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Overview of UNHCR’s operations in Africa**A. Situational context**

Sub-Saharan Africa continued to experience a significant number of simultaneous large-scale refugee crises in late 2015 and early 2016. Ongoing emergencies in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Nigeria and South Sudan festered, while the conflict in Yemen also impacted several countries in the region. Protracted conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Somalia and Sudan required protection and assistance, as well as innovative approaches to solutions. UNHCR’s operations across the continent further focused on supporting the resolution of long-standing refugee situations, such as those affecting Angolans and Rwandans. As at mid-February 2016, there were almost 17 million persons of concern to UNHCR in sub-Saharan Africa, including an estimated 4.5 million refugees and at least 12 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Since April 2015, election-related violence in Burundi has forced 240,000 refugees to flee to the United Republic of Tanzania (130,300), Rwanda (72,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (22,000), Uganda (19,000) and Zambia (1,000). Given the ongoing violence and rising tensions, contingency plans are in place to respond to the needs of some 330,000 new arrivals from Burundi in neighbouring countries in 2016, with “worst case scenario” planning for up to 500,000 refugees fleeing. Preserving the civilian character of refugee camps is one of the main challenges for UNHCR and its partners in responding to this crisis.

The Central African Republic recently witnessed a wave of renewed violence ahead of long-awaited presidential elections, which are expected to put a new government in place by February 2016. In 2016, UNHCR and its partners foresee the return of between 200,000 and 250,000 IDPs to their places of origin in the Central African Republic, should the electoral process proceed smoothly and result into the establishment of a stable government. Some 50,000 refugees are also expected to return to the Central African Republic from asylum countries, mostly spontaneously. UNHCR may envisage facilitating voluntary repatriation in late 2016, if the situation permits. The main challenge foreseen for returnees is access to their former land and property.

Violence in Nigeria continued to displace a high number of civilians within the country and to the border areas of neighbouring countries. Shrinking asylum space and reduced humanitarian access due to attacks by non-State armed groups in the Lake Chad region were the main challenges faced by UNHCR and its partners in responding to the needs of Nigerian refugees and others affected by this crisis, including in Cameroon (host to 65,000 refugees), Chad (host to 14,000 refugees), and Niger (host to 100,000 Nigerian refugees and Niger returnees from Nigeria). These countries have also seen large numbers of their own citizens displaced internally following increased activity by non-State armed groups operating across Nigeria’s borders, and as a result as at February 2016 there were some 92,000 IDPs in Cameroon, 26,000 IDPs in Chad, and 50,000 IDPs in Niger.

In South Sudan, the peace process led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) progressed slowly. Violence and food insecurity continued to affect large areas of the country, triggering new waves of displacement. In early 2016, clashes between government forces and local youth in the state of Western Equatoria led to the internal displacement of some 15,000 people and forced nearly 10,000 people to flee abroad, including to the Central African Republic (1,500), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (6,000) and Uganda (2,000). As at February 2016, some 1.65 million South Sudanese were internally displaced and 757,000 were refugees, including 280,000 persons in Ethiopia, 96,000 in Kenya, 185,000 in Sudan and 195,000 in Uganda.

Violence in Yemen continued to cause many people to flee the country. The number of people departing to Somalia began to decrease in early 2016 (as at February 2016, there had been a total of 19,000 registered arrivals). However, significant numbers continued to flee to Djibouti, which has registered over 6,500 Yemenis and Somalis since April 2015. Ethiopia has received 11,000 people from Yemen since April 2015, while Sudan has seen 5,600 arrivals. The influx from Yemen to all receiving countries was of a complex nature and included returnees, refugees and third-country nationals.

The displacement situation in the southern Africa region remained generally stable, with the exception of growing tensions in Tete Province in Mozambique, which have caused more than 6,000 persons to flee to Malawi since mid-2015. UNHCR continued to work with governments and other partners to address issues relating to xenophobia in southern Africa. While sporadic incidents were reported in some countries, there were indications that the overall numbers of xenophobic attacks and other incidents had declined.

