

WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

By far the most positive development in West and Central Africa during the first half of the year was the successful completion of the Sierra Leone peace process, after ten years of civil war. Following an unprecedented humanitarian, political and military effort by the international community, the Head of State declared the end of the war in the presence of the main contenders. More than 40,000 Sierra Leonean refugees returned home since January 2002, bringing the number of returnees since September 2000 to some 173,000 persons.

In stark contrast, the situation in Liberia was marked by a deterioration of armed hostilities that spread to many parts of the country, provoking the displacement of thousands of people who eventually became refugees in neighbouring countries. Since January 2002, more than 60,000 Liberians fled into exile, compelling humanitarian agencies to meet their emergency needs by redirecting efforts and resources from ongoing programmes. Both the situation in Sierra Leone and that in Liberia are described in detail in separate chapters.

Two successive waves of Senegalese refugees arrived in Gambia in recent months. Hopes for a lasting solution to the Casamance problem faded as fighting resumed between the government forces and the *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance* (MFDC). Meanwhile, a sizeable influx of Nigerian refugees arrived in Western Cameroon in January 2002, following the clashes between Mambilas (farmers) and Fulanis (cattle owners) in the Northern Taraba State.

The report of a joint UNHCR-Save the Children Fund assessment mission conducted

in October and November 2001 contained grave allegations of sexual exploitation of refugee children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, including by humanitarian workers. At UNHCR's request, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services sent investigation missions to these countries. Meanwhile, UNHCR and operational partners embarked on a concerted effort to identify and address operational gaps that might contribute to the phenomenon of sexual exploitation and abuse. More details of this action are contained in the relevant country chapters.

PROGRESS TOWARDS OBJECTIVES, AND CONSTRAINTS ENCOUNTERED

The deterioration of the security situation in the Republic of the Congo (ROC) hampered the planned repatriation of Congolese refugees from Gabon. Similarly, prospects for repatriation of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and ROC to the Central African Republic (CAR) remained dim in the absence of written security guarantees. In February 2002, a Tri-partite Agreement was signed between UNHCR and the CAR and Rwandan governments for the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees. However, these refugees are still reluctant to return home, fearing forced enrolment in the army. The recent signing of agreements between DRC and Rwanda augur well for peace in the DRC, and may increase prospects for a return of DRC refugees from various countries in West and Central Africa.

Activities were ongoing to ensure that countries enact refugee legislation and carry out refugee status determination procedures. Insufficient resources and the lack of protection staff constituted key constraints

on this endeavour. Efforts to ensure that governments were in a position to manage refugee-related issues bore particular importance in countries where UNHCR provided support to government bodies overseeing refugee issues. Thus, following the closure of a number of offices in the region, UNHCR's Offices in Benin, the Central African Republic and Senegal are gradually setting up mechanisms to ensure that refugees in countries under their regional coverage continued to benefit from adequate protection and assistance. This included regular missions, as well as the strengthening of NGO capacity. However, in Cameroon and Gambia, local capacities were not able to substitute for UNHCR, and plans are underway to re-establish UNHCR's presence there.

In many cases, the quest for durable solutions was limited to supporting voluntary repatriation and providing partial income-generating opportunities in environments characterised by high rates of unemployment. The occupation of N'djamena Cathedral in Chad for several weeks in April 2002 illustrated the difficulties inherent in providing inadequate assistance to urban refugees.

Efforts to achieve a comprehensive and integrated approach to refugee and returnee issues continued through the United Nations Consolidated Appeals process. In Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, this co-operation benefited multi-sectoral assistance to refugees and returnees. In Côte d'Ivoire, UNDP and UNHCR are providing technical and financial support to a government initiative to rehabilitate refugee-hosting areas. The project is part of the country's poverty alleviation strategy aimed at improving the lives of communities through economic and social development activities, and through the strengthening of border security in the western region of Côte d'Ivoire. The recent setting up of the OCHA regional support office in Abidjan, and the Secretary General Office in Dakar augur

well for the strengthening of inter-agency collaboration in West Africa.

