

# CÔTE D'IVOIRE

## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Continue to facilitate the return of Liberian refugees wishing to repatriate.
- Reduce assistance to the remaining Liberian refugees and negotiate with the Government for a gradual transfer of services (health and education).
- Protect an estimated 1,780 Sierra Leonean refugees; monitor the situation in Sierra Leone and facilitate/promote voluntary repatriation once conditions permit.
- Protect an estimated 1,700 urban refugees and asylum-seekers of different nationalities and ensure that their situation is regularised through the *ad hoc* national eligibility committee; support the most vulnerable with health and educational services, and further their self-reliance.
- Encourage the Government to enact a national law on refugees and stateless persons and assist in its formulation.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

### Liberian Refugees

Organised voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees from Côte d'Ivoire was expected to come to a close at the end of 1999. A review of the operation was carried out in a regional meeting convened in February in Côte d'Ivoire where it was recognised that several thousand refugees had been unable to avail themselves of this form of repatriation principally due to logistical constraints (including the unavailability of a safe and functioning ferry to cross the Cavalla River into Maryland county and poor road conditions). UNHCR therefore decided to extend the operation for a further six months. It was also decided that the Office would continue to facilitate voluntary repatriation through the provision of a repatriation

package throughout 2000.

The planning figure for organised (transport and package) and semi-organised (package only) voluntary repatriation was 24,300 refugees. By 30 June, only 16,700 refugees had been able to repatriate by one or the other of these means (10,400 from Tabou and 6,300 from Danané/Guiglo and Toulepleu) or 69 per cent of the planned total. Funding constraints and continued logistical constraints (unavailability of a ferry) seriously hindered the start of the operation which got into full swing only in May. During organised movements, the refugees benefited from transport from their place of residence in Côte d'Ivoire to their place of origin or chosen residence in Liberia. Transport was also provided for their household goods and returnees were medically screened and children under five years of age vaccinated against measles. Each returning family received a repatriation package consisting of one plastic sheet, one jerry can, one kitchen set, two blankets, two sleeping mats and basic agricultural implements (hoes and machetes). A special repatriation convoy was organised on 26 May from Danane for 25 separated Liberian children who were reunited with their families in Liberia by an international NGO.

Resettlement to a third country either for protection purposes or for family reunion has also constituted a durable solution for a few thousand Liberian refugees and a few individuals of other nationalities. A total of 130 refugees have been resettled so far this year, of which 100 were Liberians.

UNHCR (and WFP) significantly curtailed assistance to Liberian refugees during the first half of the year. Medical assistance was limited to evacuations of only the seriously ill and food assistance (except for Liberian refugees who arrived in Côte d'Ivoire after September 1998 and are living at Nicla camp) was discontinued at the end of 1999. In addition to food, medical and educational assistance, refugees at Ni-

cla camp continued to benefit from vocational training, crop production and income-generating activities. During the first half of the year, 70 refugees (of which 40 women) were trained in tailoring, dyeing, pastry-making and other skills. A total of 33 heads of families (including 14 women) received loans to set up small income-generating businesses in different fields (bakeries and small-scale trade). At Nicla camp, 117 hectares of rice paddies are being cultivated by 202 refugee heads of families and 303 Ivorian farmers. Agricultural implements such as hoes and machetes together with fertiliser and phyto-sanitary products from existing stocks have been distributed to the rice-growers. Socio-cultural activities were organised regularly at the camp, where a youth centre and several sports grounds (football, basketball, handball and volleyball) have been built.

A national NGO was caring for a small number of separated children in the Nicla/Guiglo and Tabou areas in special centres where they were taught skills such as knitting, gardening, sewing and literacy in French as well as receiving psycho-social counselling as required.

The bulk of UNHCR's assistance focused on children's education. Following the official announcement by the Government in April 1999 that local integration would be possible for Liberian refugees who could not return home, it was decided to gradually begin to incorporate primary school-age children into the Ivorian school system. French language courses were thus organised for Liberian children. The 1999-2000 academic year (which started somewhat late) was considered as a transitional year. Refugee children have been taught the Ivorian curriculum in French by local teachers with technical supervision by the Ministry of Education. However during this school year the children remained in the existing refugee schools and did not mix with local children. As of the end of June enrolment stood at 17,700 (of whom 9,600 boys and 8,100 girls).

UNHCR continued to provide financial support to enable 1,470 secondary school-age youths (990 boys and 480 girls) to complete their studies in the Liberian curriculum. In

May, a team from the West African Examinations Council in Liberia came to Côte d'Ivoire to supervise examinations held in Tabou, Nicla and Danane. Of 1,230 students (810 boys and 420 girls) who had registered, 1,100 actually sat for the examination, but results have not yet been published. Regrettably, some students who had already repatriated to Harper in Liberia returned to Tabou too late for the examinations. The 13 remaining secondary schools were closed in July.

WFP continued to supply food rations (maize, peas, vegetable oil and salt) for school canteens and this has undoubtedly been a crucial contribution to regular school attendance. However, this assistance is now being terminated.

