

UPDATE n° 5
Bureau for Africa
10 May 2005

Summary of the situation of Togolese refugees in Benin and Ghana

Situation in Togo

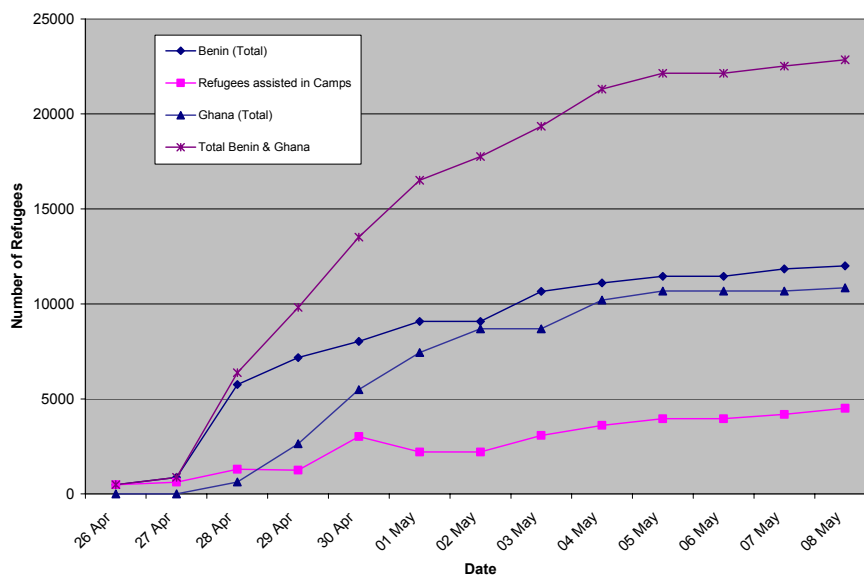
The influx of refugees started on 26 April, as a result of political unrest, demonstrations and acts of public violence caused by the announcement of the provisional results of the presidential elections which brought Faure Gnassingbe to power. The security situation has been reported calm since the Constitutional Court confirmed the election of the late President Eyadema's son on 03 May, but many arrests and house to house searches in Lome have been reported. At this stage, no solution has been agreed between the parties concerned to overcome the present political deadlock, despite regional diplomatic efforts (ECOWAS, AU). Though the UN was not allowed to assess the situation outside Lomé in the aftermath of the elections, humanitarian sources informed that the situation outside the capital is quiet but tense. Some Togolese nationals were seen leaving the capital to return to their home villages in the last few weeks. It has been difficult to find out whether the 1100 urban refugees in Lome have been affected by the

security problems after the elections. More information should be obtained during a meeting scheduled between the National Refugee Coordinator from the Togolese Government and UNHCR in Benin.

Number of refugees

There are 23,330 refugees in total as of Monday 09 May in the evening. While the number of refugees considerably increased on the Benin side on Thursday 28 April when the border with Togo re-opened, it took more time for Togolese nationals to cross into Ghana in numbers, although the border opened at the same day as Benin. Indeed, the influx significantly increased on Saturday 30 April, with 2,013 more refugees. Incidentally, many refugees in Ghana shuttle during the day back to Togo and spend the night in Ghana for their security. This phenomenon is taken into account in the consolidation of registration statistics.

Refugee Influx



Immediate response to the refugee influx

The first 480 refugees arrived on Tuesday 26 April in Benin at Hilakondji, where the church, Caritas and the Benin Red Cross provided immediate assistance. The following day, UNHCR carried out an assessment mission and started, in close cooperation with the authorities, UN and non-governmental agencies, to register and provide emergency assistance to the refugees in Hilakondji transit site and in the newly created Come camp, some 30 kms from the border, where refugees started to be transferred on the same day.

The Regional Representation Cotonou made a request on 27 April to the Regional Hub in Accra for logistic support, to provide non food items for some 5,000 individuals. As a result, 10 trucks were sent on Saturday 30 April via Burkina Faso to Benin, where all goods were unloaded the following week. The Regional Emergency stockpile has enough NFIs for the next two months, excluding tents, which may be brought from the sub-region or another source if the bamboos and plastic sheeting currently used in Ghana for shelter are not sufficient to accommodate all refugees.

On 27 April, a request for immediate deployment of an Emergency Response Team was made by the West Africa Desk to the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section at Headquarters. Eight staff from the Emergency Roster Team and EPRS, including protection, programme, community services, logistics, field, administration staff, have been deployed to the 2 affected countries for a period of two months (except one Emergency Officer expected to return soon from Ghana where she had arrived prior to the influx).

Since the beginning of the influx, ad hoc support from other units in Headquarters, from the West Africa Regional Hub and country offices included a Site Planner from Headquarters, the Regional Registration Officer and the Regional PI Officer from the Regional Hub in Accra, the Site Planner from Liberia Office, and the PI TV crew from Geneva. The Senior Regional Health Coordinator will travel to the refugee sites in both countries this week.

Transfer of refugees and site planning

In both Benin and Ghana, most refugees decided to stay with relatives and friends or to temporarily

rent a place where to stay. About 37% of the new arrivals in Benin are willing to be assisted in camps and are registered at Hilakondji transit centre before being transferred to Come camp or Lokossa camp, about 10 kms far from the nearest border. UNHCR facilitates as required the transport of those refugees willing to join their relatives in Benin, including Cotonou, instead of being assisted in the camps.



