
Update on UNHCR's operations in Africa

UNHCR continues to prioritize finding durable solutions for refugees in Africa, especially in areas where peace and stability have been established. Concurrently, the Office is strengthening its capacity to respond to new and deteriorating refugee emergencies. Striking a balance between emergency response and solutions, within a context of constrained human and financial resources, remains the definitive challenge to the Office's engagement on the continent.

A. Situational analysis including new developments

Central Africa and the Great Lakes

New rounds of violence in the Kivus and Province Orientale regions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo triggered further displacement within the country – now reaching some 2.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) -- and forced some 146,000 Congolese into Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda since the beginning of 2012. In July, some 66,000 refugees experiencing attacks by the Allied Democratic Front in Kamango, in the northern part of North Kivu province, fled into Bundibugyo district in western Uganda. A robust relief operation was mounted, including a new transit centre where refugees are assisted before being transferred to the settlements. The decongestion of the transit centre and the expansion of service delivery in the refugee settlements are key priorities for the Office. Similar responses have been put in place in Burundi and Rwanda, where respectively 8,500 and 35,000 newly arrived Congolese refugees have been assisted in camps opened this year.

Violence, serious human rights violations and a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation have prevailed in the Central African Republic since the Séléka coalition overran Bangui on 24 March 2013. There are now an estimated 206,000 IDPs, and nearly 63,000 refugees from the Central African Republic have been registered in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Congo. While problems of access and insecurity in the Central African Republic hindered the aid effort, UNHCR was able to provide food and non-food items to more than 10,000 refugees in Bambari, Batalimo and Zemio camps in the central and southern parts of the country. In neighbouring countries, registering the refugees and providing them with documentation and assistance, mounting an effective emergency response, including through the establishment of camps and support to host communities, and relocating refugees away from volatile border areas, were among the Office's key priorities.

The East and Horn of Africa

In Sudan, a breakdown in law and order, growing competition over scarce resources and inter-ethnic conflict in Darfur resulted in 300,000 people being displaced internally and forced another 30,000 to flee to south-eastern Chad. Lack of access to the newly displaced in Darfur has prevented much needed assistance and protection interventions.

According to the Government of Sudan's estimates, some 340,000 persons have been affected by floods this year. Some 40,000 families received non-food items while another 13,000 will benefit from similar assistance in the coming weeks.

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N) continued to displace thousands of civilians in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile states and forced another 228,000 to cross the border into South Sudan (193,000) and Ethiopia (35,000).

In South Sudan, the remoteness of the refugee sites and the lack of basic infrastructure continued to be a major impediment to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The pre-positioning of food and relief items before the onset of the rainy season reduced logistical costs and provided uninterrupted assistance to refugees. There are still some 70,000 refugees in Yida despite the relocation of 22,000 refugees to Ajuong Thok and Kaya camps, in Unity and Upper Nile states respectively. The flood-prone camps of Jamman, Pariang and Nyeel were closed following the transfer of refugees to Ajuong Thok and Kaya camps.

Meanwhile, the security situation in Jonglei state significantly deteriorated since late 2012, with an increase in inter-communal violence and fighting between State security forces and armed groups. Over 100,000 people have been affected by the latest wave of violence in Pibor and Pochalla counties, which broke out in March 2013. Some 16,000 people from Jonglei sought asylum in the neighbouring countries.

In Somalia, a large portion of the population remains displaced, with some 1.1 million IDPs and nearly one million refugees in the region, including 22,500 who fled their homes thus far in 2013. The fall of militia strongholds in parts of southern and central Somalia and encouraging political developments, including the recent signing of an Agreement between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Jubaland Administration, have brought hopes for peace and stability. Despite these positive developments, many areas remain largely inaccessible due to security concerns and lack of administrative support structures. While spontaneous returns are taking place, especially from Kenya, some key areas of return in Somalia remain unsafe for any form of organized return.

West Africa

In May 2013, a state of emergency was declared in three states in north-eastern Nigeria in an attempt to curb the proliferation of violent attacks by Boko Haram. While the lack of access for humanitarian workers made it difficult to estimate the number of people who have been displaced internally, inter-agency assessment missions found that, by mid-2013, more than 10,000 Nigerians had sought refuge in Cameroon and Niger. All refugees were registered and received assistance, and UNHCR offices in both countries updated their respective contingency planning in the likelihood of further arrivals.

