

UPDATE # 4
Bureau for Africa
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Togolese refugees in Benin and Ghana

Number of refugees

The number of refugees is still on the rise though the daily influx has slowed down. The total number of refugees stands at 22,139 refugees, including 11,458 refugees in Benin and 10,681 in Ghana. Refugees in Ghana continue to shuttle on a daily basis between Togo and Ghana.

Togo

Security

The security situation in Togo is reported tense and calm, with no demonstration and acts of public violence. According to a humanitarian source, the situation outside Lomé is also tense, quiet and not catastrophic. Inhabitants expressed scepticism though regarding the evolution of the situation. It is reported and confirmed by UN sources that many arrests are still taking place at night in Lomé, which may be the main cause for the civilians to seek refuge in neighbouring Benin and Ghana. The Office of the UNHCHR informed that the Committee Against Torture would be examining the situation in the coming days. A Human Rights Advisor (UNHCHR) was deployed in Lomé to assist the UN Country Team until mid-July.

IDPs and return of refugees

Though the Government of Togo officially encouraged all refugees to return to their homeland, it is felt that prospects for an early return are very slim.

A humanitarian source informed on Wednesday 04th May that there were no visible movements of IDPs in the areas they visited in the North and Eastern parts, though confirming movements of Togolese nationals to neighbouring countries. However, unconfirmed reports indicate that people from Lomé are returning to their villages. In the coming days, some agencies are planning to carry out a general assessment of the situation in their respective areas of intervention out of Lomé as part of their routine activities.

It is not clear whether the incidents and prevailing situation in Togo has affected the refugees in

Togo (1100 urban refugees in Lomé). RR Cotonou team, which is overseeing the refugee caseload in Togo, is making efforts to contact its implementing partners in Lomé to collect information on their situation.

Benin

Refugee movements

In Benin, there are 11,458 refugees as of Thursday 05th May in the evening. The situation at Hilakondji continued to be reported as very calm with no arrivals from the lagoon and other unofficial borders. Of the total 11,458, approximately 300 were at Hilakondji border by the end of the day; 1,344 at Come site; and 2,146 at Lokossa site. The remaining 7,499 (67% of the overall population) are assumed to be residing with relatives or host families. In Cotonou 321 Togolese refugees were registered by the Protection Unit, but were not added to the overall statistics as many of them are thought to have already registered in Hillakondji. They are reportedly staying with family and friends in Cotonou.

Protection and community services

The security situation in Come is still reported as weak, as many people are able to enter the site undisturbed. Assurances were given by the local authorities and a group of parliamentarians who visited the site that the camp security would be strengthened.

A total of 157 pregnant women have been registered to date. The total number of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) registered is 110, out of which 4 were reunified.

Young students who sought refuge in Benin will soon face problems to take their exams and the significant number of UAMs may be linked to the issue of education.

UNICEF in collaboration with Plan International carried out a teachers' and animators' training session for 43 Togolese teachers identified in Come and Lokossa sites.

Assistance

Hilakondji (transit site located at church grounds): the site hosts approximately 200 persons.

Lokossa : UNHCR is opening a Field office in Lokossa today. There are 2,146 refugees in the camp, of which 2,060 individuals/ 1,008 families were registered by UNHCR and the Government. Some 338 tents have been set up. The transfer of refugees to the site is now limited due to the need to clear more land and spread out the tents. At present Lokossa has a capacity for 2,500 people. The installation of additional latrines and water taps is ongoing to meet the needs of the growing refugee population in the site.

Come : there are 1,344 persons (501 families), all registered by UNHCR and the Government. The registration process at Come has been finalized. The distribution system will need to be corrected and refugees will need to start getting involved in the food distribution process, as some problems were reported during the distribution, done by tent rather than by family (distribution card). A communal cooking place needs to be set up in order to avoid fire hazards in the tented areas.

Ghana

Refugee movements

The total number of arrivals stands at 10,681 as of Thursday 05th May in the evening, including 218 new arrivals during the day. Nearly all arrived in good condition and are still able to find shelter and basic assistance with relatives and friendly host communities. Over the past days the number of arrivals has greatly reduced with a continuous trend downwards. The general situation in the relevant areas, including Aflao, is calm and orderly.

Protection and community services

Joint registration efforts by the Ghana Immigration Service, UNHCR and the Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment continue in a harmonious and effective manner.

Some 800 refugees with special needs are supported through targeted interventions and linked up with host communities through a support network, created in cooperation with local authorities, chieftaincy structures and church groups. Two unaccompanied minors were so far identified (one from Benin, the other from Cote d'Ivoire) and appropriate measures for their protection and for the reunification with their

families in their respective home country are being taken.

Assistance

Site planning : As a matter of policy, agreed by all key stakeholders, strong preference is given to the settlement in host families and communities rather than in camp sites. However, extensive planning and site preparation has been undertaken in close cooperation with all concerned. Three sites have been identified: preparations are underway for a potential camp site and the operational base close to Adidome for the possible arrival of up to 3,000 persons, which could eventually be extended to up to 8,000 persons. Similar measures are being pursued in parallel, but with a time lag, with regard to the second site close to Aka/Jasikan, while a third site (near Kpedzeglo, some 15 km north-east of Adidome) is considered as a further option, should the capacity of the other two sites be fully utilized. As agreed in the joint Government-UN contingency plan and as a matter of policy, each camp site should ideally accommodate a maximum of 6,000-8,000 persons only.

