

This chapter provides a summary of the general environment in which UNHCR will operate in Asia and the Pacific in 2016. It presents an overview of the organization's strategy for the region, the main challenges foreseen and the financial requirements for its operational response.

Details of the operations in the region and its subregions in 2016 are presented on the Global Focus website at <http://reporting.unhcr.org>.

## | WORKING ENVIRONMENT |

- The Asia and the Pacific region is host to 3.8 million refugees, 5 million internally displaced people (IDPs), and 1.5 million stateless people. Of the 45 countries and territories in the region, only 20 have acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, but many continue to uphold traditions of hospitality to refugees and people in refugee-like situations.
- The majority of refugees in the region originate from Afghanistan and Myanmar. Many Afghan refugees have been in exile for more than three decades and may be second or third-generation refugees who have never lived in Afghanistan. The approximately 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees are dispersed across 70 countries, but the vast majority are hosted by just two countries - the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.
- The formation of Afghanistan's National Unity Government reignited hope for a stable Afghanistan and the possibility of lasting solutions for millions of Afghan refugees. The new Government is committed to welcoming Afghan refugees home, involving them in the country's reconstruction process, and to strengthening cooperation with its two neighbouring host countries and UNHCR in order to find durable solutions for them.
- Nevertheless, challenges lie ahead. Increasing numbers of Afghans are leaving the country to escape intensifying fighting and dire economic conditions, making their way to other parts of the region and also further afield. UNHCR estimates that Afghans account for up to 20 per cent of the people who have arrived by boat seeking international protection in Europe in 2015. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan is also internally displacing an increasing number of people.

# ASIA AND

A Rohingya refugee child from Myanmar receives medical treatment in a temporary shelter in East Aceh, Indonesia.

# THE PACIFIC



- In South-East Asia, Myanmar has undergone considerable political changes since 2011, making notable progress in the nationwide ceasefire negotiations involving different armed groups. It is hoped that the national elections in November 2015 will constitute another important milestone towards progress in the country's reform process.
- Meanwhile, an increasing number of people are taking to the seas in search of protection in South-East Asia. During the first six months of 2015 alone, some 31,000 people departed by sea from the Bay of Bengal, a 34 per cent increase in numbers from the same period in 2014. Around 370 people are believed to have died at sea in the first eight months of 2015. Concerned States in the region and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), supported by the United Nations and international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders, are strengthening cooperation to address the issue of irregular migration at sea (see also special feature in this chapter).
- The protection and provision of assistance for refugees living in urban and semi-urban contexts – a population of 2.8 million people, which represents 80 per cent of the total refugee population in Asia and the Pacific – continues to be a priority for UNHCR. Experience suggests that inadequate protection, inequitable access to education and livelihood opportunities, and a lack of available solutions in countries of first asylum often lead to irregular onward movements. The increasing numbers of people seeking to move onwards have placed additional burdens on other asylum countries and challenged UNHCR's capacity to carry out refugee status determination (RSD) in operations receiving many new arrivals.
- Further, more than 43 per cent of the people of concern to UNHCR under its statelessness mandate are concentrated in Asia and the Pacific: addressing this problem is therefore at the forefront of UNHCR's work in this region.

## | STRATEGY |

UNHCR's response in 2016 to the needs of people of concern in the many complex and critical situations across this region will be articulated around the following protection and operational strategies.

### ◉ *Safeguarding protection and asylum space*

UNHCR will continue to ensure adequate access to fair RSD processes in countries without national asylum procedures. The Office will also strengthen its advocacy and cooperation with States to uphold respect for international refugee and human rights law, including the principle of non-refoulement.

In 2016-2017, efforts to improve protection standards, including with regard to mixed movements, and to promote regional, protection-sensitive asylum management systems, will be pursued.

Priorities include: identifying alternatives to detention for asylum-seekers; individual status determination; and alternatives to third-country resettlement, such as temporary protection schemes and the promotion of bilateral labour-migration agreements.

