

Statement

92nd Meeting of the Standing Committee

Geneva, 11-13 March 2025

Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

While the regional update provides key facts and figures, I wish to focus on the people behind the numbers, the challenges defining their reality, and the opportunities to address these challenges through a more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable approach. By prioritizing solutions, we can move beyond immediate needs and work toward long-term measures that promote self-reliance, inclusion, and durable outcomes for both displaced populations and host communities.

Dear Chairperson,

In 2025, forcibly displaced persons in West and Central Africa are projected to reach **15.2 million**, including 8.2 million internally displaced persons. These numbers reflect not only the immense needs but also the resilience of millions forced to flee conflict, violence, and socio-economic hardship. They also underscore the necessity of **efficiency** in a constrained operational and financial landscape.

Efficiency is not just about managing resources—it is central to UNHCR's vision of **protection, inclusion, and solutions**. By integrating displaced populations into national systems, we foster sustainability rather than dependency, ensuring more meaningful collaboration with host governments and communities.

This approach is reflected in our **cash-based interventions (CBI)**, **centralized procurement**, and **biometric registration**, which improve transparency, reduce costs, and empower displaced persons as active participants in local economies. In Chad, refugees now access **national health and education systems**, while in Burkina Faso, the allocation of **83 hectares of land** provides displaced families with livelihoods and a foundation for self-reliance. These efforts, supported by **development partnerships**, help transition displaced populations from humanitarian aid to long-term inclusion.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

While efficiency is key, we remain equally committed to **durable solutions**, particularly **voluntary returns**. Nearly **90,000 refugees** have returned to their home countries with UNHCR's facilitation, including **40,000 from Niger to Nigeria** and **17,000 Cameroonian refugees from Chad**. In the Central African Republic, over **20,000 refugees** returned in 2024, with another **40,000 projected for 2025**.

These returns occur in complex conditions. Sustainable returns require a **comprehensive approach**—stabilization, livelihoods, governance, and services—alongside security efforts. In **Baoro, CAR**, local authorities, UNHCR, and UN-Habitat have initiated **100 housing units for returnees**, alongside investments in **education, healthcare, and livelihoods**, fostering reintegration and community resilience.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

Migration in the region is ever evolving and increasingly complex and interconnected, requiring a holistic protection strategy. With Malians now representing the primary country of origin for individuals attempting to reach the Canary Islands, it is evident that protection and solutions must extend across borders and encompass all stages of the migratory journey. The **Route-Based Approach (RBA)** strengthens reception mechanisms, asylum systems, and inclusion, while addressing root causes and providing safer alternatives to dangerous onward journeys. To **counter onward risks**, UNHCR has expanded **communication campaigns**, reaching thousands with information on safe alternatives. Meanwhile, **education and skills-building programs**, such as Chad's **1,310 "mixed movement scholarships"**, provide opportunities for displaced youth to contribute meaningfully to society.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

Host countries in West and Central Africa continue to demonstrate **extraordinary generosity** despite their own challenges. **Chad alone has welcomed over 763,000 Sudanese refugees in less than two years**, and countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger collectively host over **4 million displaced persons** amid rising insecurity.

The ongoing **spillover of the Sahel conflict into coastal states**—Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin—is further straining host communities, stoking intercommunal tension over resources. Nevertheless, governments remain committed to **protection and inclusion**. In **February 2025, Ghana granted *prima facie* refugee status** to Burkinabe asylum seekers, ensuring legal protection and access to services.

Regional forums, such as the **Lake Chad Governors' Forum and the Lomé Dialogues**, play a crucial role in balancing **security concerns with refugee protection**. The upcoming **Lomé Dialogue (March 2025)** will focus on **border security, asylum procedures, and voluntary repatriation frameworks**, reinforcing the region's commitment to stability and solutions.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

The challenges in West and Central Africa are immense—but so too are the opportunities. By focusing on **efficiency, inclusion, and stabilization**, we can not only address immediate humanitarian needs but also lay the foundation for long-term stability and prosperity.

Let me conclude with the words of a **young Sudanese refugee in Chad**, who, after receiving a **scholarship under the Route-Based Approach**, shared his aspiration to become a doctor and serve both his community and his host country. His story reflects the resilience and potential within displaced populations—potential that, with the right support, can contribute to a more stable and prosperous future for all.

Thank you.