

A person is standing on a boat, holding a flag. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building. The entire image has a warm, orange-toned overlay.

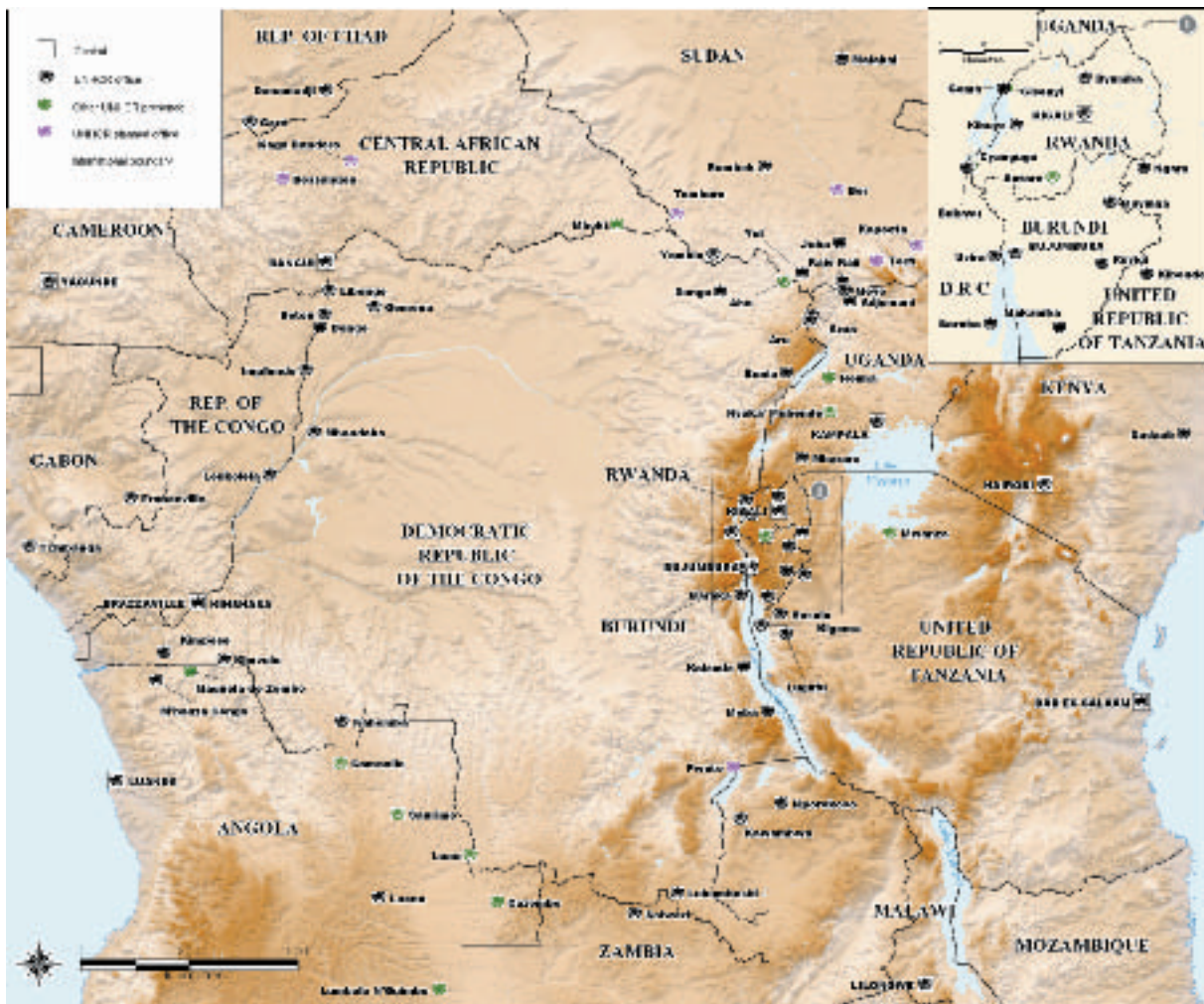
Central Africa and the Great Lakes

Recent developments

During 2005, the Central Africa and the Great Lakes subregion experienced further stabilization and progress towards peace and democracy. No major refugee crisis occurred in the region in 2005 although about 10,000 Central Africans fled into southern Chad following security incidents in villages near the border and despite some influxes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) into Rwanda and from Rwanda to Burundi. UNHCR has therefore been able to continue its ongoing activities and initiate new repatriation operations in the region.

A new Government took over from the transitional authorities in Burundi following successful elections in August 2005. The continued presence and support of the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB), followed by the deployment of over 5,000 troops within the country in early 2005, has resulted in an improved security situation. Peaceful parliamentary and presidential elections also took place in the Central African Republic (CAR) and presidential elections in the United Republic of Tanzania (Tanzania) and Gabon are due to be held before the end of 2005. The Republic of the Congo (RoC) has remained generally stable despite recurrent security incidents in the Pool region.

