

# Republic of the Congo



spurred on the social integration of refugees and helped to reduce conflict, especially land-use disputes.

- Over the course of the year 290 Congolese refugees returned, mainly from Gabon.
- Some 7,100 DRC Congolese refugees were repatriated from RoC, in addition to another 780 refugees, who returned mostly to Angola, but also to Rwanda, the Central African Republic and other countries. All the necessary infrastructure was put in place for a wider repatriation operation for DRC Congolese refugees.
- The application of the Bamako Initiative, a programme aimed at involving communities in primary health care, allowed the procurement of medicines to complement those provided by UNHCR.

## Working environment

### The context

The overall security situation in RoC continued to improve throughout 2005. In October, Bernard Kolélas, former opposition leader and founder

of the *Ninja* militia, was permitted to return to RoC from exile and was officially pardoned in December. Other key opposition leaders, however, still remain to be pardoned before a lasting national reconciliation can take place. Several hundred armed *Ninja* fighters who controlled the Department of Pool continued to loot trains and rob civilians or humanitarian workers. Nevertheless, the ceasefire between the Government and the *Conseil national de résistance* (CNR) which controls the *Ninjas*, led by Reverend Frédéric Bitsangou known as Pasteur Ntoui, continued to hold.

## Main objectives

In 2005, UNHCR aimed to provide international protection and assistance to refugees hosted in the Republic of the Congo (RoC); facilitate the voluntary return of refugees, especially from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Angola, if permitted by conditions in their areas of origin; assist the repatriation and reintegration of Congolese refugees from Gabon; and build the capacity of local authorities to carry out refugee status determination (RSD).

## Impact

- Throughout the year, UNHCR continued to provide international protection to over 63,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in the country and assistance to more than 51,000.
- Agricultural and fishing activities simultaneously benefited refugees and the local population. This

Despite a GDP growth of an estimated four per cent, economic and social conditions remained dismal, with some 70 per cent of an estimated population of 3.9 million considered to be living in poverty. In terms of their status and rights, the refugee population continued to enjoy fair treatment from the Government, notwithstanding some negative trends which became increasingly apparent.

## Constraints

The availability of transport services in RoC did not improve significantly. Logistical problems affected activities in the North, where transport is mainly by boat – and where low water levels slowed down the repatriation operation for DRC Congolese refugees and pushed up costs – and in the South, where the roads are poor. The uncertain and inadequate rail connection between Pointe Noire and Brazzaville caused delays in the shipment of goods and continued to force UNHCR to use air transport, which again pushed costs up. In addition, insecurity and lack of infrastructure in Equateur Province in DRC limited the number of returnees from the North of RoC to some 7,100. In some instances, refugees also cited the harvest cycle and completion of their children's school year as reasons for postponing their return.

## Funding

A series of budget cuts amounting to seven and a half per cent by the end of the year caused a reduction of essential assistance and repatriation activities. The cuts mainly affected the procurement of medicines, assistance to those with special needs, assistance to urban refugee students and the provision of livestock.

## Achievements and impact

### Protection and solutions

UNHCR's protection activities in 2005 focused primarily on finding durable solutions for those refugees who found themselves in a protracted situation. The most significant operation was the launch of a facilitated voluntary repatriation operation for DRC Congolese refugees living in the North-East of the country and who had registered to return to Equateur Province in DRC. Structures were put in place to assist some 24,000 DRC Congolese refugees to return home in 2005. However, given persisting insecurity in some parts of Equateur Province in DRC, logistical and weather constraints as well as the delayed deployment of UNHCR staff in areas of return, only 7,100 refugees were repatriated to DRC in 2005.

UNHCR actively promoted the voluntary repatriation of Angolan and Rwandan refugees throughout the year. Registration and mass information campaigns targeting these groups were intensified and several voluntary repatriation movements were organized. By the end of the year, over 600 refugees had been assisted to return to Angola, primarily to Cabinda Province. Various obstacles hampered the return of Rwandan refugees (only 60 chose to return in 2005).

UNHCR also continued to encourage Congolese refugees to return to RoC from neighbouring asylum countries, primarily Gabon, Benin and DRC. Despite mass information campaigns and the creation of reintegration projects in key returnee areas, only 290 Congolese refugees returned home in 2005. Economic conditions and lack of basic facilities in the areas of return were the main deterrents. Roughly 10,000 remain in Gabon, where they benefit from better socio-economic conditions than in Congo and where UNHCR and the Gabonese Government still subsidize health and education.

