

Great Lakes

Recent Developments

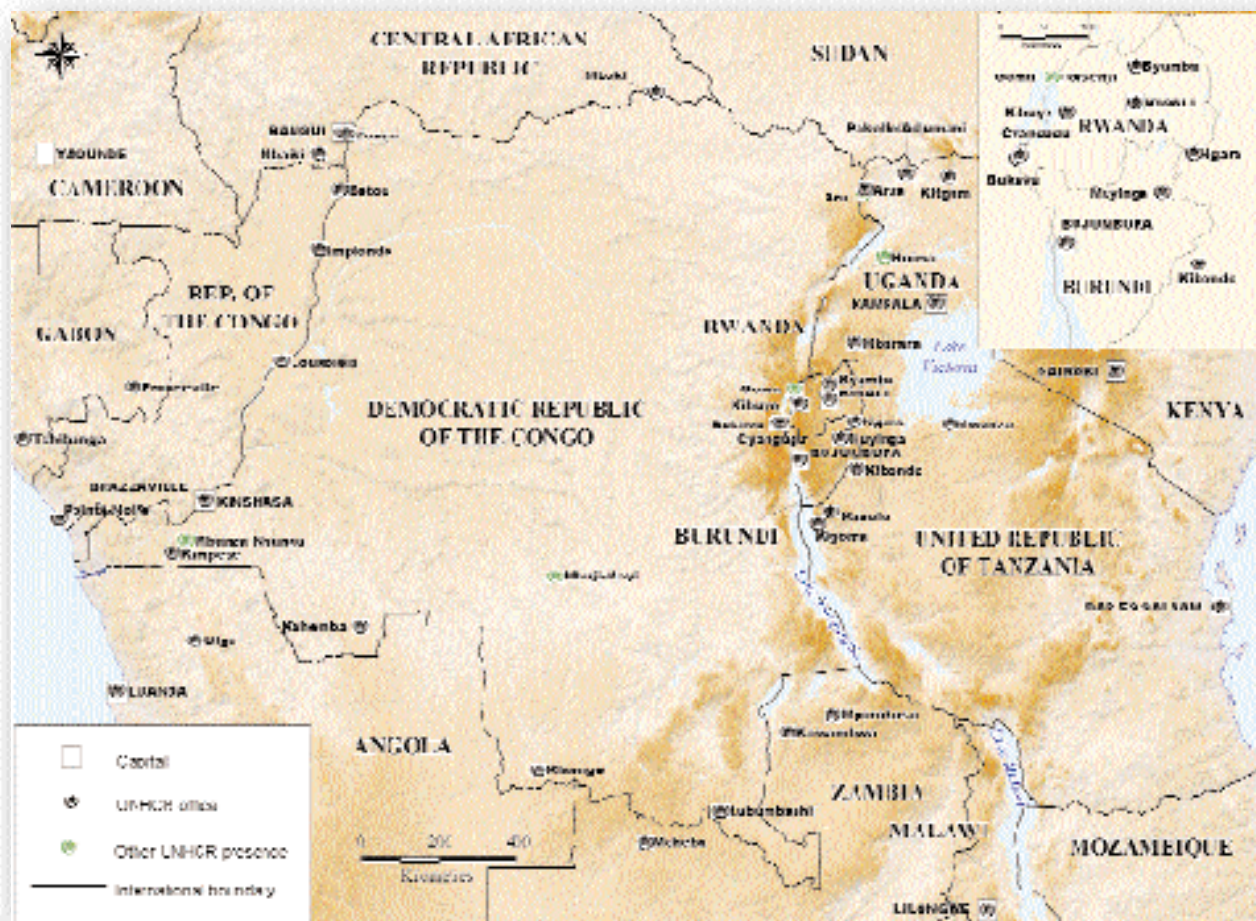
Voluntary repatriation will be the most likely durable solution for thousands of refugees in the Great Lakes Region. This goal is often obscured from view by the instability of the countries that produced the refugees, as well as the climate of political, economic and social stagnation that typifies the entire region. However, hopes have quite reasonably been raised by recent progress in the implementation of regional initiatives.

Developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) include the partial withdrawal of foreign armies, political liberalisation, the facilitation of access by humanitarian agencies to the interior of the country, the progressive deployment of MONUC troops, and progress towards dialogue between warring factions in the DRC. This has led UNHCR to review its policy on the return of refugees and enhance regional preparatory activities for the eventual voluntary repatriation of some 100,000 Congolese (DRC) from neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, episodic skirmishes between forces elsewhere in the region, in particular, Angola and the Central African Republic (CAR), continue to create a permanent “emergency-like” situation in the DRC, with refugees fleeing to areas which are largely difficult to access.