In Central Asia, UNHCR will continue to support governments in developing legal frameworks and national asylum systems that comply with international refugee protection standards, and to include all people of concern in national systems. All operations will be shifting gradually from care and maintenance and mandate status determination activities to focusing on solutions and institution building.

In South-East Asia, UNHCR will work with concerned States to address mixed maritime movements in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. This includes the implementation of measures agreed upon

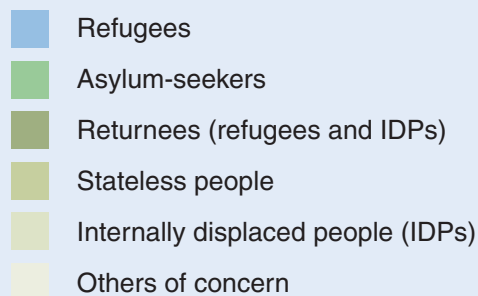
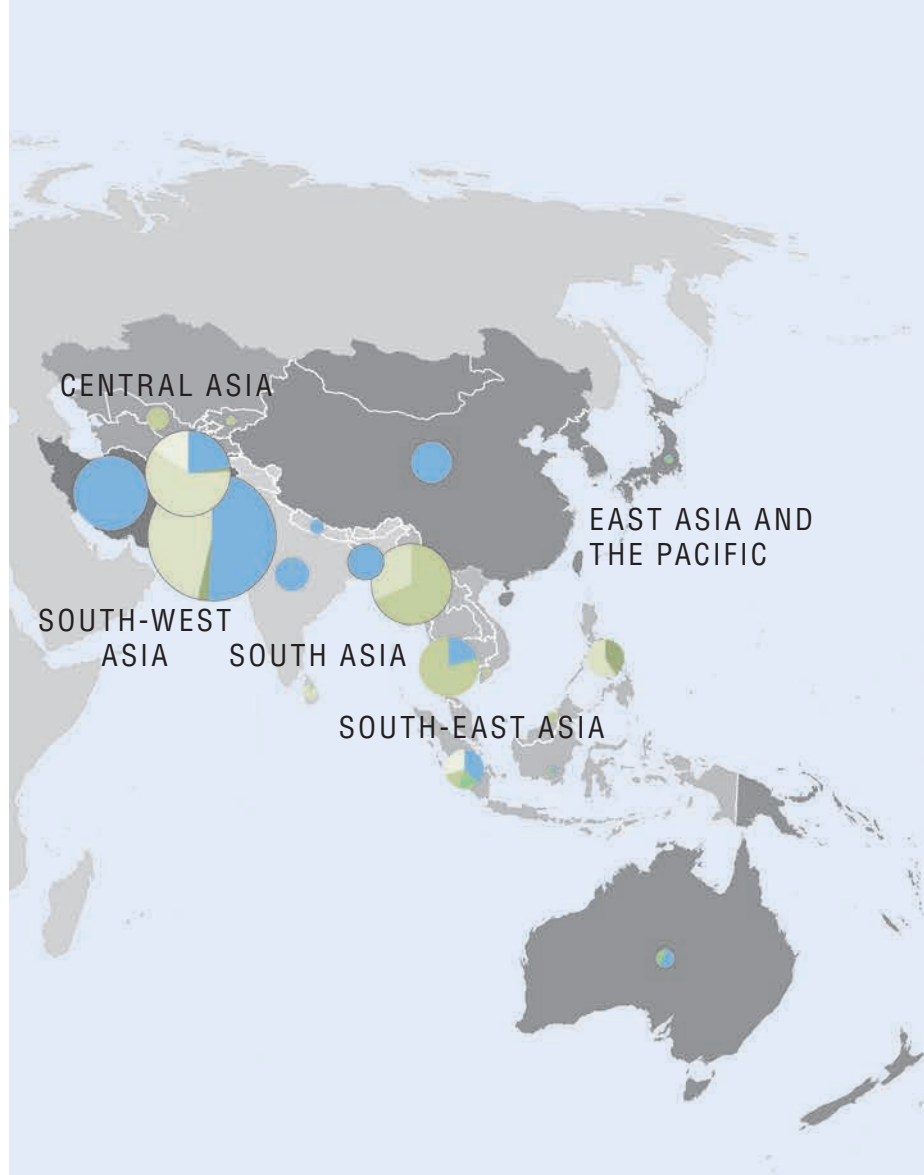
in 2015 during a meeting on the issue organized by the Government of Thailand and attended by countries in the region, UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and other States and stakeholders. These measures target the protection of people stranded at sea; the prevention of irregular migration, smuggling and trafficking; and moves to address the root causes of flight, including improving livelihood opportunities for at-risk communities.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan have continued to protect large numbers of Afghan refugees for decades, in difficult socio-economic conditions. In Pakistan, the Government has extended the validity of Proof of Registration (PoR) cards until the end of 2015. The Government's draft *Comprehensive Policy on Voluntary Repatriation and Management of Afghan Nationals Beyond 2015* includes a proposal to extend the validity of the PoR cards until the end of 2017. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, meanwhile, registered refugees are provided with Amayesh cards, which enable their access to basic services and facilitate the issuance of work permits.

