

Overview of UNHCR's operations in Africa

A. Situational context

Refugee emergencies triggered by conflicts in the Central African Republic, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, northern Nigeria and South Sudan continue to dominate UNHCR's operations in Africa. Level-3 emergencies are still active in the Central African Republic and South Sudan, while the situation in north-east Nigeria is rapidly deteriorating. Despite the numerous humanitarian crises on the continent, progress is being made to resolve some of the long-standing refugee situations. In the United Republic of Tanzania, naturalization of the over 162,000 former Burundian refugees resumed. Additionally, significant progress was made in the repatriation and local integration of tens of thousands of former Angolan refugees.

In South Sudan, fighting continues to displace thousands of people every week, despite renewed efforts to drive the peace process forward. Some 630,000 South Sudanese refugees are hosted in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda, almost 500,000 of whom fled since the conflict began in mid-December 2013. Fighting and generalized violence also displaced 1.5 million South Sudanese inside the country. The humanitarian community is facing a number of concerns including lack of land to host the rapidly increasing number of refugees, food ration cuts in Kenya and Uganda, and limited humanitarian access to internally displaced persons (IDPs).

In the Central African Republic, the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in September 2014 brought hope for the gradual re-establishment of security in the country. However, ongoing fighting between rival factions and human rights abuses targeting civilians continue to cause massive displacement. The number of Central African refugees in neighbouring countries reached 426,000 by January 2015, including 190,000 who fled following the outbreak of violence in December 2013.

Indiscriminate attacks against civilians in north-eastern Nigeria along the borders of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger became more frequent and violent. The attacks targeted several villages in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states in north-eastern Nigeria, which have been in a state of emergency since 2013, and also spilled across the border into Cameroon. As of January 2015, at least 980,000 Nigerians are believed to be internally displaced and the number of refugees has rapidly increased to over 160,000.

Violence continued in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the Kivus, Katanga and Ituri provinces. At the end of 2014, there were over 2.7 million IDPs and 450,000 Congolese were refugees in neighbouring countries.

In northern Mali, the security situation remains fragile since the incidents in Kidal in May 2014. Peace talks are scheduled to resume in mid-February 2015. Some 143,000 Malian refugees remain in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger. Although the number of IDPs has reduced by 70 per cent since early 2014, 86,000 people remain internally displaced. UNHCR is establishing legal frameworks for organized voluntary returns that will be facilitated once the security situation permits such movements. Meanwhile, UNHCR is

assisting those IDPs and refugees who have spontaneously returned to reintegrate in their places of origin.

In southern Africa, progress continues in achieving durable solutions, particularly in the repatriation and local integration of former Angolan refugees in the region and the resettlement of refugees, mainly of Congolese origin. Unfortunately, refugees continue to face hostility in the context of mixed migratory movements, and there is increasing pressure on the asylum and protection space. UNHCR is bolstering efforts to strengthen national asylum systems and improve refugee status determination procedures.

B. Achieving the global strategic priorities

(i) Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions

Comprehensive solutions

The High Commissioner's Global Initiative for Somali Refugees (GISR) aims to identify solutions for the one million Somali refugees in the East and Horn of Africa region and Yemen. In August 2014, a ministerial-level meeting with concerned States adopted the *Addis Ababa Commitment towards Somali Refugees*, which emphasises improving asylum space in host countries and working toward adequate conditions for repatriation in Somalia. In 2015, the GISR consultation process with governments, humanitarian and development actors and the Somali diaspora will continue in order to translate the commitment into action.

In 2014, decisive steps were taken to conclude the chapter for Angolan refugees after 50 years of exile. More than 14,000 former Angolan refugees repatriated, mostly from the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. The Angolan Government supported the local integration of its citizens by deploying inter-ministerial teams to the host countries and issuing some 1,000 national passports. Host governments are issuing residence permits, enabling Angolans to remain in the country after the cessation of their refugee status. Progress in Zambia to provide residence permits is ongoing despite administrative delays. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, some 18,000 residence permits are currently being issued to facilitate local integration, and over 37,000 former Angolan refugees are expected to be repatriated in 2015.