Although the political situation in the Republic of the Congo (RoC) remains fragile, there has been steady progress towards peace and stability over the past two years. A population census was undertaken recently and democratic elections are planned. Encouraged by these developments, Congolese refugees have expressed a willingness to return; UNHCR expects that the majority will be repatriated in the near future. Notwithstanding ongoing political instability, RoC provides asylum to thousands of refugees from DRC, Angola and most recently, CAR, where a failed coup attempt took place in May 2001. The majority of these populations are in the north of the country, where poor roads present immense challenges to the delivery of assistance.

Rwanda plays host to a large number of refugees who originate from the Kivu provinces in eastern DRC. For this population, voluntary repatriation is largely dependent on the implementation of the Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement. Assistance to these refugees will continue until security conditions in the Kivu

Burundi
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Republic of the Congo
Rwanda
United Republic of Tanzania



provinces become conducive to mass return. Meanwhile, the organised repatriation of Rwandan refugees from DRC and Tanzania is expected to continue in 2002 under the framework of the Tripartite Commission, despite periodic security lapses along repatriation routes. The return of large numbers of nationals is expected to further increase the considerable pressure on limited land, resources and infrastructure in Rwanda. The Government is collaborating with development actors to improve the quality of life of the general population. For its part, UNHCR is playing an instrumental role in facilitating the Brookings Process, which aims to address gaps in the transition from relief to development.

In Burundi, international efforts to bring peace have recently gained momentum. However, despite progress on the political front, armed conflict continues to obstruct access to vulnerable populations, contributing to the deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation. Insecurity in various pockets of the country has reduced the likelihood that refugees might return in significant numbers from neighbouring countries in the near future.

The United Republic of Tanzania is the country most seriously affected by refugee influxes in the Great Lakes Region. The

hospitality traditionally afforded to refugees has been eroded, slowly but surely, with mounting insecurity and pressure on limited natural resources. The present politically charged atmosphere precludes any prospects of local integration of the refugees, and the focus of Government policy is now on temporary asylum. Tanzania remains at the forefront of regional initiatives to achieve political solutions in the Great Lakes Region. There are continued bilateral consultations with neighbouring countries in an effort to find mutually acceptable solutions to the refugee crisis in the region. In order to facilitate the eventual repatriation of refugees to Burundi and Rwanda, those two countries have both signed Tripartite Agreements with Tanzania and UNHCR, which are in various stages of implementation. A similar Tripartite Agreement is envisaged for the DRC.

The safety of humanitarian workers continues to be a major preoccupation in the Great Lakes Region, where a volatile security situation warrants continual monitoring and assessment, and the updating of appropriate emergency evacuation measures. UNHCR works closely with the United Nations Security Coordinator in this regard. Closely related challenges arise from the need to assure the security of refugees and maintain the civilian character of refugee camps.

Strategic Objectives

In 2002, UNHCR's strategic objectives in the Great Lakes region are to promote respect for humanitarian principles and international refugee law in the protection of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, thus making a long-term contribution to national and regional peace and security. UNHCR will protect the rights of refugees and returnees through the application of relevant international instruments, while maintaining an effective presence in the countries of origin and asylum. UNHCR will

also address issues related to environmental degradation and refugee-impacted areas. In view of the fluidity of the political and security situation in the region, the Office will regularly update its regional contingency plans in collaboration with other agencies to address the situations in Angola, Burundi, DRC and CAR and to maintain contingency stockpiles of non-food items in the DRC and Tanzania. UNHCR will also continue to advocate increased international support for both humanitarian relief and development initiatives in the Great Lakes region.



DRC: Refugees from the Central African Republic in Zongo receiving basic material assistance. *UNHCR*

also ensure and co-ordinate the provision of assistance to refugees, returnees and other persons of concern. The Office will spearhead the search, in collaboration with all relevant parties, for lasting solutions for populations of concern and promote voluntary repatriation, subject to adequate security and formal agreements with the respective Governments.

UNHCR will pursue efforts to address security issues arising from the presence of refugee camps in the western part of the United Republic of Tanzania; and will assist countries of origin to ensure the speedy reintegration of returnees and internally displaced populations, in co-operation with other actors. UNHCR

BUDGET (USD)

Country	Annual Programme
Burundi	6,516,928
Democratic Republic of the Congo	23,374,952
Republic of Congo	6,926,406
United Republic of Tanzania	24,718,192
Regional Activities ¹	8,056,300
Sub-total Great Lakes Operation	69,592,778
Rwanda	8,307,269
Total	77,900,047

¹ Includes assistance to various refugees in the Great Lakes region, such as resettlement, care and maintenance, as well as support costs for UNVs and consultants, light aircraft charters costs and scholarships for refugee students.