

Republic of the Congo

Main Objectives

- Support the Government in the implementation of national refugee legislation and the establishment of a National Eligibility Commission.
- Provide support to the Government with refugee registration and issuance of legal documents to all refugees in the country.
- Promote local settlement activities and facilitate voluntary repatriation, when feasible, for Angolan refugees from Cabinda.
- Provide humanitarian assistance to refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR).
- Provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
- Promote local settlement assistance to urban refugees and ensure access to the refugee status determination.
- Undertake reception and reintegration of Congolese returnees, mainly from Gabon and DRC.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

Although the political situation remains somewhat fragile in the Republic of the Congo (RoC), prospects for lasting peace have been growing steadfastly following the signature of the peace and cease-fire agreements in late 1999. A Committee of Reconciliation was created in 2000 and the long-awaited National Dialogue which took place in March 2001 under the chairmanship of President Omar Bongo of Gabon, led to the adoption of a new Constitution. The social and economic situation is evolving positively with the injection of foreign investments. A census was recently undertaken to establish a population profile that could be used for socio-economic development planning and for the preparation of the elections, foreseen this year.

These developments have increased the numbers willing to repatriate among the refugees who are still in DRC and

PLANNING FIGURES		
Population	Jan. 2002	Dec. 2002
Angolan Refugees	15,000	10,000
Refugees from CAR	1,675	1,675
Congolese (DRC) refugees	84,280	54,280
Rwandan/Burundian Refugees	7,050	6,800
Urban Refugees	1,900	2,300
Returnees from Gabon	500	17,555
Total	110,405	92,610

TOTAL REQUIREMENTS • USD 6,926,406

Gabon. During 2001, a tripartite agreement that provides the legal framework for voluntary repatriation from Gabon was signed between the Governments of Gabon and RoC and UNHCR – inter-regional meetings have taken place to prepare for repatriation.

The aborted coup d'état in late May 2001 in the Central African Republic resulted in the sudden arrival of 1,675 refugees in northern RoC and in the capital Brazzaville. In view of the political situation in CAR, voluntary repatriation is not expected in the near future.

Constraints

It has to be noted that RoC is a country in the process of recovery and that hosting refugees represents a burden to its socio-economic situation. The presence of other humanitarian and development organisations in RoC is very limited and the local authorities lack resources and capacity to efficiently deal with refugee issues. This still fragile socio-economic situation renders local integration of urban and Angolan refugees in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire difficult.

The main constraint for the return of Congolese from Gabon is the poor state of the road infrastructure in Niari region, which will need to be rehabilitated prior to starting repatriation by the road.

Access to the Congolese refugees scattered along the Ubangui river has been difficult in northern RoC due to the insecurity prevailing in the Equator Province in neighbouring DRC. Although the situation has substantially improved, it is still fragile, and precautionary security measures have to be taken. The refugee hosting areas consist mainly of marshland, limiting the availability of agricultural land and thus the possibilities for the refugees to achieve self-sufficiency. The facilitated repatriation to Cabinda (Angola) will very much depend on the security situation in Angola, and could be put on halt if the safe return of the refugees can not be guaranteed.

STRATEGY

UNHCR will support the Government in the functioning of the National Eligibility Commission and the reactivation and strengthening of the National Committee for Assistance to Refugees to address individual protection cases. The registration/documentation exercise will be completed in the beginning of this year.

Refugees hosting area near the Congo River. *UNHCR/B. Bossard.*



Angolan Refugees

Of the some 15,000 Angolan refugees in the RoC, UNHCR is assisting 3,575 in the Pointe-Noire region. The unassisted urban Angolan refugees settled in Pointe-Noire benefit from international protection. UNHCR will continue to facilitate voluntary repatriation to the Cabinda province.

The 3,575 refugees will be assisted to become self-reliant through the provision by the local authorities of sufficient land for crop production, and the establishment of revolving funds. UNHCR will carry out training activities to help refugee committees assume responsibility for management of the education and health facilities under supervision by the local education and health authorities. Women's capacity to generate income will be strengthened through skills-development programmes, including training in business management and support for establishing micro-enterprises. Protection of women and children will be further reinforced through awareness-raising activities and a strengthened follow-up on reported cases of abuse. UNHCR will also support the empowerment of women to strengthen their involvement in the management of refugee sites. School furniture and teaching material will be supplied to the refugee schools in collaboration with UNICEF. To preserve the environment, both refugees and local communities will be encouraged to create environmental committees that will pay particular attention to natural resource management. Refugees will be encouraged to set up tree nurseries and to use energy-saving methods for domestic activities (cooking, building). UNHCR expects that all Angolan refugees will have become completely self-reliant by the end of the year, and that UNHCR's assistance will be limited to ensuring the international protection of the refugees.

Refugees from CAR

Following the failed *coup d'état* in late May 2001, some 1,675 refugees fled to Betou in northern RoC and to Brazzaville. Apart from reinforcing its capacity to respond to potential new influxes from CAR, UNHCR activities will focus on site development and subsequent construction of adequate shelter. Particular attention will be given to ensuring adequate education activities that will allow young refugees to remain in northern RoC. UNHCR will develop more self-sufficiency activities to settle the refugees in Betou and Impfondo. In Brazzaville, UNHCR will develop a communal approach and provide assistance to the refugees as a group.