Shelter : Considering cost-effectiveness and the shortage of tents in stocks in the sub-region, it was decided to use bamboo and plastic sheeting for shelter purposes. Water tanks and related equipment have already been installed at the Adidome site. A stockpile of essential items is being built up close to the Adidome site, for immediate distribution to up to 3,000 persons.

Food : WFP has a stockpile of high energy biscuits and dry rations in a warehouse in Tema. High energy biscuits for 10,000 persons for two days and 16 mt dry rations (cereals, pulses, oil and salt) have furthermore been pre-positioned along the border area in the south of the Volta Region. High energy biscuits are currently being distributed with the assistance of the Ghana Red Cross to needy arrivals in a targeted manner to only a few hundred persons, but it is anticipated that the needs will increase, as arrivals and host families/communities may not be able to cover a more extended period with their available resources.

Distribution arrangements for arrivals in host communities : The cooperation among WFP, UNHCR, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the National Catholic Secretariat (NCS) and Care is being enhanced with regard to assessment, distribution and monitoring systems, particularly

relating to the more complex situation of arrivals who have settled in host families/ communities. A MOU between UNHCR, WFP, CRS and the Government of Ghana is being finalized as a basis for eventual food aid interventions.

CARE conducted an initial assessment mission during the past last week and identified focal NGOs in 9 designated border zones between Aflao and Ho. A community monitoring tool was developed to provide further information in each zone on available resources, referrals for services, and monitor needs and changes in the situation in the border communities.

Health : WHO has deployed an expert to the operational area to further coordinate with regional and district health authorities. UNICEF is sending an emergency kit for the Ketu district hospital as well as 300 adult hygiene kits and 50 baby hygiene kits to Aflao. MSF Belgium has fielded a mission to the Volta Region on 5 May in order to assess the medical situation, but MSF will not intervene unless there is a full emergency.

Regional developments

Logistics support

The 10 truck convoy from Accra and loaded with NFIs for 5,000 individuals (tents, blankets, jerrycans, kitchen sets, mosquito nets, sanitary clothes, sleeping mats and soap) reached Benin on Wednesday 04th May in the evening. Eight trucks have been unloaded so far. There are enough mats, soap, mosquito nets, blankets, sanitary napkins in stocks (Accra) for the next two months. Accra agreed to use plastic sheeting and bamboos for the time being to accommodate all refugees in need of shelter. There is no need for more tents for now, but UNHCR Liberia may send 480 tents to Ghana in the coming days and IFRC may consider sending tents from a warehouse in Dubai (where they have 8,000 tents) as need be.

Other developments

Human resources and technical support

The three remaining ERT members (Administration, Field and Logistics) will arrive today in Benin to join the three first members deployed last week end (protection, programme and community services). Other staff members, including a site planner (from Liberia), the Senior Regional Registration Officer, the Regional Telecom Officer and the Senior Regional Health Coordinator (all of them from Accra) are

travelling this week to provide temporary support to the team in Benin, where refugees are accommodated in sites more than in Ghana where most refugees are welcome by relatives. In Ghana, the team is reinforced with one Emergency Officer and one site planner from HQs.

Other agencies are reinforcing their presence on the ground, mainly in Benin (IFRC, UNFPA, WFP), but also in Togo (OCHA, ICRC, UNHCHR) and Ghana (ICRC, WFP).

Emergency funds

The Desk has sent the LOI (project description) to the field, and a new allocation will need to be requested, as the funds released from the UNHCR operational reserve (0.5 million US Dollars), has already been spent. HQs advised UNHCR teams on the ground to submit their financial and resources requirements from now until the end of 2005 for a tentative refugee population of 20,000 refugees in each neighbouring country. This work is now in progress and a first draft was shared with HQs.

Humanitarian agencies are in favor of launching a flash appeal as soon as possible, since the emergency is already taking place in Ghana and Benin. They are all considering that the flash appeal should be an inter-agency initiative and be envisaged at the regional level to include Togo, Benin and Ghana. WFP, which has already issued two EMOP respectively for Benin and Ghana, worth 500,000 USD each, plans to include them later in the inter-agency appeal. UNICEF emphasised that the flash appeal would need to encompass not only emergency activities but also repatriation, reintegration and peace building activities, which would need to be planned as of now.

IFRC has issued today an emergency appeal to provide support to 10,000 refugees in Benin, worth USD 755,900.

PI and External relations

The UNHCR PI TV crew is returning to HQs on Saturday, after spending one week in refugee sites in Benin, while the Regional PI Officer will proceed to Ghana from Benin.

OCHA, WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, ICRC, IFRC, are participants to the Togo Task Force meetings, organised three times this week at UNHCR Headquarters.

The OCHA Emergency Coordinator in New York will brief the Security Council on the humanitarian aspects of the Togo crisis on Tuesday 10th May. Togo will also be on the agenda of the next ECPS meeting on Monday 09th May and the next Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) meeting on 11th May.