In order to improve the protection of some 63,000 refugees hosted by RoC, UNHCR assisted the Government in designing new refugee identification cards. These cards were distributed to all registered refugees in the urban areas of Brazzaville and Pointe Noire, and distribution also began in other parts of the country.

UNHCR intervened as appropriate in cases involving physical safety, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), arbitrary detention, discrimination, and denial of economic, social and cultural rights, working closely with relevant Government and NGO partners to ensure that appropriate measures were taken.

### Activities and assistance

**Community services:** Over 100 micro-projects were launched for 195 persons with special needs and existing programmes were followed up. Several projects involved the setting up of bakeries, artisanal soap-making, sugar retailing, or selling fritters. Food was provided for 200 hospital patients. Community agents sensitized camp-based refugees on the system of transferring responsibilities to community leaders, and insisted on

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Total in country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	DRC	56,400	50,100	51	58
	Rwanda	6,500	100	41	38
	Angola	3,000	1,000	46	46
Asylum-seekers	DRC	2,900	-	-	-
	Côte d'Ivoire	400	-	-	-
	Various	400	-	-	-

the necessity of involving women in community activities.

An action plan for the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence was developed for 2005. Staff were trained on SGBV issues and almost 14,000 refugees, more than half of them women, were sensitized on the problems linked to sexual and gender-based violence.

The first campaign in the fight against HIV/AIDS was launched in October 2005. Using participatory methods, three training modules on basic knowledge about HIV/AIDS and gender issues were developed.

**Crop production:** About 80 per cent of the refugees were involved in agricultural and fishing activities. UNHCR provided material assistance for 57 groups of refugee farmers, including training provided by two agricultural technicians. Very limited agricultural assistance was also provided for some returnees.

**Domestic needs and household support:** A limited number of refugee families with special needs received various household utensils or subsistence allowances.

**Education:** More than 14,600 refugee students were enrolled in school during the academic year and benefited from the distribution of more than 1,200 textbooks and other school materials. All 23 schools in the region were rehabilitated. Another 240 beneficiaries attended literacy classes; 1,300 female students participated in training sessions on SGBV, HIV/AIDS and other issues.

**Fisheries:** To promote self-sufficiency, 26 fishing groups were formed, composed of refugees and nationals, men and women; 17 fishing groups were supported with fishing gear.

**Forestry:** An assessment of the environmental conditions in refugee camps in Bétou, Impfondo, Loukoléla and Pointe Noire was conducted in 2005. Because of budget cuts, other activities, such as reforestation and the distribution of fuel-efficient stoves, could not be carried out as planned.

**Health and nutrition:** Most of the refugees had access to health care in more than 20 health posts, mobile clinics and through the work of 15 trained health committees. The mortality rate and the crude mortality rate were below the indicated standard rates. The Bamako



A refugee man from the Democratic Republic of the Congo mends the roof of his hut at a refugee settlement in the village of Malebo. UNHCR / J. Ose

Initiative was applied, with refugee patients paying a contribution of 200 CFA Francs for each consultation, which enabled the community health care system to procure additional medical supplies.

**Income generation:** Sensitization sessions in the Impfondo area led to a reimbursement rate of more than 70 per cent of 110 loans dating back to 2003. This money was thus available to support various groups among the refugee population. In Pointe Noire five small-scale businesses were created by refugees; in Brazzaville a training centre was opened. Training sessions for 50 refugees were held, covering sewing, cutting, knitting, embroidery, soap-making, shoe repair and leather-tanning.

**Legal assistance:** Further to significant interventions in individual protection cases, UNHCR offered training and staff support for its principal governmental counterpart and implementing partner, the *Comité national*

*d'assistance aux réfugiés*. UNHCR also established a network of local human rights NGOs to which refugees with legal problems were referred. These NGOs did their utmost to provide assistance despite financial constraints. UNHCR also advised on the drafting of a comprehensive refugee law and participated in discussions on procedures and a timetable for enactment of the law.

**Livestock:** Chickens kept by Congolese returnees were vaccinated.

**Operational support (to agencies):** Implementing partners were given financial support to carry out programme activities. Training was given to their staff and UNHCR flights transported goods and personnel to less accessible field locations.

**Shelter and infrastructure:** Two transit facilities were set up for Angolan refugees and Congolese returnees from Gabon, and several miles of unusable roads were repaired.

**Transport and logistics:** Two warehouses were rented in Impfondo and Loukoléla; this kept the loss of goods below one per cent. Transport fleets were kept in both locations for the repatriation operation.

**Water/Sanitation:** All refugees had access to latrines and to drinking water (11 out of 39 wells were rehabilitated). Every family contributed an average of 100 CFA Francs monthly for maintenance of the latrines.