More generally, rising food insecurity for many refugees in Africa remained a serious concern. In 2015, 76 per cent of refugees in the region were impacted by ration cuts, and further reductions are planned for 2016. In most of the areas affected, the lack of food was causing refugees to adopt negative coping strategies. Levels of global acute malnutrition, stunting and anaemia remained well above global standards. A targeting strategy is being developed to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees are prioritized for support. Cash distributions are also being considered to increase food security and nutrition in areas affected by food ration cuts.

B. Achieving the global strategic priorities

(i) Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions

Comprehensive solutions

In order to mobilize international assistance to support Somali refugees and their host communities, UNHCR and the European Union co-hosted a ministerial pledging conference entitled “Somali Refugees: Conditions for Voluntary Return” in October 2015 in Brussels. Donors pledged a total of US\$ 105 million against the US\$ 500 million in estimated requirements for the implementation of the “Integrated action plan for the sustainable return and reintegration of Somali refugees from Kenya to Somalia”, which was developed by the Tripartite Commission on Voluntary Repatriation of Somali Refugees (composed of the Governments of Kenya and Somalia, together with UNHCR). Between January 2016 and December 2017, projects under the action plan are expected to foster the safe and dignified return and sustainable reintegration of 135,000 Somali refugees from Kenya in nine geographical areas of Somalia which have been prioritized for return. Activities under the Action Plan will also support the protection and resilience of refugee and host communities in Kenya, including with regard to their security.

UNHCR supported the participation of Central African refugees – primarily hosted in Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of the Congo – in the Central African Republic’s 2015 presidential elections. Sixty per cent out of some 54,300 Central African refugees of voting age in asylum countries participated in the first round of the elections. Their participation in national elections plays an important role in enhancing national reconciliation, peacebuilding and durable solutions.

In October 2015, UNHCR facilitated a regional ministerial-level meeting in Geneva to discuss implementation of the “Comprehensive solutions strategy for Rwandan refugees”. The African Union and 12 delegations from countries hosting large numbers of Rwandan refugees across the region, together with the Government of Rwanda, agreed to bring the comprehensive solutions strategy to conclusion as soon as possible, and no later than 31 December 2017.

Voluntary repatriation

Voluntary returns from the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya to Somalia have continued. More than 8,000 Somali refugees have repatriated to southern Somalia (Baidoa, Luuq, Kismayo and Mogadishu) since the beginning of the voluntary repatriation operation in December 2014, and in the month of January 2016 a record number of almost 2,000 returns was recorded. In Ethiopia, 10,000 Somali refugees have expressed interest in voluntary repatriation. UNHCR will be working with the Governments of Ethiopia and Somalia in 2016 to establish a tripartite commission and conclude a tripartite agreement which will provide a framework for the returns.

In December 2015, the voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees from Liberia resumed after an 18 month suspension due to the outbreak of Ebola in the region. By early February 2016, 2,260 Ivorian refugees had returned from Liberia. Some 100 Ivorian refugees also returned from Benin, Ghana and Togo in 2015.

In 2015, 4,650 Rwandans voluntarily returned home, bringing the total number of returns since 2000 to 164,250. The biometric registration of Rwandan refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was suspended in July 2015, due to insecurity in North Kivu. Pending the results of this exercise, the estimated number of Rwandan refugees across the region remained at approximately 72,000. One of the commitments made by governments at the ministerial-level meeting in 2015, referred to above, was to take steps to increase the confidence of Rwandans to return home and to extend support to those willing to repatriate until 31 December 2016.

Some 800 refugees returned from the Zemio refugee camp in the Central African Republic to Equateur Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the second half of 2015. A local integration strategy will be implemented in 2016 for the 2,650 refugees remaining in Zemio. Some 900 former refugees are expected to return to the Zambesi region of Namibia in 2016, following the invocation by the Government of Botswana of the cessation of refugee status for Namibian refugees at the end of 2015.

Local integration

The comprehensive solutions strategies for Rwandan and Angolan refugees include a strong local integration component. UNHCR continued to work closely with governments and relevant stakeholders on documentation and socio-economic development to facilitate local solutions, with support from the international community.

The local integration of Angolan refugees in Zambia continued with the expectation that at least 10,000 persons would benefit from this process. Local integration is also being pursued for some 1,000 former Angolan refugees in Namibia with the assistance of UNHCR.

