

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

19 September 2017
English
Original: English and French

Sixty-eighth session
Geneva, 2-6 October 2017

Update on UNHCR's operations in Africa

A. Situational analysis including new developments

In 2017, the Africa region continued to host the largest number of persons of concern to UNHCR.¹ At the end of 2016, the number of displaced and stateless persons was estimated at almost 19.6 million. New displacement was largely due to conflict in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an upsurge of violence in the Central African Republic as well as food insecurity combined with conflict in Somalia and South Sudan.

Food insecurity remained a concern throughout the region, particularly in the Horn of Africa where severe drought is projected to continue into early 2018. A famine was declared in parts of South Sudan in February 2017, and parts of northern Nigeria and Somalia were at risk of famine. By the end of December 2016, approximately 3.5 million out of 5.1 million refugees across 20 countries in Africa were receiving food assistance from the World Food Programme. As of June 2017, several countries in the region faced cuts to food assistance, including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania. More countries are expected to be affected by cuts if additional resources are not made available.

Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region

Reports of human rights violations continued in Burundi, and over 418,000 Burundians remained in exile in neighbouring countries. While some spontaneous returns were reported, the need to maintain asylum space for Burundian asylum-seekers remained vital. Only 15 per cent (\$37 million) of the total needs (\$248 million) of Burundian refugees in the region are currently being met.

UNHCR remained concerned over the resurgence of violence in parts of the Central African Republic and the targeting of civilians and humanitarian workers. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) increased by more than 25 per cent to over half a million. In the neighbouring countries, there were almost half a million refugees from the Central African Republic. By the end of July 2017, another 70,000 new refugees had fled to Cameroon, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conflict in the Kasai region had displaced some 1.4 million people internally between March and September 2017, bringing the number of IDPs to 3.8 million. People from the Kasai region mainly fled to Angola, where 33,000 were registered as refugees. Influxes into Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania also continued, and the overall number of Congolese refugees in the region reached almost 620,000.

¹ In the present update, the Africa region refers to sub-Saharan Africa only.

East and Horn of Africa

The security situation in South Sudan continued to deteriorate, further exacerbated by the lack of food. This led the South Sudan emergency to become the fastest growing displacement crisis in the world. A third of South Sudan's population of 12 million was displaced, while more than half of the population was affected by the crisis. Almost 2 million South Sudanese lived in host countries as refugees or asylum-seekers and another 2 million were internally displaced. Over the past year alone, an average of 1,800 South Sudanese arrived in Uganda every day. In addition to the million hosted in Uganda, more than a million South Sudanese were hosted in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan.

In spite of encouraging political developments, the security situation in Somalia remained volatile. Together with food insecurity, this triggered further population displacement, bringing the total number of displaced to some 1.5 million IDPs and 900,000 refugees.

West Africa

A complex humanitarian emergency continued to affect some 7.1 million people across the Lake Chad Basin, including 2.3 million refugees, IDPs and returnees. UNHCR voiced concern about forced and self-organized returns to Nigeria, noting that the minimum conditions of safety and dignity were not yet met.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions

The decision by Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania to implement the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF), contained in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, has renewed the region's focus on durable solutions and strengthened partnerships to support solutions-orientated initiatives. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) Special Summit on Somali refugees, held in Nairobi March 2017, saw the adoption of the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia.² The Declaration contains strong commitments in support of durable solutions, as well as the inclusion of refugees in national systems and development planning.

The Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region held in February 2017, sought to identify medium to long-term development solutions for displaced people affected by the Boko Haram insurgency and to highlight the continued need for political and financial support to address the humanitarian challenges.

In June 2017, Uganda co-hosted a Solidarity Summit on Refugees with the United Nations to showcase Uganda's progressive refugee policy. The policy allows for the accommodation of refugees in settlements and grants them the right to move about freely and to work.

At a ministerial meeting in September 2016, African States hosting large populations of Rwandan refugees committed to a firm deadline of 31 December 2017 to implement the comprehensive strategy for Rwandan refugees who fled the country between 1959 and 1998. UNHCR is making all possible efforts to support countries of asylum in finding solutions, including through local integration and voluntary repatriation, before the planned disengagement. Despite the challenges in finding solutions for the remaining caseload, over 5,700 Rwandan refugees repatriated in the first half of 2017, mostly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

² See <https://igad.int/communique/1519-communique-special-summit-of-the-igad-assembly-of-heads-of-state-and-government-on-durable-solutions-for-somali-refugees>.

Voluntary repatriation

Cameroon and Nigeria signed a tripartite agreement for the voluntary return of Nigerian refugees in March 2017, providing the necessary legal framework. Unfortunately however, renewed conflict has stalled the process.

Following increasing cross-border movements and spontaneous returns between Chad and the Darfur region of Sudan, the two Governments signed tripartite agreements with UNHCR in May 2017, for the voluntary returns of Chadian refugees from Sudan and of Sudanese refugees from Chad. Preparations, including mapping of areas of return, finalization of standard operating procedures for the repatriation movements and harmonization of assistance packages at the sub-regional level, were put in place for the first movements, which are foreseen from Sudan to Chad in the last quarter of 2017.

