

Update on UNHCR operations in West and Central Africa

A. Situational analysis, including new developments.

Forced displacement persists across West and Central Africa, driven by insecurity, economic hardship and extreme weather events. By December 2024, the number of displaced and stateless people reached approximately 14 million, including 171,000 newly arrived and registered refugees and asylum-seekers. This overall figure reflects a 3.1 per cent increase to the 13.5 million reported at the end of 2023.

Of the region's 8.3 million internally displaced persons, nearly half – approximately 3.5 million people – are in Nigeria, followed by 2.1 million in Burkina Faso and 1 million in Cameroon. There are currently 2.7 million refugees and asylum-seekers in the region, representing a 16 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2023. This rise is primarily driven by the ongoing conflict in the Sudan, which has caused significant displacement toward the Central African Republic and Chad, as well as by continued insecurity in the Central Sahel.

Mixed movements also persisted, with 11,400 arrivals recorded in the Canary Islands via the West Africa Atlantic Route during the first half of 2025, which is increasingly used by refugees. Malians remain the largest group from the Sahel region seeking asylum in Europe.

While governments have made considerable efforts to protect conflict-affected communities, protection risks in the region remained high. To better understand and respond to these risks, and to inform humanitarian-development-peace programming in the Sahel, UNHCR conducted protection monitoring in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali and the Niger, surveying 34,500 households and 20,900 key informants. The findings revealed a concerning trend: forced displacement was found to double the occurrence of protection-related incidents, including violence against women and girls. Food insecurity was found to double the occurrence of forced recruitment and association of children with armed forces and groups. Movement restrictions were found to double land conflicts between displaced and host communities.

Due to funding shortfalls in 2025, UNHCR was forced to reduce its programmes in the region by 25 per cent. In response, the organization adapted its activities, prioritizing core protection activities and life-saving assistance, while accelerating the transition toward sustainable responses, which aim to strengthen self-reliance and support durable solutions from the outset.

The Sudan situation (the Central African Republic and Chad)

Chad continues to host the largest numbers of Sudanese refugees, having received over 874,000 individuals since the eruption of the conflict in the Sudan in April 2023. Between January and June 2025 alone, 144,000 new arrivals were recorded, with projections indicating that a total of 250,000 arrivals are expected by the end of the

year. The Central African Republic also received approximately 45,200 people from the Sudan, including some 38,900 refugees and 6,300 returnees.

The Sahel situation

Currently some 4 million people remain displaced across the Sahel. The Central Sahel countries alone, comprising of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, host 3.6 million displaced people – a notable increase from 2.4 million in 2020 - with over 75 per cent being internally displaced. The number of people fleeing to neighbouring countries also continued to rise.

The Lake Chad Basin situation

The Lake Chad Basin continued to face a protracted humanitarian crisis, initially triggered by the conflict in north-eastern Nigeria, affecting populations across Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria itself. The Lake Chad Basin region currently hosts more than 3.3 million forcibly displaced persons. This included some 347,000 Nigerian refugees and asylum-seekers, hosted primarily in the Niger (127,000), in Cameroon (122,600) and in Chad (21,500).

The Central African Republic situation

Nearly 447,000 people remain internally displaced in the Central African Republic, while 691,500 Central African refugees are hosted in neighbouring countries. The largest host countries included Cameroon (287,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (207,000) and Chad (144,000). With progressive stabilization of some areas, UNHCR was able to facilitate the safe and dignified return of 4,250 refugees to the Central African Republic in 2025.

B. Progress and challenges by impact area in 2024 and updated plans for 2025

Attaining favourable protection environments

Between January and June 2025, more than 89,500 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered across the region. Despite this progress, funding shortfalls continued to constrain registration, documentation and protection responses. As a result, around 700,000 forcibly displaced persons remain unregistered, including 420,000 in Chad and 89,000 in Mali.

In Ghana, Burkinabe asylum-seekers were granted prima facie recognition, while Nigeria extended temporary legal protection to 12,000 Cameroonians and implemented simplified refugee status determination procedures for refugees of the Niger. In Côte d'Ivoire, UNHCR reinforced its technical assistance to the Government to facilitate the continuous registration of new refugees.

Efforts to improve documentation also advanced across the region. In Cameroon, the Government enrolled 33,000 refugees for biometric identification documents. In Chad, a pilot initiative is providing 25,000 identification documents to refugees, contributing to the Government's pledge to provide identification documents to 500,000 refugees. Of 20,000 planned identification documents for newly registered refugees in Togo, more than 3,300 were issued. Identity documents were also provided for 11,000 people in Burkina Faso, 5,900 in Mali, 2,700 in the Niger, 500 in the Central African Republic and 200 in the Gambia.

