



# Central Africa and the Great Lakes

## Working environment

In 2006, for the first time in many years, there were no major refugee crises in the region. Repatriation was the main focus of UNHCR's work in the region.

In Burundi, the September peace agreement between the Government and the *Front national de libération* (FNL) had not, at the time of writing, had a major impact on repatriation. Although UNHCR began promoting repatriation to Burundi in June, many Burundian refugees, mainly in the United Republic of Tanzania, took a "wait-and-see" attitude. They preferred not to join approximately 318,000 of their compatriots who have returned home since 2002 and reintegrated in their areas of origin with UNHCR's assistance.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the first free elections in 40 years were held on 30 July, but required a second round which was due to take place in late October. Although the first round of elections was on the whole peaceful, it has not yet had a positive impact on the return of refugees. From January to September 2006, only about 25,000 Congolese refugees repatriated, mainly from Tanzania and the Republic of the Congo (RoC). However, all DRC refugees in Sudan who wished to return to their country did so. Total returns to the DRC from across the region since 2005 number some 72,000. Organized repatriation from Zambia to specific areas in Katanga may start at the end of the year after the signing of a tripartite agreement by UNHCR, the DRC and Zambia.

Burundi

Central African Republic

Chad (see under Chad/Sudan situation)

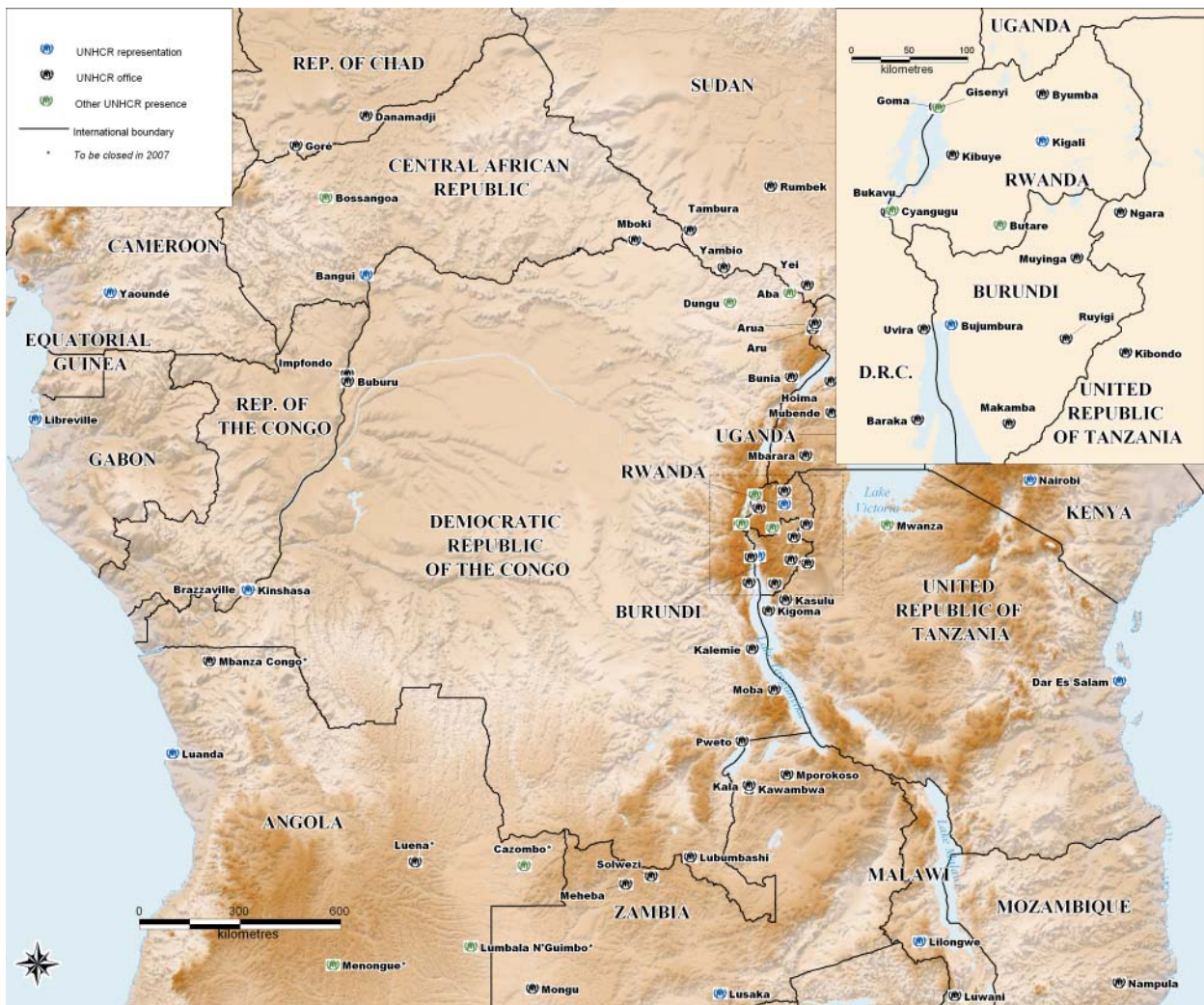
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Gabon