Resettlement

The overall number of resettlement submissions from Africa increased by 130 per cent between 2012 and 2015, and a further increase is expected in 2016. In 2015, UNHCR submitted over 38,700 individual cases for resettlement from Africa and more than 23,900 refugees departed to resettlement countries. The majority of refugees referred for resettlement were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Somalia and then Eritrea.

In 2016, UNHCR will continue to focus on implementation of the multi-year plan to enhance resettlement opportunities for 50,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo living in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Some 42,880 submissions were made between 2012 and 2015, and it is therefore expected that the target of 50,000 places will be met in 2016. Refugees from Eritrea and Somalia, as well as from Darfur in Sudan, will also continue to be prioritized for resettlement, as will refugees of other origins facing particular protection risks.

(ii) Promoting a favourable protection environment

Asylum

While the protection environment generally remained strong across the region, there were concerns about shrinking asylum space in certain countries as a result of measures taken to address security issues. UNHCR continued to work with governments to strengthen national screening capacity for refugees and asylum-seekers, and to support efforts to enhance security in refugee-hosting areas while preserving access to asylum and protection.

Efforts continued to ensure the fair and efficient processing of asylum claims in national asylum systems in southern Africa. The increase in the number of asylum-seekers in South Africa – the Government recently estimated that there were nearly 800,000 asylum-seekers in the country – has led the Government to review its asylum policy, while also redoubling efforts to strengthen its national procedures.

While many States in Africa are signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, several States, particularly in southern Africa, maintain reservations to relevant provisions concerning freedom of movement and access to employment. National asylum legislation and regulations in several countries are, however, in the process of being revised and updated, with the support of UNHCR.

Mixed movements

UNHCR has actively engaged in regional dialogues and consultative processes on mixed movements in Africa, with a view to responding to protection concerns. Enhanced cooperation with development actors, such as the World Bank, and multi-year planning to resolve situations of protracted displacement, are essential in managing mixed movements in Africa.

The Valetta Summit on Migration, held in Malta in November 2015, sought to strengthen cooperation on migration and forced displacement between Africa and Europe. The summit resulted in an action plan outlining a number of priority initiatives, as well as the establishment of a EUR 1.8 billion “Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa”, including for North Africa. The European Union aims to support initiatives to address challenges relating to forced displacement and onward movements in three geographic areas: the Sahel region, Lake Chad and the Horn of Africa.

Statelessness

The right to a nationality is increasingly recognized in the African region as an important human right. Most sub-Saharan African States are party to relevant international instruments (20 African States are parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and 13 are parties to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness). The adoption of a Protocol on the Right to Nationality in Africa by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in August 2015 has paved the way for the text to be examined and eventually approved by African Union Member States in 2016.

Many positive steps in regional efforts to combat statelessness have been reported recently. Several African Union Member States, including Liberia, Madagascar and Somalia, are in the process of reforming their nationality laws, including with a view to allowing women to pass on their nationality to their children on an equal basis as men. A number of other African Union Member States, including Burundi, Sudan and Togo, have enshrined the principle of gender equality in their constitutions, a positive step which may form the basis for subsequent reforms to nationality laws. In November 2015, the Parliament of South Africa co-hosted, together with UNHCR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an important conference on "Ensuring everyone's right to nationality: the role of parliaments in preventing and ending statelessness". The conference helped to raise awareness and provided parliamentarians with many examples of positive legislative reform to prevent and reduce statelessness.

C. Financial information

The 2016 comprehensive needs assessment budget for Africa approved by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in October 2015 was US\$ 2.29 billion. By January 2016, this budget had increased by US\$ 197 million for supplementary budgets in response to the situations in Burundi (US\$ 155 million) and Yemen (US\$ 42 million).

In 2015, emergencies accounted for almost half of UNHCR's expenditures in Africa. The Office was only able to allocate 10 per cent of funding to solutions and livelihoods interventions. In 2016, UNHCR will continue to prioritize life-saving protection activities and assistance to people displaced by violence and conflict in the region. However, increased resources will be necessary to strengthen durable solutions for hundreds of thousands of displaced persons across the continent.
