

# CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Continue to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees who fled to Côte d'Ivoire as a result of the Monrovia events in September 1998 (accommodated mainly in Nicla camp).
- Assist the remaining Liberian refugees to reach an adequate level of self-reliance and socio-economic integration.
- Endeavor to transfer health and educational services to the Government to allow a gradual scaling down of UNHCR's involvement.
- Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of the small group of Sierra Leonean refugees, if conditions in Sierra Leone permit.
- Support government structures, in particular the *Service d'aide et d'assistance aux réfugiés et apatrides* (SAARA), to strengthen the legal framework for refugee protection.
- Maintain preparations for possible new influxes of refugees from neighbouring countries.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

In March, UNHCR's Government counterpart, the SAARA, was officially transferred from the Ministry of Interior to the *Office National de la Protection Civile* (ONPC), under the Ministry of Defense. In May, a new Coordinator was appointed for the SAARA. Since then, UNHCR, the SAARA and several partners, including WFP and UNICEF, have been holding regular meetings in Abidjan and in Danane to ensure a coordinated response to the recent arrival of refugees from Liberia as well as to prepare for any new influxes.

### *Liberian and Sierra Leonean Refugees*

In April this year, renewed fighting in Liberia's Lofa county led to a new refugee influx. During the first half of the year, some 2,900 refugees, mainly women and children, crossed the border into Côte d'Ivoire bringing the total number of Liberian refugees to an estimated 118,000. They were received by Liberian refugee host families living in border areas north of the *zone d'accueil* (the so-called reception zone abutting the Liberian border). Because of insecurity in certain parts of Liberia, UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme was suspended and funds were re-directed towards other projects including the registration and medical screening of new arrivals. Nevertheless, before the repatriation operation was suspended, UNHCR had distributed repatriation packages (including essential domestic items) to over 2,000 Liberian refugees to return to their country.

The Government's policy requires that refugee status determination should be undertaken on an individual basis. In this case however, because of the numbers and the obvious reasons for the flight, an exception was made and group refugee status was granted to the new arrivals. UNHCR, in consultation with the Government, is only providing material assistance to refugees who have settled in Nicla camp (the only existing refugee camp in the country) and who have no other source of support.

In June, UNHCR, WFP and the Government carried out a joint food assessment mission in the areas hosting new arrivals. The findings of the mission showed that the refugees were in urgent need of food assistance. To respond promptly to the situation and start food distributions in July, WFP decided to draw from its existing regional stocks. Distribution of food to the refugee population in Nicla

camp had been stopped in December 2000. A survey to assess the nutritional status of the camp population is scheduled for August.

Because of the numerous changes in the Government at local and central levels, the refugee registration exercise planned for the first quarter of the year was postponed to September. In the meantime, preliminary contacts were established with UNFPA, which had provided technical assistance and financial support to the Government in carrying out the National Population Census in 1998.

There has been little improvement in the level of self-sufficiency of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugee populations. An independent evaluation to assess the extent of the refugees' socio-economic integration in the *zone d'accueil* is scheduled to take place in August within the framework of the Protracted Refugee Situations Initiative launched by UNHCR. The results and recommendations of the evaluation will be used to review plans for 2002 activities.

In March, meetings between the SAARA and UNHCR to review the draft refugee law resumed. The discussions had been suspended since the coup of December 1999. To date, no agreement has been reached on the legal rights (in particular in relation to residence and work permits) of individuals who hold a refugee identity card. The issuance of cards, that was suspended in all locations except Abidjan in September 2000, is expected to resume in October, once the registration exercise has been completed.

In June 2000, UNHCR initiated discussions with all agencies working with children to agree on common guidelines. The drafting of the guidelines on separated refugee children in Côte d'Ivoire was finalised earlier this year and the SAARA and UNHCR agreed to sign the document in July. A plan of action was also drafted and agreed upon by all agencies working with children. Although the plan has

not yet been officially adopted, certain elements of the plan are already being implemented. For example, a speedy procedure has been put in place to organise the reunification of children whose names are not found in the refugee database, but whose families have been traced in Liberia.