Congolese Refugees from DRC

Some 84,280 refugees from the DRC, who fled during 2000 following upsurges of conflict in the Equator Province, have sought asylum along some 700 km of the Ubangui river and 80 per cent of their locations can only be reached by river. The

improved security situation on the river border in RoC has increased UNHCR's accessibility to them.

Implementation of the tripartite agreement signed on 10 April 1999 is still ongoing, and those refugees willing to repatriate will receive a return package. For those remaining, UNHCR will aim to ease their integration in the local communities where they currently live through various assistance activities. In order to raise awareness among the local authorities, UNHCR will organise training sessions on refugee rights and obligations. The Office will also rehabilitate local health structures and schools, which will be managed jointly by refugee committees and government officials. Access to land will be negotiated with the local authorities and subsequently granted to some of the refugees, while fishing material will be distributed to others.

Supplementary food will be distributed to refugees and to vulnerable groups within the local population, in collaboration with WFP. Domestic items will be distributed to refugees who have not benefited from this form of assistance previously and the entire refugee population will benefit from a distribution of soap once every two months. UNHCR will rehabilitate the only hospital in northern RoC and thereby complement the efforts of other partners to reinforce the current health structures available. Current collaboration with UNICEF to provide school material for primary education, and with UNESCO to improve teachers' capacity through organisation of training will be pursued, and efforts will be made to integrate refugee students in the local secondary schools. Protection of women will be improved through information and follow-up on gender violence. Women's equal access to job opportunities and awareness and education campaigns will be developed through acquisition of basic French language skills. Particular attention will be given to care of unaccompanied minors as well as tracing and family reunification activities. These activities will be carried out in close collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross. Various cultural and educational activities will be organised, paying particular attention to the participation of girls and school drop-outs. In co-ordination with other UN-agencies' national programmes, immunisation and nutritional follow-up of all children under age five will be ensured. The creation of environmental committees where both refugees and local communities participate in the planning of natural resource management will be supported, and environmental education will be included in the school curriculum. Community-based rehabilitation programmes and household support will be provided to the disabled. The participation of elderly refugees as skills-trainers for development of micro-projects and advisers for the youth will be promoted.

Should other UN agencies and development agencies integrate refugees as beneficiaries of their annual programmes in sectors such as health, education, agriculture and environment, UNHCR will progressively phase out its assistance.

Urban Refugees

UNHCR will continue to provide assistance to the refugees to help them to achieve self-sufficiency and to settle locally. The activities will include vocational skills training and establishment of revolving funds. UNHCR will ensure that the refugees have access to refugee status determination procedures and will continue to provide medical and educational assistance as needed. Women and their families will be assured of adequate accommodation to prevent any kind of exploitation, regular home visits will be undertaken and counselling provided. Resettlement options will be explored where appropriate. Urban refugee children will be integrated into government-managed schools when possible and special attention will be given to raising AIDS awareness. Tracing of family members of separated children will have priority. Disabled and other people with special needs will be cared for through national existing structures. UNHCR will assist the government to register and issue documents to urban refugees.

Returnees to RoC

UNHCR will assist with initial rehabilitation of returnee areas through construction of transit and reception centers as well as health care facilities and water-point supplies. The disabled will be given particular attention during the repatriation process and will be provided with individual support to ease their reintegration. Returning children and adolescents will be assisted to integrate into the national education system. As the majority of refugees will have returned by the end of the year, UNHCR expects to terminate its repatriation assistance then.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management Structure

UNHCR's programme in the Republic of Congo will be implemented by 58 staff members: 10 international, 45 national, and three UNVs through the main offices in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire and three field offices (Betou, Impfondo and Loukolela), north of the capital. The UNHCR operation in RoC will continue to be managed by the Representative from UNHCR in Kinshasa, DRC.

Co-ordination

In the spirit of the PARinAC, UNHCR will give preference to collaboration with competent local NGOs. Emphasis will be given to the development of local NGOs' capacity to ensure sustainability and continuity of support following the return of the refugees and UNHCR's phase-out. UNHCR in Brazzaville collaborates closely with bilateral representations, other UN-agencies and NGOs. The close co-operation with FAO and WFP will continue. UNICEF and WHO will

remain the main partners in the education and health sectors. UNHCR has initiated incorporation of environmental concerns in the UN Plan for 2002 and will continue to strive towards co-operation with specialised agencies in sustainable natural resource management.

OFFICES

Brazzaville
Betou
Impfondo
Loukolela
Pointe Noire

PARTNERS

Government Agency
<i>Commission nationale d'assistance aux réfugiés</i>
NGOs
<i>Commission épiscopale pour les migrants et les réfugiés</i>
International Rescue Committee
Others
<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i>
IFRC

BUDGET (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	2,045,607
Community Services	181,313
Crop Production	20,219
Domestic Needs	241,355
Education	164,792
Forestry	6,740
Health	301,581
Income Generation	37,741
Legal Assistance	138,963
Operational Support (to Agencies)	486,140
Sanitation	30,000
Transport/Logistics	1,116,760
Water	22,696
Total Operations	4,793,907
Programme Support	2,132,499
Total	6,926,406