Burundi
Central African Republic
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Gabon
Republic of the Congo
Rwanda
United Republic of Tanzania



In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, joint actions by the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and the DRC national army have led to greater stability overall, despite continuing insecurity in some areas such as Ituri and parts of the Kivu provinces. The stronger presence of MONUC and the ongoing disarmament and *brassage* process (integration of former armed groups into the national army) will hopefully contribute toward further improvement. The DRC transition process advanced further with the adoption of a constitution and the organization of voter registration in preparation for elections scheduled for 2006. At the time of writing, more than 15 million voters are reported to have registered, including a number of spontaneously returning refugees.

Though the political situation in Rwanda has remained stable, there was an influx of Rwandan asylum-seekers in Burundi, following the introduction of the *Gacaca* (community tribunals which are providing an opportunity for genocide

survivors, defendants and witnesses to present their cases in an open and participatory environment). In early April of this year more than 8,000 Rwandans originating from Butare and Gikongoro Provinces fled to the Northern Provinces of Burundi, seeking asylum. However, in June, the authorities of Rwanda and Burundi decided to forcibly return all the asylum-seekers, branding them "illegal migrants". Some 5,000 asylum-seekers were eventually deported back to Rwanda while others went into hiding. At the time of writing, approximately 3,000 newly arrived Rwandan asylum-seekers are seeking effective protection and assistance in Burundi. Burundian authorities have agreed to individual refugee status determination procedures.

Under the ongoing repatriation to Burundi, to date more than 53,000 Burundians returning mainly from camps in Tanzania and Rwanda have reintegrated in their areas of origin with the support of UNHCR. After a mid-year slowdown, returns regained momentum with the August presidential elections.



Republic of the Congo: Refugees returning home to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) aboard a transfer boat on the Oubangui River. They will stop at a transfer centre in Monzombo, DRC, and from there, many will be taken by truck to their home villages. Others will have to walk. *UNHCR / J. Ose*

With regard to repatriation to the DRC, a tripartite agreement signed with Tanzania in late January 2005 was a welcome addition to the two agreements already signed in 2004 with CAR and RoC. Similar agreements are also being prepared, notably with Sudan. The official launch of facilitated repatriation from Tanzania to safe areas of return in southern Kivu is scheduled for mid-October 2005. It is worth noting that since October 2004, more than 20,000 refugees have already returned home to the DRC.

During 2005, UNHCR also introduced the new registration system (PROFILE) in Tanzania, RoC, DRC, Gabon and CAR and conducted verification exercises for the majority of the refugee populations in

these countries. The age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy will also be implemented in Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and DRC by the end of the year. The remaining countries in the region will be targeted in 2006.

Strategic objectives

Ensuring effective protection through access to asylum procedures and prevention of *refoulement* will remain at the core of the protection strategy in the region. In addition, UNHCR will pursue its programmes to address sexual and gender-based violence, with a particular focus on reinforcing



referral mechanisms and designing preventive measures aimed at addressing root causes of the problem. In refugee settlements, particular attention will continue to be paid to the issue of preserving the civilian character of asylum and combating child recruitment, in close collaboration with Government counterparts and concerned agencies. UNHCR will also ensure better registration and documentation of refugees. Through contingency planning, the Office will ensure effective and predictable responses to mass movements.

In view of the fact that statelessness or disputed nationality may be a key factor in the resolution of various conflicts in the Great Lakes, UNHCR will

pursue accession by States in the region to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of statelessness.

Similarly, the emphasis on sharing burdens and responsibilities more equitably and redoubling the search for durable solutions will be pursued, notably through the strategic use of resettlement. The group processing of the 1972 Burundian refugees in Tanzania and the Gatumba survivors in Burundi will be undertaken in 2006.

In 2006, UNHCR will continue to work on improving conditions in areas of return in the DRC, and ensure that return is sustainable, notably through reintegration assistance and returnee monitoring. It is the Office's objective to include in its repatriation programme all neighbouring countries of asylum, in the hope that up to 123,300 persons can return in 2006. The Burundi repatriation operation will be mainstreamed into the Annual Programme and most Burundian refugees in camps are expected to repatriate before the end of 2006. While UNHCR will provide limited repatriation assistance to the Burundian refugees living in the settlements in Tanzania since 1972, the Office will advocate for further socio-economic integration and the naturalization of those unable or unwilling to repatriate.

With regard to Angolans, the repatriation of the majority of camp-based Angolan refugees will have been achieved in 2005. The focus will then shift to finding a durable solution for those living outside of established camps in DRC, and for the Cabinda refugees in RoC. Following "go and see visits" organized in 2005, it is expected that some Cabindais refugees will eventually opt for repatriation. UNHCR will continue to advocate for the legal integration of those unwilling to repatriate.

Despite the death of Vice President John Garang, which raised concerns about the future of the Sudanese peace process, most of the Sudanese refugees currently hosted by the DRC are eager to return. UNHCR is gearing up for the organized return which should be commencing at the end of 2005 and will continue through 2006.