Some progress was made with regard to the incorporation of Liberian refugees into the Ivorian school system. The *ad-hoc* technical committee for education (*Comité d'Education*) in charge of steering the process resumed its regular meetings on 1 March after a six-month interruption. In May, a three-day workshop was organized in Yamoussoukro with all the actors involved in the process, namely the Ministry of Education, the SAARA, representatives of Liberian teachers, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR and other humanitarian and donor representatives. In his opening speech, the Minister of Education stated that Côte d'Ivoire was not in a position provide schooling to over 20,000 refugee children in the Ivorian primary school system on its own. UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF will therefore support the Government's diplomatic campaign to sensitize donors and international aid agencies to the situation in the *zone d'accueil*, and to raise funds for health, education and longer-term development programmes. Also in May, UNHCR approved funding for a project to increase the capacity of 25 Ivorian schools in the *zone d'accueil*. An additional 90 classrooms (equipped with basic furniture) and 90 latrines will be built. The selection of the schools was done jointly by the Ministry of Education, UNHCR, and its operational partner in this sector based on recommendations received from the respective Prefects who had convened meetings locally involving all those concerned, including Liberian and Ivorian parents. One of the main criteria in the choice of Ivorian schools to be expanded was the high concentration of refugee school-age children in the area. This will be UNHCR's last contribution before responsibility for the education sector is

handed over entirely to the Ivorian Government. At the end of June however, the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of responsible for refugee matters, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, had not been signed.

In June, the strategy to complete the hand-over of all health activities to the Government was closely examined. Given the limited means available, UNHCR has decided to focus its support on the existing community structures for primary health care in the *zone d'accueil*. The modalities of this intervention are being defined in consultation the regional health coordinator. Refugees continued to benefit from the national vaccination campaigns for which UNHCR provided logistical support. Under the extended vaccination campaign for school children initiated by the *Institut National d'Hygiène Publique*, UNHCR covered the vaccination costs for tetanus and meningitis, as well as for a de-worming treatment for some 13,500 refugee school children. UNHCR also paid the medical fees for treatment of vulnerable refugees.

The implementation of small-scale income generating projects had a slow start. However, a joint project selection committee, including members from the refugee community, UNHCR and its implementing partner, was established and approved 46 community projects during the first half of the year. These projects will benefit some 350 refugee households. Agricultural activities continued to be limited by the refugees' lack of access to land as well as scarce financial resources. UNHCR distributed agricultural tools and seeds to 240 refugee farmers, and some 70 hectares of paddy rice and 4.5 hectares of vegetable gardens are being cultivated. Agricultural extension work will also be necessary to optimise the use of scarce land resources in a technically sound manner. Land tenure is a particularly sensitive issue. Several conflicts have erupted in the refugee hosting area, but fortunately the refugees have not been involved. Application of the new land legislation adopted at the end of 1998 has begun. It is not yet possible to predict how this will affect refugee farmers.

Resettlement brought a durable solution to 522 refugees during the period under review.

**Progress as measured against selected indicators**

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Over 10,000 Liberian refugees repatriated.	Due to the deteriorating security situation in Liberia the operation was suspended in May. Only some 2,000 refugees were repatriated during the first half of the year.
Primary education (following the Ivorian curriculum) offered to some 20,000 refugee school children.	Over 19,000 children (47 per cent girls) attended UNHCR-funded primary schools where Ivorian teachers taught them the Ivorian curriculum.
Vocational training provided for 600 refugees and Ivorians.	500 youngsters (20 per cent girls) including 414 refugees and 86 Ivorians attended vocational training.
Refugee communities' ability to care for their vulnerable members strengthened through self-help initiatives.	A total of 5,277 extremely vulnerable refugees were identified (1,510 families). A joint committee (refugees/UNHCR/implementing partner) was established to select the projects to benefit from funding. 46 community projects were approved, benefit some 350 refugee heads of household.
Asylum claims are promptly processed.	A series of administrative measures to strengthen SAARA's institutional capacity and hence reduce the number of pending asylum claims were approved. These measures will become effective in the second half of the year. During the first six months of the year, only 39 individuals were recognised as refugees.
Ensure that refugees' civil rights are respected.	Sensitization campaigns conducted in the zone d'accueil on the rights and obligations of refugees, targeting both refugees and the authorities, led to a decrease in the number of reported cases of harassment.

***Urban Refugees***

The high unemployment rate and cost of living in urban areas, particularly in Abidjan, are limiting possibilities for urban refugees to become self-reliant. UNHCR has been covering medical costs for the most vulnerable refugees, while all urban refugees have access to free medical consultations.

Refugee students at the primary and secondary level have to attend private schools because students who initiated their primary education outside the country cannot enroll in Ivorian Government schools. The most needy refugee families were therefore given assistance to cover their children's school fees.