Republic of the Congo

Rwanda

United Republic of Tanzania



Central Africa and the Great Lakes

By the end of 2006, the organized return of 63,500 Angolan refugees from the DRC should be completed. In 2007, UNHCR will turn its focus to the local integration of those who have opted not to return to their homeland.

With regard to internally displaced persons (IDPs), in 2006 the DRC became one of the first countries in which the “cluster approach” was used to assist and protect them. UNHCR, as the cluster co-chair on protection, together with the UN Mission in the Congo (MONUC), and early recovery (with UNDP), focused primarily on coordinating protection mechanisms at the provincial level. This involved better monitoring as well as noting gaps and mobilizing resources to address them.

In Rwanda, 2007 is the year in which the *Gacaca* process (whereby traditional courts try suspected perpetrators of the 1994 genocide) is expected to end. In total, some 800,000 cases will be tried in the traditional courts. Drought and fear of the *Gacaca* had propelled an outflow of 20,000 people to Burundi in 2005 and 2006. With the support of UNHCR, the Government of Burundi had started individual refugee status determination (RSD) procedures, but only about 3 per cent of asylum-seekers were recognized as refugees. The majority of the rejected asylum-seekers have gone back to Rwanda.

The Republic of the Congo (ROC) remained generally stable despite some incidents in the Pool region. On the other hand, the Central African Republic (CAR) continues to suffer from insecurity and instability, especially in

the northern part of the country. In early 2006, a surge in rebel attacks triggered army reprisals against the civilian population, which the military suspected of supporting the rebels. This led to new population displacements.

The total number of CAR refugees in southern Chad now stands at close to 60,000. They have not returned home because of the security situation in their country. There are also an estimated 50,000 IDPs scattered throughout the northern region of the CAR who are dependent on international aid. The planned return of Sudanese refugees from CAR also suffered setbacks because of the CAR Government’s security concerns, but in September the authorities gave clearance for the returns to resume.

### Strategy

In 2007, UNHCR will continue with voluntary repatriation programmes for Burundian, Congolese (DRC) and Rwandan refugees as well as Sudanese refugees in the Central African Republic. It will also prepare for the eventual return of the refugees from CAR — if security permits — to the country’s northern region. For those refugees not wishing or unable to return, the Office will work with concerned governments to identify durable solutions, especially for Angolan refugees in the DRC and Congolese refugees in Gabon.

UNHCR will continue to promote the return of Burundian refugees from Tanzania, Rwanda and the DRC. It is expected that 80,000 Burundians will repatriate in 2007, mainly from Tanzania. UNHCR will also facilitate the group resettlement in the United States of up to 13,000 Burundian refugees who have experienced multiple displacements and are currently in camps in Tanzania.

By the end of 2006, there will still be approximately 350,000 DRC Congolese refugees in the Great Lakes region and in Southern Africa. In view of the security situation in the regions of Ituri, North Kivu and north of Uvira, no large return activities from Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi are planned. However, should the situation change for the better, UNHCR will conduct repatriation from these countries.

UNHCR will provide return kits to returnees and transport them to their villages. It will also, in coordination with other agencies involved in the cluster approach, provide limited reintegration assistance in those communities with the highest number of returned refugees and IDPs.

Although UNHCR has been promoting returns to Rwanda since 2002, more effort is needed to overcome refugees' fears. UNHCR will continue to promote voluntary repatriation from all neighbouring countries, and will continue its returnee monitoring programme in areas of return. The information gathered from the latter will be shared with countries of asylum. For those for whom return is not a possibility, prospects for local integration will be explored in 2007.

Most Sudanese refugees currently in the DRC and CAR are eager to return. Their organized repatriation should continue through 2007.

In Gabon, the process of making Congolese refugees from the RoC self-reliant will continue throughout 2007. With the issuance of refugee identity cards by the Government in September 2006, the prospects for more work opportunities and a reduction in protection problems have improved.