On a more positive note, the peaceful presidential elections held in Mali in July and August included the participation of thousands of refugees, facilitated by UNHCR. These elections raised some hope for the return and reintegration of the 342,000 IDPs and more than 175,000 refugees who were forced to flee their homes since January 2012, when violence erupted in the northern part of the country. Spontaneous returns have been reported and UNHCR, in close coordination with partners, is devising a regional strategy for the return and reintegration of Malian refugees.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving strategic priorities

(i) Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions

Comprehensive solutions

Africa continued to present opportunities to bring closure to protracted refugee situations. Positive developments include the tripartite meetings held among the Governments of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa and Zambia, for the resumption of the voluntary repatriation of some 25,000 Angolans in the region, mostly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Significant progress was also made towards local integration, with the granting of residence cards to 6,500 Angolans in the

Democratic Republic of the Congo, the confirmation of eligibility for more than 4,000 in Zambia and the formal commitment given by Namibia to offer local integration opportunities to these former refugees. In South Africa, while over 300 Angolans received immigration permits, negotiations for the possible extension of the 31 August deadline for the issuance of local integration documents are yet to be concluded.

While the repatriation of Liberian refugees -- started in 2004 -- was nearly completed in 2012, the full realization of local integration opportunities for those who opted to remain in host countries are still being pursued. UNHCR continued to work closely with Governments in the region towards this objective and the ultimate closure of the Liberia refugee chapter.

A Ministerial meeting to review the Comprehensive Durable Solutions Strategy for the Rwandan Refugee Situation, including the recommendation for the application of the cessation clauses as of 30 June 2013, was held in Pretoria, South Africa, on 18 April 2013. A key outcome was the call for a differentiated approach in the implementation of the various elements of the Strategy. As follow-up, a series of bilateral and tripartite discussions were held between the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Zambia, focusing on return and local integration modalities.

Voluntary repatriation

While returns to Angola continued at a slow pace with 205 people going home this year, nearly 5,000 Rwandans returned home since January, mainly as a result of the deterioration of the security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Equateur Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo saw the repatriation of some 100,000 Congolese from the Republic of Congo between May 2012 and the end of August 2013. An additional 10,000 refugees are still waiting to return home prior to the closure of the operation in 2013.

Local integration

The decision of the Government of Rwanda to issue passports to Rwandan refugees in countries of asylum is expected to increase interest in and facilitate local integration among Rwandan refugees. In addition, the possible review by the Government of Zambia of the local integration criteria for Angolan former refugees has the potential to bring solutions to thousands of Angolans.

In eastern Sudan, the Government has increased efforts in the implementation of the Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI). Some notable results have been achieved in access to basic services, agriculture, environmental management, vocational training, and institutional capacity-building. Government representatives are actively engaged in the joint programme, and partnerships have been established with civil society organizations. A monitoring and evaluation framework should be finalized in the third quarter of the year.

In West Africa, an innovative approach was piloted in Niger, where the authorities designated an enclave where thousands of nomadic refugees from Mali and their livestock could continue their nomadic lifestyle. The first caravan of some 800 animals accompanied by the herdsman, was moved to the area in May 2013, and a similar exercise was carried out two months later in the Tessalit region. In Benin, residence permits were issued for the nearly 4,000 refugees who opted for the local integration programme in the country.

Resettlement

Resettlement continued as an essential component of comprehensive frameworks for solutions in Africa, offering an important protection tool and an international responsibility sharing mechanism. Enhanced focus from resettlement countries and

UNHCR resulted in a total of 9,710 submissions of refugees in Africa in 2013 -- mostly Congolese from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Somalis, Eritreans, Ethiopians and Sudanese. However, persistent problems to access Somali refugees in Eritrea and Kenya and Eritrean refugees in eastern Sudan have limited the out-processing capacities of resettlement countries and required the introduction of innovative methodologies, such as video conferencing.

(ii) Promoting a favourable protection environment

The multiplicity of crises tested UNHCR's capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance and protection. Safeguarding protection space, as well as the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum have remained key challenges.