The implementation of comprehensive solutions for Rwandan refugees has progressed slowly. In 2014, almost 5,300 Rwandans voluntarily returned home, bringing the total number of returns since 2001 to 136,600. Verification exercises for Rwandan refugees took place in 2014, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where biometric registration is ongoing. Pending the results of this exercise, the number of Rwandan refugees currently stands at 80,000. Enhanced efforts are needed regarding the issuance of national passports and residence permits for Rwandan refugees who wish to locally integrate. A ministerial-level meeting is planned in 2015 to assess the progress made and the way forward on the comprehensive solutions strategy.

Voluntary repatriation

A pilot project to support the spontaneous repatriation of 10,000 Somali refugees from Kenya by 30 June 2015 was launched in December 2014, under the auspices of a tripartite agreement between the Government of Kenya, the Federal Government of Somalia and UNHCR. As of the end of January 2015, 1,160 refugees had returned to Kismayo and Baidoa in southern Somalia.

As of January 2015, some 35,000 Malians had returned from Burkina Faso, Niger and Mauritania, including 2,800 between November 2014 and January 2015. The Governments

of Mali, Niger and UNHCR concluded a tripartite agreement for voluntary repatriation in May 2014. A similar tripartite agreement was concluded with Burkina Faso in January 2015, and one is expected with Mauritania by mid-2015.

In 2014, more than 16,000 refugees returned to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the Central African Republic and the Congo, bringing the total number of returnees to over 119,000 since the repatriation operation began in 2012. Improved security in the Rutshuru area of North Kivu enabled thousands of Congolese refugees to voluntarily repatriate from Uganda, either spontaneously or with assistance. UNHCR facilitated the return of over 5,400 refugees between July and December 2014 from Uganda, while many more continue to return spontaneously in 2015.

Since 2011, an estimated 240,000 Ivorian refugees returned from Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, and Togo, mostly spontaneously. To ensure the sustainability of the returns, UNHCR continues to implement reintegration projects in areas of return. The organized repatriation of 38,000 Ivorian refugees from Liberia was suspended in July 2014 due to concerns linked to Ebola, but is expected to resume in 2015.

Local integration

In October 2014 the Tanzanian Government decided to resume the process of local integration of the 162,156 former Burundian refugees (and their children born after the last registration in 2010). By early 2015, some 24,000 citizenship certificates had been issued to the newly-naturalized Tanzanians, who have been given the choice to remain in the settlements where they resided for decades or to relocate to other parts of the country. UNHCR is supporting the Government in all legal aspects of the naturalization process, while working with the authorities and development partners on the long-term socio-economic aspects of integration.

In Zambia, to facilitate socio-economic integration of former Angolan refugees, most of whom are farmers, the Government demarcated 530 plots of land in two resettlement areas. Since September 2014, a total of 311 plots have been allocated. Other livelihood, health, education and infrastructure interventions have begun in the resettlement areas and will continue throughout 2015.

Resettlement

In 2014, UNHCR submitted the cases of about 34,800 refugees for resettlement from Africa and more than 19,000 refugees departed to their resettlement countries. This is a 19 per cent increase compared to the number of submissions made in 2013 and a 52 per cent increase compared to 2012. The majority of refugees referred for resettlement are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Somalia and Eritrea.

In 2015, UNHCR will continue to focus on the implementation of the multi-year plan to enhance resettlement opportunities for Congolese refugees from Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania through the submission of some 14,000 cases. Out of the 50,000 target, 33,537 case submissions were made since 2012. Additionally, Eritrean, Somali and Sudanese refugees from Darfur will continue to be processed, as well as refugees of other origin facing particular protection risks.