In order to strengthen protection in the region, the Office will improve the RSD and registration process in CAR, Gabon and Tanzania. UNHCR will also continue participatory assessments that are mindful of age, gender and diversity. It will improve measures to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, especially in IDP situations, and extend its sensitization and training activities to combat impunity.

UNHCR will work with government and other partners to integrate refugees into national responses to HIV/AIDS. Regional initiatives such as the Great Lakes Initiative Against AIDS will be pursued. Partnerships with national organizations aim to ensure equal access to services for refugees and surrounding populations.



Arriving in Baraka, DRC, back from exile in Tanzania. In 2007, UNHCR expects some 98,500 Congolese refugees to return from neighbouring countries. *UNHCR / S. Schulman*

## Constraints

The volatile situation in the region makes reliable planning difficult. The result of the second round of presidential elections in the DRC may either have a very positive impact on returns or lead to a dramatic rise in insecurity and an outflow of refugees. Access to the refugees and IDPs in the DRC and CAR will remain difficult because of the presence of armed elements. The sustainability of return will depend to a large extent on the availability of funds for reintegration activities.

## Operations

Operations in **Burundi**, the **DRC**, and **Tanzania** are covered in individual country chapters.

**Rwanda** is still host to 43,600 refugees from the DRC and 3,000 urban refugees of other nationalities. UNHCR will continue to protect and assist these groups.

The general improvement of the security situation in North Kivu and Bukavu after the election may create a suitable environment for a tripartite agreement between Rwanda, the DRC and UNHCR for the voluntary repatriation of DRC refugees hosted in the three camps in Rwanda. About 12,000 refugees are expected to repatriate in 2007.

To further promote the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees, UNHCR will continue information campaigns and conduct "go-and-see" visits. Meanwhile, in **Burundi** the Office will involve other agencies in reintegration activities to ensure that return is sustainable.

The Office will also promote the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees, coupled with the signing of tripartite agreements with Kenya and South Africa. These activities should result in the voluntary return of some 5,000 Rwandan refugees – of an estimated 57,000 still living in exile in 21 African countries.

In the **Central African Republic**, UNHCR provides international protection and assistance to some 12,000 Sudanese refugees in the Mboki settlement, approximately 700 Congolese (DRC) refugees in the Molangue settlement and an estimated 5,500 urban refugees of different nationalities in Bangui. However, repatriation of both Sudanese and Congolese refugees should reduce the figure by early 2007.

By September 2006, more than 2,100 Sudanese refugees from Mboki had repatriated to South Sudan, and in 2007 UNHCR will complete the voluntary repatriation of the remaining Sudanese refugees. In the meantime, the Office will end its involvement in the voluntary repatriation of the residual Congolese (DRC) refugees within the framework of the multi-year strategy for the DRC operations. The Molangue refugee settlement will be handed over to the CAR authorities in December 2006.

**Gabon** hosts a population of 13,800 refugees and asylum-seekers. After the verification and revalidation of over 8,500 refugees, and with the support of UNHCR,

the Government will issue identity cards which will entitle their holders to obtain residence permits that allow them to work. UNHCR will also help strengthen the *Commission Nationale pour les Réfugiés* (National Refugee Commission), and support the RSD process in the country.

The **Republic of the Congo** hosts more than 63,000 refugees. The biggest group is from the DRC, followed by refugees from Rwanda and Angola. UNHCR will continue to facilitate voluntary repatriation and pursue durable solutions for those refugees not willing to return home.

UNHCR, the Government and NGO partners conducted a participatory assessment in both rural and urban areas which identified significant protection risks, especially of sexual exploitation and abuse due to extreme poverty. The Office will conduct awareness raising campaigns on this issue for local authorities and civil society. To combat poverty, it will support projects to boost economic stability.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Burundi	37,234,162	23,792,407
Central African Republic	5,428,940	2,013,589
Chad	74,337,462	69,368,365
Congo, Republic of the	6,817,537	4,947,726
Democratic Republic of the Congo	18,336,569	11,520,750
Gabon	3,620,963	2,274,905
Rwanda	6,724,352	4,927,870
United Republic of Tanzania	27,998,719	24,357,957
Regional activities <sup>1</sup>	9,659,400	8,775,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>190,158,104</b>	<b>151,978,569</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes assistance to refugees in the Central Africa and Great Lakes region, such as resettlement, repatriation, care and maintenance, as well as support costs for UNVs and consultants, and light aircraft charter costs.