Women in refugee camp in Comé/ UNHCR

In anticipation of the limited accommodation capacity of Come camp, the preparation of Lokossa site was initiated almost immediately after the influx started : the site was completed and welcomed its first refugees on Saturday 30 April, four days after the influx started. Lokossa capacity has been continuously extended to accommodate today more than 3,000 refugees. Only separated minors are now transferred to Come camp.

In Ghana, only a small group of 120 refugees were identified in Aflao in a school compound. The majority of refugees are dispersed in the local population. The involvement of the local and traditional authorities and the existing humanitarian network have been crucial to provide assistance to the refugees. Although the integration in the host community has been supported by the authorities and the humanitarian community, it is anticipated that the host community and refugees will soon face financial constraints and may request for more direct assistance from the humanitarian community. Therefore, the preparation is underway for the creation of 3 refugee potential sites with a time lag: Adidome will be the first site to be operational and the other two sites, respectively near Aka/Jasikan and Kpedzeglo, will be developed as and if needed.

Inter-agency operational response

The humanitarian community has been working in close collaboration with the Beninese and Ghanaian authorities to meet the needs of the refugees. The humanitarian situation in both asylum countries has been under control since the beginning of the influx, as a result of a quick response and solid inter-agency cooperation between the authorities, sister UN agencies and other humanitarian partners to deliver assistance in the various area of intervention. For the time being, non food and food items have been distributed in Ghana in a targeted manner to meet the special needs of the vulnerable, but contingency measures are being worked out and NFIs and food items pre-positioned by UNHCR, WFP and their humanitarian partners. The distribution of food and non food items, with the assistance of CRS and the Benin Red Cross is ongoing in the refugee sites in Benin. UNHCR is also working closely with humanitarian partners in Ghana, where for instance a MOU between UNHCR, WFP, CRS and the Government of Ghana is being finalized for possible food aid interventions.

Additional human resources or financial support to hire consultants have been deployed by sister agencies and humanitarian partners to support the operation and the humanitarian presence in Togo to monitor the situation, including IFRC, UNFPA, WFP, OCHA, ICRC and UNHCHR.

Protection and community services

Refugees have been welcome in both countries, where the hospitality by the local community and the authorities has been remarkable.

Discussions were held with the local authorities in Benin regarding the need to ensure the civilian character of the refugee sites and to reinforce the security in the refugee sites. A few protection and security incidents were observed in the refugee sites and concerns were shared that young refugees may be recruited as combatants.

The child protection issues are being addressed by several partners, including UNICEF, the Red Cross and UNHCR. As of 6th May, some 123 separated minors had been registered and are being interviewed. Seventeen separated minors were transferred to Cotonou in care centres, while 4 children were reunified with their families. However, most of the separated minors are

transferred in priority to Come camp (102 minors), where they receive psychological support and material assistance. For instance, in Come camp, they received in the last few days hygiene kits, mats, sheets, cooking fuel, canned tomatoes and sardines, iodised salt and garbage can.

Other vulnerables, including pregnant and lactating mothers, are being identified and given priority transport and treatment at the refugee site. Material assistance was provided to 800 vulnerable to refugees in Ghana. The issue of exams in Benin has been raised by the young refugee students and is being looked into at the local level.



Young refugees living in a former school in Chetti in Benin, close to the Togolese border

The arrests and violence against opponents in the capital Lome seem to be the main cause for the civilians to seek refuge in neighbouring Benin and Ghana. Some refugees expressed fear that the Togolese army may take retaliation measures against them if they return to their homeland. Of concern is also the level of violence faced by some refugees during the political unrest and demonstration in Lome. In Benin, one refugee passed away on Sunday 08th May after he had been seriously wounded during the political turmoil in Lome.

Latest Developments

In Benin, there are 12,483 refugees as of Monday 09 May in the evening, with 162 new arrivals for the day. This figure also includes some 351 refugees who arrived in Cotonou and 350 refugees at Chetti 250 kms north of Lokossa. The situation at the border continued to be reported as very calm. Hilakondji site hosts approximately 150 individuals, while there are respectively 1,344 persons in Come and 3,354 in Lokossa, where

the work for the clearing of an additional 3 hectares has started.

In Ghana, the total number of refugees stands at 10,847 individuals, compared to 10,681 as of Thursday 05 May. Nearly 200 persons returned to Lome across the Aflao border on Sunday 08 May. Sample interviews conducted with persons appearing to be returnees indicated that they had received news that there was "no further trouble" in Togo. Incidentally, it is worth noting that an increasing number of returnees took their personal effects back to Togo. Though the total estimate of returns today stands at over 600 persons, it is too early to determine whether this will be a sustained movement at this stage.

Inter-agency coordination

At Headquarters level, a task force was established by the West Africa Desk on Thursday 27 April and has been extended since then to include representatives from OCHA, WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, ICRC, IFRC. The Task Force meets three times a week.

Emergency funds

UNHCR released USD 500,000 from its Operational Reserve at the onset of the emergency to cover costs related to the response interventions.

As the funds are being committed quickly, a review of further requirements is currently ongoing.