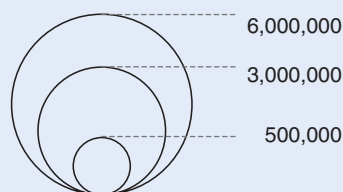
● *Finding solutions for protracted refugee situations*

In 2016 and 2017, UNHCR will continue to work with governments in the region to achieve durable solutions for people of concern, including through resettlement and, wherever possible, voluntary repatriation.

In Afghanistan, where significant political reform has taken place, nearly 54,000 refugees have returned to the country in 2015 – almost as many as the combined total for the previous two years. Reinvigorated multi-year support by the international community is essential to reinforce successes achieved to date. UNHCR will continue to support the Governments of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan to implement the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees* (SSAR) – a comprehensive and



**Size of population of concern**  
As of January 2015



integrated framework for joint interventions aimed at facilitating voluntary return and sustainable reintegration, while at the same time providing assistance to host countries. Concerted efforts have been made by these three Governments and UNHCR to implement the strategy since its adoption in 2012, including by developing country-specific projects. Targeting the cross-cutting sectors of education, health and livelihoods, these projects offer an integrated framework for cooperation and coordination to address the needs of Afghan refugees in each country and to advance solutions for them.

Meanwhile, in Myanmar, UNHCR will pursue its work with partners and stakeholders, including development agencies, to prepare for the return and reintegration of refugees from neighbouring countries.

In South Asia, UNHCR will continue to work with States concerned to seek durable solutions for refugees from Bhutan living in camps in Nepal. The number of refugees from Bhutan who have been resettled by UNHCR is expected to exceed 100,000 by end-2015, but a small number – many of them elderly – are likely to opt to remain in Nepal, with the hope of one day returning to Bhutan.

The Office will also look at strengthening protection activities for the large number of refugees living in the region's urban and semi-urban areas. Interventions will target four main areas: undertaking community outreach; fostering constructive relations between UNHCR and urban refugees; ensuring access to education, health care and other services; and promoting livelihoods and self-reliance.

### ○ *Ensuring protection and durable solutions for IDPs*

In Myanmar, the Government has started implementing a phased approach to end the internal displacement in Rakhine state which affects some 130,000 people. UNHCR will pursue protection monitoring in areas of return and advocate for joint monitoring and engagement by government authorities and humanitarian and development actors to find lasting solutions for this population. In Kachin state, where some 100,000 people remain displaced, timely access to solutions will depend on the success of a nationwide ceasefire agreement.

In South-West Asia, UNHCR will continue to work with the Government of Pakistan to protect and assist around 1.3 million IDPs, including more than 690,000 people who have been displaced in the North Waziristan and Khyber Agencies since 2014. In Afghanistan, the organization will liaise with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation on implementing the national IDP policy.

UNHCR supports the Government of Sri Lanka in finding durable solutions for remaining IDPs, and advocates for their sustainable reintegration into their areas of origin. The Office is implementing community-based livelihood initiatives aimed at improving the self-reliance and reintegration of former IDPs in the country's north, and is also carrying out capacity building for the authorities to help resolve housing, land and property issues. Solution-focused support for IDPs is provided in line with the Government's reconciliation programme.