The total number of returns from Kenya to Somalia since the start of assisted voluntary repatriation rose to around 70,000 by the end of July 2017. In addition, some 200 Somali refugees returned voluntarily from Djibouti in May 2017.

Some spontaneous returns took place from the United Republic of Tanzania to Burundi, resulting in discussions between the two Governments and UNHCR in order to ensure that the refugees could make informed and voluntary decisions about return and that such returns could take place in safety and dignity.

Elsewhere, some 32,000 refugees returned from Cameroon to the Central African Republic (mostly spontaneously), and around 20,300 returned to Côte d'Ivoire, mainly from Liberia.

Local integration

In the spirit of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, African States were supported by UNHCR to move away from a care and maintenance approach towards inclusive development planning and measures to help build the resilience and self-reliance of refugees alongside hosting communities.

Some 162,000 Burundian refugees have been naturalized in the United Republic of Tanzania. However, continued financial support is required to complete the pending naturalization of approximately 60,000 refugees. Zambia has agreed to locally integrate protracted refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which would lead to a total of 30,000 refugees in the country having access to this solution.

Resettlement

In 2016, UNHCR submitted the cases of some 44,000 refugees in sub-Saharan Africa for resettlement, which represents a 13 per cent increase compared to 2015. Over 38,900 refugees departed for resettlement, including nearly 21,900 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and over 9,800 Somali refugees. By mid-2016, UNHCR had surpassed its goal of referring at least 50,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo for resettlement, mainly to the United States of America, under the multi-year sub-regional initiative for the enhanced resettlement of Congolese from the Great Lakes region.

In the first half of 2017, the cases of over 8,400 refugees were submitted for resettlement, and over 9,400 refugees departed to resettlement countries.

Promoting a favorable protection environment

The pledges made by African States at the September 2016 Leaders' Summit on Refugees, together with the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, helped encourage a strengthening of the protection environment for refugees in the region in 2017. UNHCR continued to advocate strong support for host States to maintain the momentum created by the New York Declaration and the launch of the CRRF.

Nevertheless, core protection challenges still remained in the African region, with instances of refoulement, restraints on freedom of movement and physical and administrative obstacles

precluding refugees and IDPs from gaining access to asylum procedures, legal protection and assistance.

Countries such as Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia took positive steps in 2017 towards amending their national refugee legislation and to strengthen access to local services. South Sudan issued the regulatory framework necessary to implement its refugee and asylum policy.

Several governments in West Africa continued to address gaps in refugee protection identified within their national legislative frameworks and to improve the implementation of decrees and internal regulations. In 2016, the Gambia, Sierra Leone and Togo revised their national asylum legislation in order to improve efficiency and reduce the backlog of pending decisions on asylum claims.

UNHCR's policy on alternatives to detention was rolled out in Botswana, South Africa and Zambia, where initiatives were taken to identify and encourage alternatives to detention, especially for children.

Statelessness

Building on the success of the Abidjan Declaration of February 2015, a regional ministerial meeting was held in May 2017 in the Gambia, validating the Banjul Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness in West Africa by 2024. It was ratified by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Heads of State in July, making it a legally binding instrument.

Together with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), UNHCR organized a regional workshop on statelessness in Kinshasa in June 2017. Participants adopted a draft declaration on the eradication of statelessness as well as a regional plan of action.

In November 2016, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) passed a resolution on the prevention of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons in the region, as well as a strategic plan of action to address mixed and irregular migration 2015-2018.

In further positive developments, the Kenyan Government recognized the Makonde, a stateless minority group in the country, as Kenyan citizens. In August 2017, Burkina Faso became the latest West African country to accede to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and in July 2017, Sierra Leone's Parliament reformed its nationality law to allow mothers to transmit nationality to their children on an equal basis with fathers.

Mixed movements

The movement of refugees and migrants across the Sahara and through the central Mediterranean Sea towards Europe led to wide-scale human suffering and abuse by smugglers and traffickers. While people moving towards Southern Africa and Yemen through the Gulf of Aden faced similar dangers, these events remained largely under-reported.

UNHCR has developed a cross-regional plan to address movements from the East and Horn of Africa and the West Africa sub-regions, through the Central Mediterranean route to Europe. The aim is to mitigate protection risks along the routes, strengthen service delivery, increase the impact of information campaigns and identify adequate solutions. UNHCR's recent appeal is expected to boost its engagement in this area.

UNHCR continued to strengthen its coordination and information-sharing mechanism with the International Organization for Migration to better monitor movements of refugees and migrants across the Gulf of Aden.

C. Financial information

In October 2016, the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme approved a budget of \$2,335.9 million for Africa. Owing to new and ongoing emergencies, the budget increased to \$2,925.5 million by end July. This was mainly due to supplementary budgets established for emergencies in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, as well as the central Mediterranean route. As at 31 July 2017, voluntary contributions earmarked for UNHCR's operations in Africa amounted to \$804.1 million.