ACTIVITIES UNTIL 30 JUNE 2002

There are some 4,860 refugees and 2,070 asylum-seekers in **Benin**, primarily from Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo and Togo. Shelter repairs were undertaken in the Kpomasse refugee centre, which accommodated some 1,190 refugees. Some 14,700 patients were attended to in various health posts supported by UNHCR, and food assistance was provided to some 1,800 refugees. 127 resettled refugees benefited from regular assistance in the sectors of health, education, and micro-credit.

The office in Benin oversees activities in **Burkina Faso**, where humanitarian assistance was provided to some 92 refugees and all resettled refugees. After a two-year suspension, the National Eligibility Commission (NEC) resumed its activities. UNHCR supported the NEC to clear the backlog of asylum applications.

An estimated 41,190 refugees and asylum-seekers residing in **Cameroon** received limited assistance, due to the closure of the UNHCR Office in late 2001, and consequent difficulties in overseeing activities from the office in Gabon. A mission to assess the situation of newly arrived Nigerian refugees in early 2002, recommended the re-establishment of a UNHCR presence in Cameroon to deal with refugee issues, including the urban caseload. In the interim, an emergency team was deployed to Cameroon and an assistance programme established for the 12,000 Nigerians, who were hosted initially by local communities. The Government of Nigeria will also be encouraged to address the security concerns of refugees to enable them to return voluntarily.

The **Central African Republic (CAR)** hosted some 48,720 refugees who reside in Molangue Refugee Camp (2,760), Mboki Refugee Camp (35,980) and the city of

Bangui (9,980). Since January, 880 mainly Sudanese new asylum-seekers arrived in the country, of whom 450 were provided with health care assistance, household utensils and agricultural tools in Mboki. In Molangue, where Congolese refugees reside, WFP continued to provide food. Emphasis is placed on self-reliance activities, such as agriculture, fishing, income-generating activities and education. Three additional classrooms were built, bringing the total number of classrooms to thirteen. The average number of pupils by classroom decreased from 90 to 50.

After a nearly four-year long suspension, the National Eligibility Commission resumed its work.

Chad hosted some 13,020 registered refugees (12,460 in Abeche and 560 in N'djamena). In addition, 38 asylum-seekers arrived in the country since January 2002. Preparations are under way to repatriate 230 Congolese (DRC) refugees who opted to return home. After the closure of the UNHCR office, urban refugees went on hunger strike and occupied the N'djamena Cathedral for several weeks. They complained about lack of assistance, poor security conditions and asked to be resettled. In spite of attempts to negotiate, the police had to intervene to evacuate the Cathedral.

The influx of refugees from Liberia into **Côte d'Ivoire** increased significantly in May 2002 as the Liberian civil war intensified. Since January 2002, UNHCR registered 15,670 newly arrived Liberian refugees, the majority of whom opted to settle with host families because they had similar urban backgrounds or due to ethnic reasons. This went against the Government and UNHCR's policy of providing assistance only to refugees residing in camps. Nevertheless, the Government is identifying sites for the establishment of new refugee settlements. Following the registration of refugees in Côte d'Ivoire in June 2002, and pending its final results, the total number of registered refugees was 75,000, including new arrivals. The Government

also decided in June, that refugee identity cards would be issued free of charge. Some 3,770 refugees received food and assistance in shelter, as well as non-food items at Niela camp. Assistance provided also included negotiating land, and distributing agricultural tools and seeds. At the end of June 2002, 24 classrooms were completed and inaugurated, while 66 others were near completion. Some 2,000 refugee students (13 per cent of the target population) received primary education in Ivorian schools. Others attended makeshift Liberian private schools established by teachers who were previous employees of UNHCR's former partner in the education sector.

In **Gabon**, a verification exercise in March 2002 saw refugee and asylum-seeker population figures reduced from 19,220 to 18,260, of whom 13,770 are Congolese (ROC). The Operations Plan for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Congolese refugees could not be implemented due to a deterioration of the security in their country of origin. Consequently only 480 of the planned 6,000 refugees registered for repatriation. Due to the late arrival of food assistance in the country, the first distribution did not take place until June 2002. It benefited 9,750 out of a targeted 11,490 refugees. Domestic items were distributed on an *ad hoc* basis. An average of 4,000 consultations was held every month in various health centres supported by UNHCR. Twelve classrooms were built or rehabilitated. More than 1,600 students received primary and secondary education. Out of 1,500 micro-credit submissions received, 76 were approved.