○ *Reducing and preventing statelessness and protecting stateless people*

In Central Asia, where more than 115,000 people remain stateless or with undetermined nationality, UNHCR has developed regional guidance for operations to implement context-specific strategies under its Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024.

In Myanmar, where an estimated 1 million people are without citizenship, the

Government has taken some positive steps towards solutions. UNHCR will support the authorities in expanding a planned citizenship verification exercise – initially limited to the town of Myebon – across Rakhine state.

In Malaysia, the Office will continue providing technical assistance to an NGO partner to map, register and provide legal assistance to people, primarily of Tamil descent residing in western Malaysia, who lack nationality documentation.

## | CHALLENGES |

The absence of a legal and institutional framework to anchor protection and solutions in many of the region's situations remains a major challenge for UNHCR. The need to step in, where governmental capacity is limited in registration, RSD and the search for durable solutions, has also stretched the Office's resources.

Policy responses to mixed maritime movements in the region, including deterrent and punitive measures by some States, continue to cause concern. These severely restrict asylum-seekers' access to protection and solutions, and undermine the principles of burden sharing and cooperation promoted by regional initiatives such as the Bali Process, and by ASEAN.

The deteriorating security situation in parts of the region, along with the unpredictable political and socio-economic conditions, is also a cause for concern. In addition, with expanding global asylum and migration issues, traditional solutions such as resettlement to third countries, local integration, and voluntary return may need to be carefully considered with a view to identifying alternative mid-course solutions, such as providing temporary protection.

States must embrace their responsibilities toward protecting refugees within their territories and look for solutions for these populations, either through providing legal status, alternative stay arrangements or other forms of protection, for instance through labour-migration schemes. ■

# Bay of Bengal Situation

In May 2015, more than 5,000 refugees and migrants were abandoned by people smugglers in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, and at least 70 people died on abandoned vessels.

Countries in the region convened in Bangkok on 29 May 2015 for the Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean, and put forward 17 proposals. These include the need for immediate responses to protect people stranded at sea; comprehensive prevention of irregular migration, smuggling of migrants, and trafficking in persons; and measures to address root causes and improve livelihoods in communities at risk.

By June 2015, there had been 94,000 departures and 1,100 deaths at sea since the beginning of the year.

At the Emergency ASEAN Ministerial Meeting Concerning Irregular Movement of Persons in South-East Asia on 2 July 2015, governments echoed the proposals made on 29 May, including the need for:

- Strengthening of law enforcement efforts to combat trafficking in persons and people smuggling as well as other forms of transnational crime at the national and regional level;
- Conducting of analysis and studies on mixed movements of persons in South-East Asia;

- Supporting the establishment of a trust fund for voluntary contributions from ASEAN Member States and the international community to support humanitarian efforts in dealing with the challenges of mixed movements of persons; and
- ASEAN to explore the possibility of setting up a task force to respond to crisis and emergency situations arising from the mixed movements of persons.

UNHCR coordinates with IOM, UNODC and concerned governments on the implementation of these proposals and responses to the situation.

## UNHCR PRIORITIES

- Saving lives through search and rescue operations that ensure disembarkation to a place of safety with humane reception conditions in accordance with human rights and humanitarian principles enshrined in international law.
- Developing safe and legal migration pathways, including labour migration, at all skill levels and through regional arrangements, which would provide safe alternative routes and solutions.
- Addressing the root causes of refugee and migrant flows, including discrimination, deprivation, persecution, violations of human rights and poverty.
- Strongly advocating for the prosecution of human traffickers and smugglers for their crimes in full accordance with international standards for human rights, while fully respecting the rights of victims.





Hundreds of Rohingya refugees crammed aboard a wooden fishing boat on the Andaman Sea, desperate for food, water and a safe haven.