A joint assessment mission to the *Zone d'accueil* by the Ministry of Education and the *Service d'aide et d'assistance aux réfugiés et apatrides* (SAARA) - UNHCR's new government counterpart for refugee matters - took place in April and the conclusions of the mission were extensively discussed with UNHCR. The Government has reiterated its will to admit Liberian refugee children into the Ivorian basic education system, but it lacks the necessary resources to absorb all these children during the forthcoming school year (Liberian school children represent close to 43 per cent of the total number of school children in the *Zone d'accueil*). Moreover, the majority of refugee children in higher grades still need to consolidate their knowledge of French and other subjects. The Government has therefore requested that UNHCR fund another transitional year, during which the Ministry of Education will enhance its technical supervision, provide training to teachers and prepare for the eventual incorporation of all refugee children into the national school system. The Ministry of Education, SAARA and UNHCR (with co-operation from UNICEF and WFP) are currently looking at practical and creative ways of ensuring that new first-graders are enrolled together with Ivorian children in the same schools. A Memorandum of Understanding between the parties involved is being drafted and a steering committee to plan and oversee all the stages of the integration process is being set up.

Much remains to be done to address the needs and find solutions for the numerous vulnerable refugees that have been identified in the *Zone d'accueil*. During the period under review, assistance mainly consisted of non-food items from available stocks, purchase of local materials for re-thatching of roofs and small subsistence allowances.

### Sierra Leonean Refugees

The relatively small group of 1,780 Sierra Leonean refugees who are living in and around Danane comprises a high proportion of youths under the age of 18 (47 per cent). Over the years this group of refugees has received the same treatment as the Liberian refugees, although this year only vulnerable individuals received assistance, mainly medical. Sierra Leonean refugees have been encouraged to attend Liberian refugee schools so that they too would benefit from the preparations linked to the transitional year. However, many children have continued to attend the informal schools set up by the Sierra Leonean refugee community. Nine orphans were placed in a foster family which received financial help for their support.

To date, no new Sierra Leonean refugees have arrived in Côte d'Ivoire as a result of the events in May in Sierra Leone nor have the existing refugees expressed a wish to be repatriated. Most long for resettlement to one of the traditional resettlement countries and recently individual refugees have found their way to Europe by their own means. Unless satisfactory solutions can be found for them in Côte d'Ivoire this trend is likely to increase.

Although Côte d'Ivoire has a well-established policy and practice of hospitality, the local integration programme for Liberian refugees and, by extension, the Sierra Leoneans has yet to take off. Among factors that have hindered progress are the present socio-political and economic situation in the country, the lack of social infrastructure and services and economic development in the refugee-hosting area, the new land property law and UNHCR's own financial constraints. The latter have generated

much uncertainty and have negatively affected planning. In several instances UNHCR was not able to conclude agreements with partners for more than six months. As a result, one international NGO involved in income-generating activities has taken the decision to withdraw as of September.

The multi-year environmental programme, established in 1997 in the *Zone d'accueil* for reforestation, energy-saving measures and soil conservation, entered into its fourth and last year. An independent consultant (hired to conduct an evaluation of the project earlier this year) concluded that in terms of reforestation, the goal has been greatly surpassed (1,000 hectares planted against 550 planned), but the project has generated little interest among the local population. The same was true for agroforestry. The energy-saving stoves and improved charcoal production metal ovens have generally been a success. As many as 5,000 energy-saving stoves have been constructed over the years with a positive impact on 134 villages and the 4,700 women who have been trained to use them. The remaining issue is how to ensure the sustainability of this project through its inclusion within the overall rehabilitation programme for the *Zone d'accueil*, for which the Government is seeking assistance from the international community with UNHCR's support.

### Urban Refugees

By the end of June, there were an estimated 1,700 asylum-seekers and recognised refugees in and around Abidjan and other towns. During the period under review, some 630 individuals (the majority from the Republic of the Congo) applied for asylum in Côte d'Ivoire and 337 asylum-seekers were recognised as refugees by the *ad hoc* Eligibility Commission. Some 1,300 refugees and asylum-seekers were assisted with medical care, subsistence allowances, rent and transportation. In addition, 131 recognised refugees received financial assistance to cover the fees related to the acquisition of a *carte de séjour*. Small loans for income-generating ventures (mobile phone services, vehicle and freezer repair, sale of cakes, etc.) were given to 13 refugees and 35 refugees attended

skills training (driving, computers, tailoring, hairdressing). Some 125 refugees pursued post-secondary, academic or professional studies for which they received scholarships.

### Strengthening of the Legal Framework for Refugee Protection

No progress was made during the reporting period in furthering the draft legislation to implement the 1951 Convention, its 1967 Protocol and the OAU Convention. Following the *coup d'état* on 24 December 1999 and the dissolution of the National Assembly, the process has come to a standstill. Moreover, changes in the key ministries (interior and external relations) makes it difficult to move the process forward until the presidential and legislative elections have taken place.

A new service for refugees (the *Service d'aide et d'assistance aux réfugiés et apatrides* or SAARA) was established in February within the Ministry of the Interior by presidential decree to replace the former *Comité national de coordination de*

*l'aide aux réfugiés*. The head of this service participated in a course on refugee law organised by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, following which he visited UNHCR Headquarters where he was briefed on UNHCR's mandate and role. In-depth discussions have taken place with the SAARA about such issues as identity documents for refugees and UNHCR's policy on refugee children, in particular separated children.

### REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

UNHCR will continue, in spite of complex political and economic factors, to pursue its initial objectives, particularly with regard to durable solutions for the refugees in the *Zone d'accueil* and urban refugees. A major review of the present situation of the refugee groups and their self-sufficiency level will need to take place in order to redefine a strategy and establish a more realistic timeframe for achieving the goals set as well as for the gradual scaling down of UNHCR's involvement.

### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	8'855'356	10'812'130	5'004'075	4'966'600

\*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.