The Gambia experienced two influxes of refugees from Casamance, Senegal. Most of the estimated 1,500 refugees who fled in May 2002 returned to their places of origin shortly afterwards. However, most of the 2,050 who made up the second wave remained in Gambian villages along the border, awaiting improvements of the situation at home. Assistance activities were co-ordinated by UNHCR. About 1,060 Sierra Leoneans in Basse Town and the

Kundam camp, were assisted in the sectors of agriculture, education, food, health, water, and income generation. In addition, over 10,000 urban refugees, mainly from Sierra Leone and Senegal, were assisted with health services, primary education for all children and community services. Large numbers of Sierra Leonean refugees are expected to opt to return after the rainy season.

Since January 2002, intensified fighting in Liberia caused 3,000 Liberians to seek asylum in **Ghana**. Meanwhile, a recent Government census set the population of refugees and asylum-seekers at 42,000. They are mainly from Liberia and Sierra Leone, and reside in Buduburam and Krisan refugee camps. Some 1,950 refugees living in the Krisan camp received food, non-food items and medical services. In order to enhance self-sufficiency, a total of 264 families benefited from agricultural activities, skills-training, and small business assistance grants. UNHCR continued to provide 27,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Buduburam camp, including over 3,000 new arrivals from Liberia, with international protection and community-based assistance. Some 8,000 Liberian refugees and asylum-seekers living outside of camps are still in need of international protection. 108 refugees students benefit from scholarship programmes. Health education and HIV/AIDS training activities were carried out. UNHCR assisted the Government to complete the reconstitution of the Ghana Refugee Board, and continued to assist in dealing with the backlog of applications for asylum.

In **Guinea-Bissau**, protection and assistance was provided to some 7,340 refugees from Senegal in the Jolmet camp, and to over 500 urban refugees and asylum-seekers. Under the auspices of UNHCR, assistance was provided to needy refugees in the sectors of water, health care, education, training and income generation. At the request of the Government of Guinea-Bissau, UNHCR proceeded to register and identify refugees from Senegal located in the border areas, and delivered 7,397 refugee identity cards.

Furthermore, identity cards were issued to 370 urban refugees.

In **Mali**, there were over 3,000 refugees and asylum-seekers mainly from Liberia and Sierra Leone. Most were well-integrated in the local population, and limited assistance was provided to vulnerable groups through various income-generating activities. The transit centre in Faragouaran hosted more than 100 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers who were provided with food, medical care, education, and income-generating activities. For those who lived in the urban area, only vulnerable refugees benefited from health care and education. UNHCR continued to provide protection to 6,000 Mauritanian refugees located in the area of Kayes.

The four-year reintegration program of Tuareg returnees in **Niger** was completed at the end of June 2002.

UNHCR made plans to facilitate the repatriation of 250 Sierra Leoneans from **Nigeria** in July 2002. However, as a result of continuing hostilities in Liberia, UNHCR received about 150 asylum-seekers in Nigeria. In January 2002, food assistance to Sierra Leonean refugees was stopped, except for 274 vulnerable persons, mainly women and children. Other forms of assistance continued, notably shelter, medical and health services and education. Camp-based primary schools continued to meet the education needs of 242 beneficiaries, while secondary, vocational and tertiary education was provided outside the camp. UNHCR contributed financially towards the running of schools through the provision of teachers' salaries, school materials, payment of examination fees, and uniforms. 75 vulnerable cases benefited from food assistance. New arrivals who were considered to be vulnerable were also assisted with food and non-food items. Basic medical care continued to be extended to all refugees, irrespective of their nationality.