AP/IC. ARCHAMBAULT



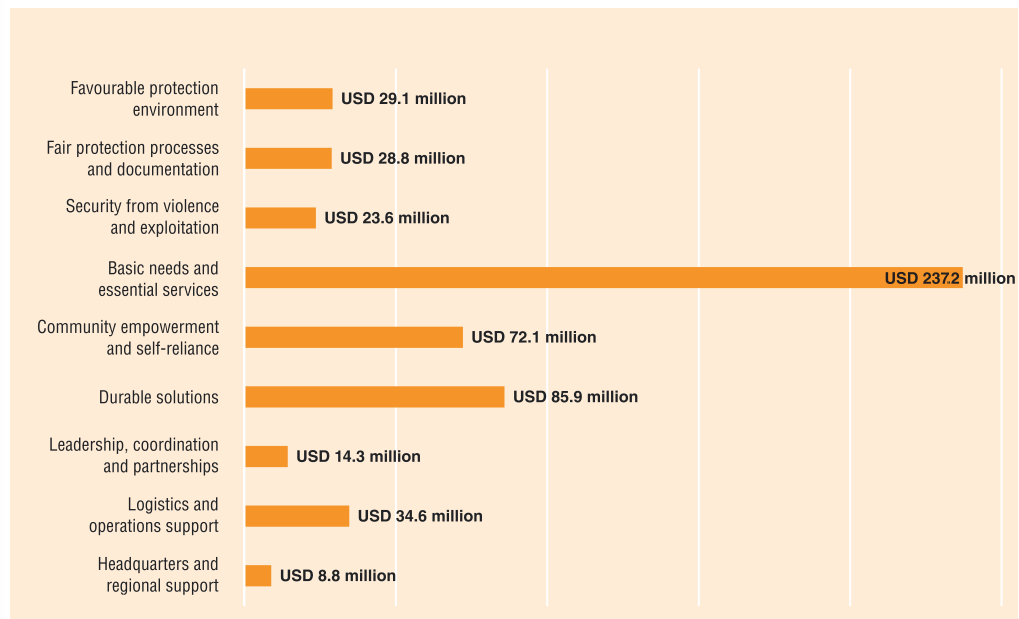
FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Limited humanitarian funding globally, and an increasing number of new emergencies, have severely constrained the resources available for UNHCR's operations in Asia and the Pacific. Although needs have grown during the past five years, the Office has had to make difficult decisions to reprioritize its activities in order to meet the most critical needs in the region, while also phasing down some programmes.

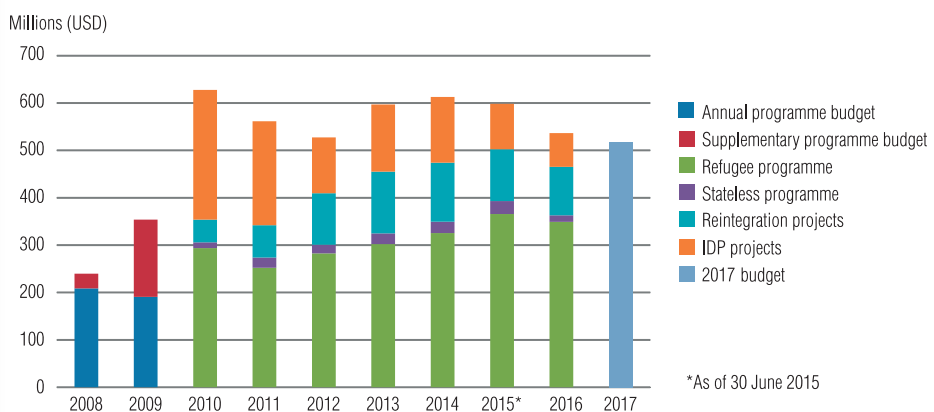
UNHCR has reduced its 2016 budget for the region by more than USD 30 million to USD 534.3 million. The financial requirements for South-West Asia, comprising operations in the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, represent some 63 per cent of the total regional requirements; the Myanmar operation represents some 10 per cent; and the remaining 27 per cent is shared among 18 other small and medium-sized operations.

UNHCR is especially concerned that a shortage of funding would hamper the search for solutions for Afghan refugees in the critical year ahead, and could have a severe impact on the delivery of key protection activities throughout the region.