## Organization and implementation

### Management

UNHCR maintained field offices in Bétou, Impfondo and Loukoléla, in addition to the representation in Brazzaville. Moreover, two antenna offices managed by an implementing partner were maintained in Pointe Noire and Dolisie. The activities were managed by 12 international and 52 national staff, as well as seven international and two national UNVs. The presence of four protection officers and one community services officer allowed a better focus on the monitoring of refugee rights and the strengthening of community activities; 13 general service posts, one logistics officer post and one repatriation officer post were created to work on repatriation to Equateur Province.

### Working with others

UNHCR worked with five implementing partners, two of them international and three national. UNHCR also closely cooperated with the National Refugee Commission on various issues including the distribution of identity cards.

## Overall assessment

Given the socio-economic conditions in their areas of origin, Congolese refugees were hesitant about returning from Gabon. However, UNHCR's advocacy efforts with the RoC Government resulted in the rehabilitation of roads by the Ministry of Social and Humanitarian Affairs, which will facilitate future returns. Due to logistical constraints and insecurity, only 7,100 DRC Congolese refugees were repatriated in 2005 but the necessary infrastructure for the repatriation of larger numbers was put in place.

Despite the difficulty of access, UNHCR was able to monitor the rights of the DRC refugees and to intervene as appropriate following any violations. Solutions were generally found for cases of harassment, or disputes over fishing or land rights. Attempts to address incidents of sexual and gender-based violence were not helped by the absence of a functioning local judiciary.

### Offices

**Brazzaville**  
Bétou  
Impfondo  
Loukoléla

### Partners

#### Government agencies

*Comité national d'assistance aux réfugiés*

#### NGOs

*Agence pour l'assistance aux rapatriés et réfugiés au Congo*  
*Commission d'entraide pour les migrants et les réfugiés*  
International Rescue Committee  
*Médecins d'Afrique*

#### Others

*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*

## Budget, income and expenditure (USD) Annual and supplementary programme budgets

	Final budget	Income from contributions <sup>1</sup>	Other funds available <sup>2</sup>	Total funds available	Total expenditure
Annual programme	6,422,970	1,620,347	4,801,396	6,421,743	6,421,743
Supplementary programme <sup>3</sup>	2,387,539	701,890	1,058,356	1,760,246	1,760,246
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,810,509</b>	<b>2,322,237</b>	<b>5,859,752</b>	<b>8,181,989</b>	<b>8,181,989</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

<sup>2</sup> Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

<sup>3</sup> The supplementary programme figures apply to the Supplementary Appeal for Repatriation and Reintegration of Congolese (DRC) Refugees.

Note: The supplementary programme budget does not include a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

## Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects			Prior years' projects
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total	Annual and supplementary programme budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,205,579	210,105	2,415,684	0
Community services	171,641	29,766	201,407	94,218
Crop production	41,235	0	41,235	15,741
Domestic needs and household support	69,505	807	70,312	21,357
Education	311,690	0	311,690	193,287
Fisheries	5,534	0	5,534	0
Forestry	3,430	5,011	8,441	0
Health and nutrition	299,556	32,217	331,773	137,860
Income generation	31,083	0	31,083	19,929
Legal assistance	175,025	11,593	186,618	35,516
Livestock	133	0	133	35,988
Operational support (to agencies)	538,739	75,342	614,081	215,211
Sanitation	18,462	0	18,462	8,184
Shelter and infrastructure	10,967	45,238	56,205	36,338
Transport and logistics	469,616	739,143	1,208,759	139,375
Water	33,150	998	34,148	14,708
Instalments with implementing partners	658,843	406,201	1,065,044	(967,712)
<b>Sub-total operational activities</b>	<b>5,044,188</b>	<b>1,556,421</b>	<b>6,600,609</b>	<b>0</b>
Programme support	1,377,555	203,825	1,581,380	0
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>6,421,743</b>	<b>1,760,246</b>	<b>8,181,989</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Cancellation on prior years' expenditure</b>				<b>(107,140)</b>
<b>Instalments with implementing partners</b>				
Payments made	2,351,975	639,275	2,991,250	
Reporting received	(1,693,132)	(233,074)	(1,926,206)	
<b>Balance</b>	<b>658,843</b>	<b>406,201</b>	<b>1,065,044</b>	
<b>Prior years' report</b>				
<b>Instalments with implementing partners</b>				
Outstanding 1 January				965,206
Reporting received				(967,712)
Refunded to UNHCR				(36,933)
Adjustments				39,439
<b>Balance</b>				<b>0</b>