refugees participated in the 2024 Baccalaureate session. UNHCR and six private universities in Chad renewed a memorandum of understanding to reduce tuition fees for refugee students by half.

With administrative support from UNHCR, six students from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana and Togo were admitted to French universities under the *Couloir Universitaire pour les Réfugiés* (University Pathway for Refugees) programme to pursue master's degrees. Eight refugees from Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger also enrolled in higher post-secondary diploma courses in the humanitarian sector at the Bioforce Training Centre Africa in Senegal. In Nigeria, in collaboration with the ProFuturo Foundation, over 2,360 students received tablets and laptops.

Since April 2023, the number of cases of gender-based violence reported in Chad increased by 19 per cent, in part due to the heightened awareness of gender-based violence response services and an increase in arrivals. UNHCR undertook gender-based violence prevention and response activities that included case identification and management. Support groups and recreational and psychosocial activities were also facilitated, and womens' committees established. Challenges persist for survivors to access justice and livelihoods support, with underfunding of the crisis affecting the overall response to gender-based violence.

In response to the Sudan crisis, the "Ma Mbi Si" service, which provides support for survivors of gender-based violence, expanded its network from 25 to 31 centres in the Central African Republic. The region also continues to benefit from funding from Safe from the Start, which supports the "Engaging Men and Boys in Accountable Practices" programme in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. Small grant agreements were also initiated with women-led refugee organizations in the Central African Republic, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria.

Following advocacy carried out by UNHCR, the Government of Cameroon granted 100 hectares of land to Nigerian refugees, who subsequently cultivated 40 hectares of rice in the Minawao camp. In Chad, the authorities allocated half a hectare of farmland each to Cameroonian refugees and Chadian farmers in the Kalambari and Guilmeiy sites.

The advocacy undertaken by UNHCR for the financial inclusion of refugees resulted in a policy change in Chad, where a requirement from the 2023 finance law mandating banking institutions to request a national identification number for refugees when opening accounts was removed. UNHCR and the International Finance Corporation – a member of the World Bank Group – designed a joint action

plan to foster financial inclusion, expand access to mobile money, enhance job opportunities, and improve access to clean energy and agribusiness for forcibly displaced persons in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.

UNHCR continued its advocacy for the integration of forcibly displaced individuals into national development plans, in alignment with its sustainable programming approach. In Cameroon, UNHCR and the National Institute of Statistics signed a memorandum of understanding, which facilitated the Institute's work in conducting a survey on forced displacement, supported by UNHCR and the World Bank through the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement. The survey aimed to improve data collection on the socioeconomic and living conditions of forcibly displaced persons and host communities, facilitating their inclusion in national and local development plans.

In Benin, UNHCR and the World Bank also undertook a joint mission as part of the Government's eligibility process for the Window for Host Communities and Refugees financing modality. The mission identified policy priorities for further engagement on biometric identification, data and analytics, access to land, water and other local resources in rural areas, as well as health and education. A similar eligibility exercise was carried out in the Central African Republic, which resulted in the creation of a government strategy to comprehensively address the displacement situation based of identified priorities.

Securing solutions

In Senegal, over 300 Mauritanian refugees were naturalized following a government decree granting them citizenship. Meanwhile, the issuance of indefinite residence permits to the 500 former Ivorian refugees who remain in Ghana is ongoing. The cases of some 1,000 former Ivorian refugees for legal integration in Liberia are being processed. In Mali, approximately 2,700 out of 5,600 submissions for nationality by Mauritanian refugees were granted.

In 2024, some 15,000 people returned through the UNHCR facilitated voluntary repatriation programme to the Central African Republic, including 12,000 from Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and 3,000 from Chad. The findings of a UNHCR survey carried out in eastern Cameroon on the intentions of refugees to repatriate showed that 80,000 intended to return home. Within the Central African Republic, 118,000 internally displaced persons returned to their places of origin.

Given the scale of returns, the Central African Republic launched a national strategy for durable solutions for the return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons. The members of the Core Group of the Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform, led by the Africa Development Bank and also comprising France, the United States of America, the European Union, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, agreed to continue supporting solutions-oriented government action plans within the framework of the Support Platform.

In Chad, the Fourkouloum site was selected as a pilot for a sustainable inclusion-oriented project for internally displaced persons in the Lac province. UNHCR, in collaboration with the local authorities and humanitarian actors, conducted a needs assessment to gather data to inform the multisectoral response in Fourkouloum. The project will strengthen the access of internally displaced persons to basic and socioeconomic services.

In March 2024, a revised tripartite agreement was signed between Burkina Faso, Mali and UNHCR for the voluntary repatriation of Burkinabé refugees in Mali and for Malian refugees in Burkina Faso. In Cameroon, 13,000 refugees voluntarily returned home from Chad, receiving multipurpose cash assistance prior to departure and upon their return home.

An estimated 112,000 refugees require resettlement in the region. By June 2024, the cases of approximately 1,800 individuals were submitted for resettlement, and over 2,700 departures took place, mainly to Canada, France and the United States of America. As of August 2024, in the Niger, 370 registered refugees and 290 Emergency Transit Mechanism evacuees were resettled.

Cross-cutting issues

In line with the pledges made by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, \$9 million of the ECOWAS Humanitarian Fund was allocated towards ongoing responses by 12 Member States to refugee, internal displacement and statelessness situations in the region. The development of regional policies on asylum are under way with both ECOWAS and the Economic Community of Central African States, with a view to promoting key protection and solutions standards. In 2024, ECOWAS joined the Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

In Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, UNHCR implemented climate-smart agricultural projects for forcibly displaced and host communities to boost self-reliance; generate renewable energy and establish solarized infrastructure; support environmental restoration, including reforestation and reverse degradation; and foster peaceful coexistence.

C. Financial information

The budget for the West and Central Africa region, which was approved by the Executive Committee in October 2023, amounted to \$1,011.4 million. As of 31 August 2024, a supplementary budget for the Sudan emergency response amounted to \$163.7 million, of which \$103.7 million represented requirements for the West and Central Africa region (\$89.5 for Chad and \$14.2 million for the Central African Republic). The financial requirements for the West and Central Africa region therefore stand at \$1,115.1 million, representing a 5 per cent increase compared to the final budget for 2023.

The breakdown of requirements by impact area is as follows: realizing rights in safe environments (\$451.5 million, or 40 per cent); attaining favourable protection environments (\$337.5 million, or 30 per cent); empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$202.7 million, or 18 per cent); and securing solutions (\$123.4 million, or 11 per cent).

As of 31 August 2024, 35 per cent of the region's 2024 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions. Although this funding level represents a 21 per cent increase compared to the same period last year, the needs in the region continue to outpace resources available. In particular, the funding gap is affecting activities related to durable solutions and livelihoods.