BUDGET FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC | 2016 by Rights Group



BUDGET FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC | 2008-2017



## BUDGETS FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC | USD

Operations	2015	2016					2017
	Current budget (as of 30 June 2015)	PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	PILLAR 2 Stateless programme	PILLAR 3 Reintegration projects	PILLAR 4 IDP projects	Total	
<b>SOUTH-WEST ASIA</b>							
Afghanistan	150,643,886	62,075,385	0	51,825,628	23,832,852	137,733,865	141,033,217
Iran, Islamic Republic of	72,823,782	70,663,243	0	0	0	70,663,243	72,552,381
Pakistan	136,702,630	58,127,703	235,000	50,347,091	18,719,794	127,429,588	108,709,794
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>360,170,298</b>	<b>190,866,332</b>	<b>235,000</b>	<b>102,172,719</b>	<b>42,552,646</b>	<b>335,826,696</b>	<b>322,295,393</b>
<b>CENTRAL ASIA</b>							
Kazakhstan Regional Office <sup>1</sup>	6,994,319	5,082,108	1,907,856	0	0	6,989,964	6,989,964
Kyrgyzstan	4,262,384	1,856,638	1,019,634	0	0	2,876,272	2,306,308
Tajikistan	2,718,279	2,462,432	1,604,709	0	0	4,067,141	4,940,383
Turkmenistan	694,624	353,078	391,998	0	0	745,077	739,754
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>14,669,605</b>	<b>9,754,256</b>	<b>4,924,197</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14,678,453</b>	<b>14,976,408</b>
<b>SOUTH ASIA</b>							
India	14,714,199	14,987,333	74,513	0	0	15,061,846	15,814,435
Nepal	16,914,053	9,011,837	679,488	0	0	9,691,325	8,020,000
Sri Lanka	7,662,461	5,548,079	45,784	0	789,056	6,382,919	5,574,738
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>39,290,714</b>	<b>29,547,249</b>	<b>799,784</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>789,056</b>	<b>31,136,090</b>	<b>29,409,173</b>
<b>SOUTH-EAST ASIA</b>							
Bangladesh	15,184,305	13,605,759	62,188	0	0	13,667,947	13,482,943
Indonesia	8,520,175	7,246,455	129,725	0	0	7,376,180	8,113,799
Malaysia	18,700,610	18,899,473	973,049	0	0	19,872,522	18,525,588
Myanmar	72,772,720	28,978,657	2,610,846	0	24,458,412	56,047,915	56,210,000
Philippines	5,477,770	1,091,946	924,748	0	2,953,873	4,970,567	5,182,206
Thailand	38,363,459	29,100,284	1,590,355	0	0	30,690,639	27,935,563
Thailand Regional Office <sup>2</sup>	10,329,227	6,842,144	1,042,388	0	0	7,884,532	7,884,566
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>169,348,267</b>	<b>105,764,718</b>	<b>7,333,299</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27,412,285</b>	<b>140,510,303</b>	<b>137,334,665</b>
<b>EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC</b>							
Australia Regional Office <sup>3</sup>	1,976,522	1,980,000	0	0	0	1,980,000	1,938,464
China Regional Office	4,140,045	4,581,576	184,710	0	0	4,766,286	4,099,321
Japan	3,469,847	3,195,590	104,409	0	0	3,300,000	3,134,718
Republic of Korea	2,162,266	1,529,932	170,068	0	0	1,700,000	1,497,893
Regional activities	629,062	444,000	0	0	0	444,000	500,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>12,377,742</b>	<b>11,731,098</b>	<b>459,187</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12,190,285</b>	<b>11,170,395</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>595,856,627</b>	<b>347,663,653</b>	<b>13,751,468</b>	<b>102,172,719</b>	<b>70,753,987</b>	<b>534,341,828</b>	<b>515,186,033</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes activities in Uzbekistan<sup>2</sup> Includes activities in Cambodia, Mongolia and Viet Nam<sup>3</sup> Includes activities in New Zealand, the Pacific Island countries and Papua New Guinea