Given the difficulties encountered in the recovery of loans from beneficiaries under the microcredit project, it was decided to suspend the activity. Instead, UNHCR focused its assistance on activities that have shown more positive results and have allowed refugees to become less dependent on humanitarian aid.

This includes mainly vocational training courses in areas such as driving and secretarial skills and payment of residence permit fees. Preliminary discussions were held with UNDP on the possibility of including refugees in existing credit schemes.

In September 2000, although a decision was taken to suspend the issuance of refugee identity cards throughout the country until the completion of the registration exercise, an exception was made for Abidjan. In urban areas, there are frequent police controls of identification documents and it was therefore agreed to that the SAARA would continue to issue refugee identity cards in Abidjan. UNHCR assistance in covering the costs of residence permits for refugees was maintained on case-by-case basis. Because there remains a general lack of clarity on the rights of persons holding refugee identity cards in the country, a residence permit is a more useful document, as it is widely recognised.

In response to the security concerns raised last year by many urban refugees, UNHCR and the SAARA organized a series of workshops on refugees' rights for the police forces. In

parallel, refugee leaders were sensitized to the need to respect the law of the country of asylum.

**Progress as measured against selected indicators**

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Refugees have access to higher education.	A total of 86 refugee students of different nationalities received scholarships to pursue their education.
Refugees who have recently arrived in Côte d'Ivoire can meet their basic needs.	Over 360 subsistence, accommodation, and transport allowances were paid to refugees. Costs for 134 residence permits were also covered.
Refugee protection is enhanced.	Seven training sessions were organised for over 260 individuals (from the authorities and the refugee community).
Individual repatriation requests are processed in a timely manner.	33 individuals were assisted to voluntarily repatriate.

**REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER**

Repatriation of Liberian refugees is currently not advisable due to the prevailing security situation. UNHCR will pursue its initial objectives. New objectives had to be set to address the situation of the new arrivals from Liberia.

- Orderly transfer of new arrivals to Nicla camp and creation of adequate conditions to enable them to settle in the camp.
- Provision of basic assistance, including food assistance to Liberian refugees who settle in Nicla camp, and development of self-help projects aimed at securing their self-reliance within one year.
- Finalisation of the contingency plan to assist up to 20,000 new Liberian refugees; in co-ordination with the Government, identification of a new site to complement the capacity of Nicla to accommodate new arrivals.
- Implementation of the approved administrative measures to allow the *Commission nationale d'éligibilité* in Abidjan and the *Commissions d'agrément* in Danane and Tabou to process all pending asylum claims before the end of the year.
- Pursue the signing of the MOU for the incorporation of refugee children in the

*zone d'accueil* into the Ivorian education system.

- Devise, in co-ordination with the Government, WFP and UNICEF practical measures to make it possible for the Ministry of Education to absorb as many refugee children as possible.
- Sensitize Liberian refugee parents on the need to send their children to Ivorian schools.
- Closely monitor the school construction project to ensure targets are met.
- Sensitize the donor community to the need to support the Ministry of Education in its efforts to absorb such a large number of refugee children.
- Orderly closure of the UNHCR offices in Danane and Tabou by 30 September and the office in Guiglo by the end of the year. In December, transfer of the Abidjan office from its present location to new premises adjoining the Regional Directorate for Central and West Africa to enable the establishment of common administrative, financial, telecommunications and information technology services as of 1 January 2002.
- Plan, in consultation with the SAARA and operational partners, ways of monitoring refugee protection and UNHCR activities in the *zone d'accueil* after the closure of field the offices.

- Strengthening of the capacity of UNHCR's main implementing partner who will continue to carry out assistance activities in the *zone d'accueil*.
- Support the evaluation mission and follow up on its conclusions and recommendations.
- Define a more effective programme strategy in light of the results of the evaluation.
- Support to the Ivorian Government in seeking funds for a multi-sector rehabilitation programme for the *zone d'accueil*.
- Registration of all refugees in the country in September 2001.

#### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	<b>Initial Budget</b>	<b>Revised Budget</b>	<b>Total Funds Available<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Total Funds Obligated</b>
<b>APB</b>	9,974,346	10,141,641	5,183,837	4,733,920
<b>SPB</b>	430,000	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,404,346</b>	<b>10,141,641</b>	<b>5,183,837</b>	<b>4,733,920</b>

<sup>1</sup>Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.

Includes administrative costs related to the Regional Director's Office.