Following the elections in CAR, and provided that the Government is able to restore security in the northern region, UNHCR will establish a presence. It will then implement activities, within a UN collaborative approach, to prepare the ground for the return of CAR refugees from Chad and Cameroon and, if conditions are met, will start facilitating returns towards the end of the year.

In terms of durable solutions for the remaining Rwandan refugees found mainly in the DRC and RoC, only a limited number of individuals are currently repatriating, mainly from the DRC. More concerted efforts by UNHCR and other actors are needed to overcome fears and renew the momentum for return. Additional tripartite agreements will be signed and UNHCR will continue to promote repatriation through "go and see" visits, information campaigns and increased returnee monitoring. Nevertheless, prospects for local integration of some of these refugees will need to be further explored in 2006.

The search for durable solutions for Congolese refugees in Gabon, including repatriation and local integration, will continue throughout next year.

In 2006, UNHCR will continue to implement its multi-year HIV and Refugees Strategic Plan. Implementation of subregional AIDS initiatives, such as the Great Lakes Initiative on AIDS (GLIA) and the Oubangui-Chiari Initiative, will begin in 2006, after years of planning and preparation. This will ensure more comprehensive and integrated HIV activities for refugees and surrounding host communities. At country level, UNHCR will continue to advocate for refugees and other persons of concern to be included in the host countries' National Strategic Plans and will pursue funding opportunities.

With regard to internally displaced people (IDPs), the current population in the subregion is estimated at 3.5 million. IDPs will benefit from returnee monitoring and community-based assistance in areas where refugees are returning. In the DRC, UNHCR and UNDP jointly chair the inter-agency working group on reintegration, focusing on strategies to benefit all returnee groups, including IDPs.

Operations

Operations in **Burundi, CAR, DRC, RoC, Rwanda** and **Tanzania** are covered in individual country chapters.

At the time of writing **Gabon** had almost completed the verification of the refugee and asylum-seeker population, with the registration of some 13,800 refugees and asylum-seekers mostly from the RoC. At most only a few hundred failed to reach the registration points during the main exercise. Other main groups of refugees come from Chad and DRC.

The protection environment is far from ideal, and is marred by frequent reports of harassment, detention, and theft of refugees' belongings by security forces. UNHCR has also been concerned that the protection climate might deteriorate in the run-up to the December presidential elections due to fears that foreigners living in Gabon, particularly Congolese, will be made political scapegoats. UNHCR has conducted sensitization campaigns among refugees to discourage them from any involvement in the elections and has strengthened its information activities and training of authorities and security forces on refugee rights and the difference between a refugee and an immigrant. As the lack of recognizable documentation frequently led in the past to harassment by security forces, UNHCR has secured a commitment from the Government to issue ID cards to refugees on the basis of the verification exercise. With support from UNHCR, the Government will issue these cards, hopefully before the presidential elections. Possession of an ID card will also entitle refugees to obtain a *carte de séjour* (residence card), which will allow them to work. While few refugees will gain access to formal employment, these documents will facilitate self-employment and socio-economic integration. To further improve refugee protection, UNHCR will in 2006 continue to strengthen the *Commission nationale pour les réfugiés*, provide specific protection training to authorities and security forces and organize information/sensitization campaigns among the media, civil society and politicians to combat negative attitudes. UNHCR

also intends to strengthen and support the RSD process in Gabon.

In terms of durable solutions, UNHCR will further shift its focus from repatriation towards local integration as the refugees remaining in Gabon are not willing to repatriate (only about 300 refugees are expected to have repatriated by the end of 2005). Resettlement will continue to be used as a protection tool but the criteria will also be

expanded to include lack of durable solutions on an individual basis. UNHCR's assistance programme will move away from relief towards refugees' self-reliance and skills development taking into account market activities and employment opportunities. UNHCR will call for a collaborative approach and enlist the support and expertise of relevant Government institutions and UN development partners.

Budget (USD)			
Country	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget²	Total
Burundi	37,234,162	536,646	37,770,808
Central African Republic	5,428,940	412,004	5,840,944
Democratic Republic of the Congo	18,336,569	54,545,729	72,882,298
Gabon	3,620,963	0	3,620,963
Republic of Chad	74,337,462	0	74,337,462
Republic of the Congo	6,817,537	2,760,132	9,577,669
United Republic of Tanzania	27,998,719	3,517,240	31,515,959
Regional activities ¹	9,659,400	0	9,659,400
Sub-total	183,433,752	61,771,751	245,205,503
Rwanda	6,724,352	1,009,229	7,733,581
Total	190,158,104	62,780,980	252,939,084

¹ Includes assistance to various refugees in the Central Africa and Great Lakes region, such as resettlement and relief, as well as support costs for UNVs and consultants, light aircraft charters costs and scholarships for refugees students. It also includes activities for the implementation of Project Profile in Africa.

² The figures refer to the supplementary programme for the repatriation and reintegration of Congolese (DRC) refugees.

Note: The Supplementary Programme Budget does not include a 7% support cost (USD 4,394,669) that is recovered from each contribution received to meet indirect costs in UNHCR (field and headquarters).