Some 20,000 Mauritanian refugees lived in **Senegal** in four areas in the River Valley as

well as some 1,000 urban refugees and 3,000 asylum-seekers mainly from the Great Lakes and the Mano River countries. During the first quarter of 2002, the National Eligibility Committee registered 243 new arrivals. The most vulnerable of urban refugees were assisted with subsistence allowances, health care, micro-credits projects, education and vocational training. 500 naturalisation requests from Mauritania refugees had not progressed since May 2000 due to the lack of a legal framework. The Mauritanian refugees received limited assistance in health, education and water, particularly Mauritanian women living in the Northern Senegal Valley.

A request for the repatriation of 600 out of the 11,000 Ghanean refugees in **Togo**, is being considered by UNHCR in close co-operation with the Togolese and Ghanean governments.

OUTLOOK FOR JULY-DECEMBER 2002

In the coming months UNHCR will aim to consolidate the emergency response to the Liberian refugee exodus and make the transition to a stable protection and assistance programme. UNHCR will also refocus its efforts and resources on the repatriation exercise and on re-invigorating the reintegration programme for Sierra Leoneans. Return movements are expected to gain momentum at the end of the rainy season in October 2002 and if security

conditions in Sierra Leone allow, UNHCR may shift from facilitating to promoting voluntary repatriation in the coming months. Conversely, the situation in the Republic of the Congo is unlikely to improve to such an extent that refugees in Gabon will opt to return. Meanwhile, for most refugees and asylum-seekers dispersed throughout West and Central Africa, limited financial resources continue to place restrictions on assistance provided.

In order to strengthen resettlement as an integral durable solution, particularly in the context of protracted refugee situations, a regional resettlement hub is to be established in Accra, Ghana to play a co-ordinating role for the West and Central Africa region. Furthermore, the resettlement hub will support offices in the region to set up systems and procedures to ensure the effectiveness and the integrity of resettlement activities.

The findings of the joint UNHCR/Save the Children UK assessment mission provided UNHCR the opportunity to review the impact of activities implemented thus far to address sexual and gender-based violence issues. Prevention measures continue to be integrated into protection and assistance interventions, with special emphasis being laid on sensitisation and training to build staff awareness and capacity on gender, women and children's rights and prevention of gender-based violence.

Financial Data (USD)

Country / Activity	Annual Programme Budget and Trust Funds				Supplementary Programme Budget			
	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level
Regional Office (Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan)	3,864,398	1,739,752	895,200	895,136	0	0	0	0
Benin	300,100	1,012,524	247,500	247,500	0	0	0	0
Burkina Faso	50,000	0	4,303	0	0	0	0	0
Cameroon	154,000	421,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central African Republic	2,276,759	2,179,759	1,224,964	1,224,390	0	0	0	0
Chad	100,000	0	440	0	0	0	0	0
Côte d'Ivoire	2,120,878	4,514,278	2,497,822	2,497,886	0	2,648,743	200,000	200,000
Gabon	4,552,696	2,273,640	1,492,700	1,492,700	0	0	0	0
Gambia	305,000	400,000	118,000	118,000	0	0	0	0
Ghana	2,127,076	1,214,242	566,801	566,400	0	0	0	0
Guinea	24,591,972	24,199,033	15,502,569	12,748,516	0	4,062,057	400,000	400,000
Liberia	6,737,148	7,044,079	4,631,621	2,491,600	0	0	0	0
Mali	0	0	295,590	0	0	0	0	0
Niger	133,000	110,000	98,813	97,277	0	0	0	0
Nigeria	1,010,278	964,778	503,300	503,300	0	0	0	0
Senegal	1,105,838	1,121,703	454,300	454,300	0	0	0	0
Sierra Leone	14,959,111	21,130,546	14,225,369	10,731,723	0	3,713,541	322,922	250,000
Togo	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regional Activities ¹	1,473,000	3,700,587	1,165,976	1,129,070	0	0	0	0
Unrestricted Contributions	0	0	1,226,569	0	0	0	150,000	0
Total	65,891,254	72,025,921	45,151,837	35,197,798	0	10,424,341	1,072,922	850,000

¹ Includes care and maintenance for urban refugees, voluntary repatriation and education assistance, as well as scholarships for refugee students in West African countries.