UNHCR strengthened regional political dialogue, notably with the coastal countries and Burkina Faso through the Lomé Dialogue, to support governments in upholding international protection standards for forcibly displaced persons while safeguarding their national security interests.

The implementation of the route-based approach gained momentum, as UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration worked with the Governments of Chad,

Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal to strengthen protection and local solutions. Efforts focused on providing alternatives to dangerous crossings along the central Mediterranean and northwest African maritime routes. Foundations were laid for regional political dialogue between Mali, Mauritania and Senegal, while reception and asylum systems were reinforced and government capacities strengthened across all five countries.

As part of efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness in the region, UNHCR supported legislative reforms to protect stateless individuals. Mali made notable strides by adopting a law granting stateless persons equal rights to health care, education, employment, housing and justice.

Realizing rights in safe environments

In Nigeria, 37,000 internally displaced persons affected by floods in the States of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe received cash assistance, while 9,000 non-food item kits were distributed to support their basic needs. Similarly, non-food items were provided to 15,800 flood victims in Kousséri, northern Cameroon; 6,000 in Mali; and 1,900 in the Central African Republic.

UNHCR improved access to secure shelters, by distributing shelter kits to nearly 1,000 internally displaced persons and completing 220 semi-durable houses for Sudanese refugees in the Central African Republic. In Cameroon, shelter solutions were provided to 13,000 displaced persons and host community members. Notably, in Minawao camp, 7,600 households produced 317,000 kilograms of ecological bricks to build eco-friendly housing. In Burkina Faso, shelter and non-food items were provided to 29,000 internally displaced persons and in Mali, nearly 800 persons were supplied with disaster-resilient shelters. In Borno State, Nigeria, UNHCR is constructing 450 durable homes for displaced individuals and their hosts. Meanwhile, in the Niger, 900,000 people in need of shelters were identified, with UNHCR providing assistance to 113,000 of them.

Significant progress was made in the establishment and expansion of refugee settlements in eastern Chad. Eight new sites were opened, including three in Wadi Fira Province, with a combined capacity for 56,000 people. Additionally, 11 existing sites were scaled up, with extensions prioritized in Ouaddaï and Ennedi Est. Since April 2023, 541,000 Sudanese refugees were relocated to safer sites, including 116,000 in recent months. Despite this progress, an urgent need remains, as 239,000 Sudanese refugees still require relocation.

Protection monitoring efforts in the region continued. Through Project 21, an inter-agency protection monitoring system, UNHCR collaborated with 30 mostly local organizations to collect and analyse protection data. In the Wadi Fira Province of Chad alone, 3,400 respondents reported severe violence and human rights abuses both before and during displacement.

Violence against women and girls was addressed through protection activities reaching 474,000 people. Among survivors, 88 per cent received psychosocial support, 63 per cent accessed health services and 27 per cent were supported with income-generating activities to facilitate economic reintegration.

Children also received targeted support: UNHCR identified 121,600 at-risk children, including 18,000 unaccompanied or separated minors. A total of 383,000 displaced and host community children accessed child-friendly spaces. Psychosocial and mental health care were provided to 376,700 children. Furthermore, 93,800 caregivers participated in child protection programmes.

In parallel, UNHCR supported governments to integrate refugees into national education systems. In Chad, 53 emergency schools for Sudanese refugees gained public status, with UNHCR funding salaries for 2,000 teachers, thereby improving access to education for 155,000 children. In the Central African Republic, UNHCR facilitated the enrolment of 2,200 Sudanese refugee children in primary schools, with

500 receiving bridging courses. Secondary school enrolment rose from 2.5 per cent in 2024 to 14 per cent by mid-2025. In the Niger, UNHCR supported the drafting of the 2025-2030 national education inclusion strategy. Across the region, movement restrictions limited access to education by 40 per cent, with 2,000 schools closed in Mali. To mitigate this, UNHCR supported an accelerated learning programme for displaced children.