(ii) Promoting a favourable protection environment

Asylum

Asylum remains solid and resilient in Africa, where almost one quarter of the 13 million refugees worldwide reside. UNHCR is concerned about continued instances of *refoulement*, including to countries where violence and human rights abuses are prevalent.

Maintaining the civilian nature of refugee camps is an ongoing concern, especially in border areas. Additionally, preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence remains a protection priority for UNHCR in both refugee and IDP contexts.

In 2014, UNHCR undertook a regional survey of its capacity to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) refugees and asylum-seekers in Africa. The results showed the need for additional focus, technical capacity and support to be given to offices across the continent. As a result, the first UNHCR-led training for the African region on the protection of LGBTI individuals was facilitated for more than 30 senior protection staff in November 2014.

In December 2014, a memorandum of understanding was concluded between the Ministry of Interior of the Sudan, the Commissioner for Refugees and UNHCR for the registration and documentation of 120,000 South Sudanese refugees, defining their legal status and facilitating easier access to services provided by UNHCR and the Sudanese Government.

Mixed migration

Tens of thousands of African refugees and asylum-seekers are seeking safety in countries outside their region, joining migrants in mixed population movements. Trafficking continues to be a tragic feature of these long and dangerous journeys. Border control measures are becoming more restrictive, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean, making it more difficult for people in need of international protection to seek asylum.

In response, the African Union continues to promote regional dialogue and coordination on migration management; to support Member States in strengthening responses to transnational organized crime, notably trafficking and smuggling of persons; and to enhance the protection of trafficking victims in the Horn of Africa. Following consultative meetings with the Governments of Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia and the Sudan, the African Union Commission, with support from the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR, convened a regional ministerial-level conference in October 2014. The outcome of the conference was the *Khartoum Declaration and Plan of Action*, encouraging sharing of best practices, greater cooperation across borders, and the development of national strategies to address smuggling and human trafficking. The further adoption of a declaration in the context of the European Union-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative¹ in November 2014 was a positive step towards international cooperation.

Internally displaced persons

December 2014 marked the second anniversary of the entry into force of the *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa* (Kampala Convention), which is the world's first continental instrument that legally binds governments to protect the rights and wellbeing of the internally displaced. As of January 2015, 39 States were signatories to the Convention, while 22 had ratified it.

Encouragingly, several African governments are developing national legislation on internal displacement. Somalia's adoption of the policy framework on displacement and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's preparation of a draft bill on IDPs are exemplary of this progress.

¹ See: <http://italia2014.eu/media/3785/declaration-of-the-ministerial-conference-of-the-khartoum-process.pdf>

Statelessness

In May 2014, the African Union (AU) and its African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights agreed to undertake a study on the right to nationality and assigned the Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Internally Displaced Persons and Migrants with the responsibility of developing a protocol on the right to nationality in Africa. The study was supported by UNHCR and released in January 2015. Just as the Kampala Convention raised the protection needs of internally displaced people to the top of the regional agenda, the protocol on nationality is expected to galvanize action to end statelessness in the continent.

To bring forward UNHCR's global campaign to end statelessness by 2024 and address statelessness issues regionally, UNHCR and the Economic Community of West African States will be facilitating a ministerial-level conference in Côte d'Ivoire on 25 February 2015.

As of the end of January 2015, 22 out of the 54 AU Member States were parties to the 1954 Convention and 15 were parties to the 1961 convention.

C. Financial information

The 2015 comprehensive needs assessment budget for Africa approved by the Executive Committee in October 2014 was of US\$ 2.17 billion. By January 2015, the budget increased by US\$ 317 million in response to the situations in the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and South Sudan and the impacts of Ebola in West Africa.

In 2014, emergencies accounted for over 70 per cent of UNHCR's expenditures in Africa, while less than 15 per cent was directed toward solutions and livelihoods interventions. In 2015, UNHCR will continue to prioritize providing life-saving protection and assistance to people displaced by violence and conflict in the region. However, increased resources will be necessary to advance the search for durable solutions for hundreds of thousands of refugees across the continent.