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 challenges for full or due compliance. 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. Thus, in an immigration control exercise launched in Tanzania in July, the Government cooperated with UNHCR and partners in responding positively to refugee protection concerns and cases. In Kenya, where the High Court quashed a directive issued in December 2012 for refugees in urban centres all to be relocated to the refugee camps in Dadaab and Kakuma, UNHCR continued to work with the authorities and a range of partners in realizing the ability of refugees to continue lawfully residing in urban settings.

Continued efforts to strengthen normative and institutional frameworks and to ensure a proper functioning of asylum systems brought positive results. In Botswana, UNHCR and the Government signed a memorandum of understanding for the establishment of a working group tasked with drafting asylum legislation. In Angola and Rwanda, UNHCR made substantive contributions to the drafting of the long awaited Refugee Bill and new refugee law, respectively. The Office also provided comments on the draft Constitution currently under revision in the United Republic of Tanzania. In August this year, the National Eligibility Commission in Djibouti resumed its activities after a suspension of several years.

Registering displaced people so as to understand better their demographic profile and needs, remained a key priority. In Kenya, the outcome of the mass physical verification and revalidation exercise that took place in Daadab from September 2012 to July 2013, showed a twenty percent decrease of the refugee population in all camps. A similar initiative is underway in Ethiopia, in partnership with WFP and other partners, with about 40 percent of the refugee camps completed thus far. The camp-based refugee population in Mozambique was also verified in mid-2013, while biometric registration started for Malian refugees in Burkina Faso in August and is expected to be completed in November 2013. In April 2013, the Government of Sudan and UNHCR started the joint registration of refugees and asylum-seekers living in Khartoum, an exercise that will be extended to other parts of the country, starting with eastern Sudan.

UNHCR intensified its cooperation with agencies and governments to address problems related to mixed migratory movements. In Southern Africa, the Office witnessed a range of policies, practices and steps forward toward legal reform designed to restrict access to asylum and protection space. A survey of mixed migration in the Southern Africa region was completed and is informing development of the Regional Strategy on Mixed Migration and Refugee Protection. In South Africa, where the Government's efforts to curb asylum applications resulted in stricter border controls, UNHCR advocated to re-open regional registration offices and shared best practices and minimum standards for establishing refugee reception centres.

The Office continued to direct an active protection stance to the human smuggling, abductions and trafficking of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers in eastern Sudan, a problem that stretches all the way through the Sinai desert. UNHCR has engaged partners and governments in preparing national plans of action to combat this phenomenon. In Sudan and Ethiopia, joint UNHCR-IOM strategies are close to finalization and will soon be launched. Meanwhile, the enhancement of security measures around the camps in eastern Sudan, combined with the prosecution of perpetrators and awareness-raising activities, led to a decrease in the number of kidnappings in Shagarab.

The promotion of accession and implementation of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa continued to be a key priority in the region. Thirty-nine member States have now signed the Convention, while 19 completed the ratification process. In partnership with the African Union, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs and the Brooking-LSE Project on Internal Displacement, UNHCR organized a training programme on IDP protection for government officials, members of parliament and national human rights institutions in Uganda in September.

Following the 2012 escalation of security incidents in the Dadaab camps, the Kenyan authorities, donors and UNHCR reinforced the Security Partnership Project and, as a result of these interventions, incidences of insecurity significantly decreased in 2013.

This year has also witnessed significant developments in the area of statelessness prevention and reduction. In Madagascar, UNHCR facilitated a workshop for local authorities that led to the adoption of a concrete plan of action to address statelessness related issues in the country. The Parliament of Côte d'Ivoire also voted in favour of the country's accession to the statelessness conventions. In South Sudan, UNHCR assisted the Government with the provision of nationality documents and passports to South Sudanese living in Sudan through the South Sudanese Consulate in Khartoum. The Office also supported the efforts of the Directorate of the Civil Registry in Sudan to improve the national civil and birth registration system.

C. Financial information

For its ongoing programmes in Africa, UNHCR's 2013 budget totals some US\$ 1.82 billion. However, the Office continued to respond to new emergencies, resulting in additional operational and budgetary requirements. Assistance and protection needs arising from the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo situations, as well as from the influx of Sudanese refugees from Darfur into Chad, led the Office to launch three Supplementary Appeals totalling US\$ 158.1 million.

As more and more financial, staff, and other resources are commanded by emergencies, less and less is left to be devoted to resilience, sustainability and, most important of all, solutions for refugees, including situations that could actually be brought to closure with sustained funding availability.