Efforts were also made to strengthen access to health care services. In Cameroon, 97,000 refugees were enrolled in the national health insurance scheme, improving access to quality and affordable care. In Chad, UNHCR and the Ministry of Health supported 20 health centres, 7 health posts and 2 secondary hospitals, alongside recruiting 1,200 health workers. Nigeria saw the opening of 10 solar-powered health centres in the States of Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Taraba, providing services to 5,000 refugees.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

In Nigeria, UNHCR advanced a self-reliance project in Borno, Cross River and Katsina States. Following advocacy efforts led by UNHCR focused on land allocation and the provision of agricultural equipment and irrigation schemes, the Government allocated 854 hectares of farmland, mostly in Katsina State, for year-round cultivation. This initiative is expected to benefit 1,200 displaced and host community households by promoting sustainable agriculture, improving food security and stabilizing incomes.

Similarly, in Cameroon, UNHCR supported Nigerian refugees and the TINARE Cooperative in the Far North region to cultivate dry season crops such as sorghum and rice. The Government allocated 151 hectares of farmland, of which 110 hectares were cultivated by 600 refugees and 200 cooperative members.

In the Niger 10,000 households received agricultural support through the distribution of seeds and tools. Additionally, 1,000 women and 300 refugees received vocational training.

To expand economic opportunities in displacement and return areas, UNHCR strengthened its engagement with local private sector actors. Conferences held in Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic served as important platforms to encourage investments and foster collaboration.

Securing solutions

Between January and June 2025, voluntarily returns continued across the region, with around 28,600 refugees returning to their countries of origin. The majority – 23,700 individuals – returned to Nigeria, followed by 4,250 to the Central African Republic and 670 to Mali. Returns to Nigeria took place from Cameroon, Chad, Niger and the Sudan and included the return of 21,500 people from Chad and Niger in operations organized by Borno State authorities. Among them were 7,000 registered refugees returning from Chad and 5,000 from the Niger.

UNHCR and the Governments of Chad and Nigeria signed a tripartite agreement in February 2025, aimed at facilitating the voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of Nigerian refugees hosted in Chad. In parallel, advocacy efforts progressed for the finalization of a similar tripartite agreement between the Niger, Nigeria and UNHCR, with a signature expected by the end of 2025.

Returns to the Central African Republic included over 3,700 individuals from Cameroon and approximately 450 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, bringing the total number to around 57,200 since 2017. With continued support from the Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform, UNHCR projects up to 300,000 facilitated returns to the Central African Republic by 2028.

Alongside refugee returns, internal displacement also saw significant returns. By mid-2025, over 263,000 internally displaced persons had returned to their areas of origin, particularly in the Central African Republic and Mali. To support these returns, UNHCR worked with governments and development partners to develop return areas for refugees and internally displaced persons, including through initiatives such as the Baoro Development Pole in the Central African Republic and the national strategy for durable solutions in Mali.

While voluntary returns gained momentum, resettlement opportunities declined, with the regional resettlement quota reduced by 64 per cent compared to 2024. As of June 2025, 954 individuals had departed to seven countries – 939 through resettlement and 15 via complementary pathways.

At the same time, local solutions advanced. In Senegal, nearly 100 Mauritanian refugees were naturalized by decree, bringing the total to more than 450. In Ghana, 500 former Ivorian refugees received indefinite residence permits, following the cessation of their refugee status in 2022. Similarly, Liberia issued an executive order granting free and simplified access to indefinite residency for 900 former Ivorian refugees.

Efforts to promote inclusion progressed in Burkina Faso, where the first tripartite technical meeting between the National Commission for Refugees, the Unique Social Registry Technical Secretariat and UNHCR paved the way for refugee access to national social protection mechanisms.

As part of broader localization efforts, 60 per cent of UNHCR project partners are now local actors. To further strengthen locally-led responses, UNHCR facilitated the mapping and legalization of refugee-led organizations, including more than 490 in Chad, enhancing their recognition, representation and participation in decision-making processes.

Through the International Development Association, the World Bank channelled over \$700 million into projects across seven countries,¹ focusing on social protection, education, energy, urban resilience and social cohesion. These investments led to significant advancements, such as refugee access to the national identification system and social protection registry of Chad.

C. Financial information, including updated budget figures

The Executive Committee approved a 2025 budget of \$1,191.0 million for the West and Central Africa region. The breakdown by impact areas is as follows: “attaining favourable protection environments”, \$357.8 million; “realizing rights in safe environments”, \$443.0 million; “empowering communities and achieving gender equality”, \$250.3 million; and “securing solutions”, \$140.0 million.

As of 31 August 2025, 29 per cent of the region’s 2025 financial requirements were funded, considering the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.

¹ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Niger and Togo.