

# West and Central Africa

## Recent Developments

In September 2002, the attempted coup d'état in Côte d'Ivoire seriously affected the security situation in the sub-region. Thousands of Ivoirians, immigrants and refugees were displaced by fighting in Bouaké and by the destruction of shanty towns around Abidjan. This led many urban refugees and asylum-seekers to seek assistance from UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies. A wave of xenophobia followed accusations that the rebels had been supported by foreigners, causing fears for the safety of refugees and other foreign nationals. In October, UN agencies at a regional meeting in Accra decided to launch an inter-agency flash appeal to facilitate the response to the needs of people affected by the instability. There are concerns that, over and above the serious humanitarian consequences of the conflict, a prolonged crisis in Côte d'Ivoire could also have devastating economic and social consequences for the sub-region.



In Liberia, the security situation deteriorated in 2002 as the civil conflict intensified. As of September 2002, more than 81,000 Liberians had fled the country. This was in addition to the estimated 227,000 who fled by 31 December 2001, into neighbouring countries, and an estimated 150,000 who were internally displaced. There is scant hope of any immediate improvement of the security situation in Liberia.

Since stability has been restored in Sierra Leone, refugees and internally displaced persons have been returning home. In 2002, more than 240,000 Sierra Leonean refugees and returnees have gone back to their places of origin. With the entire country having been declared safe, UNHCR decided in September 2002, to start promoting the return of refugees from other countries. With the help of the international aid community, the Government has developed plans to ensure a smooth transition from relief assistance to development.

Of the 20,000 Nigerians who, in January 2002, sought refuge in Cameroon from the inter-ethnic conflict in northern Nigeria, some 12,000 remained there and have been provided, since September, with relief assistance. Approximately 1,000 Sudanese refugees who fled to the Central African Republic (CAR) at the beginning of 2002 continue to receive food, medicines, non-food items and agricultural tools. Although there have been some positive developments in the Great Lakes region and in Central Africa, these have not translated into large returnee movements from either CAR or Gabon.

## Strategic Objectives

UNHCR will continue to seek repatriation and re-integration as the best durable solution for most refugee groups in the sub-region. This will be of primary concern to Sierra Leonean refugees, but will also affect those originating from Central Africa

and the Great Lakes regions. Key to the achievement of this objective will be UNHCR's co-operation with other UN agencies, bilateral actors and NGOs. In Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, the Consolidated Appeal framework has provided a forum for the co-ordination of UN humanitarian activities, as well as forge a link between relief assistance and early recovery. That link is of crucial importance to sustainable return and reintegration.

When repatriation is not an option as a durable solution, UNHCR will focus on local integration activities and seek to enhance economic their self-sufficiency.

UNHCR aims to strengthen its resettlement programme in the region. This received renewed impetus in 2002 when a regional resettlement unit (hub) was established in UNHCR's Ghana office. Resettlement activities in West and Central Africa will be co-ordinated and supported through this resettlement hub, with the aim of improving and accelerating the processing of resettlement cases.

In light of large backlogs of asylum requests in some countries in the region, UNHCR will help governments to increase their capacity to handle refugee matters and asylum applications. UNHCR will continue to promote the need for national legislation on refugees and provide technical support to governments when required. In Cameroon and the Gambia, UNHCR will re-establish its presence in 2003, in order to ensure that urban refugees and asylum-seekers receive adequate protection.

In many countries in the sub-region, large influxes of new refugees over the past year have caused local populations and governments to become increasingly concerned about insecurity and destabilisation. In order to mitigate some of the tensions arising from such concerns, UNHCR will strengthen the co-operation with governments and support and sensitise local communities.

In Guinea, the presence of armed elements in refugee camps has been a growing concern. UNHCR will closely co-operate with the Government in its intensified efforts to ensure the civilian character of refugee camps. Measures will include strengthening security forces, encouraging

the establishment of separate settlements for ex-combatants and establishing camps at a safe distance from borders.

The abduction of five NGO nurses from Sinje refugee camp in Liberia in June 2002, underlined the increasing security risks faced by humanitarian workers in conflict zones. UNHCR will aim to reinforce measures to protect staff through adequate security procedures and the provision of communication equipment.

UNHCR will continue to strengthen its core protection function by stepping up measures to prevent and, when necessary, combat sexual exploitation and abuse of refugees. After UNHCR and Save the Children UK had carried out a joint study on sexual violence against refugee children in West Africa, specific measures were introduced in 2002 to better address sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse in refugee situations. These include: the introduction of the UNHCR Code of Conduct for all staff, national and international; the inclusion of clauses governing the conduct of NGO partners in all implementation agreements; the publication of the newly revised Guidelines on Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and IDPs; and the setting up of mechanisms for improved accountability to beneficiaries. One of UNHCR's principal objectives in 2003 will be the implementation and enforcement of these measures, both in the region and worldwide. In addition, measures will be adopted to review the level of material assistance currently being provided by UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies to refugees and those living in close proximity to the refugees.

## Operations

UNHCR's country programmes in **Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia** and **Sierra Leone** are described in separate chapters.

The Cluster Office in **Benin**, in addition to providing assistance to approximately 2,300 urban refugees in Benin, has also been assisting people of concern to the Office in **Burkina Faso, Niger** and **Togo**, after UNHCR offices in these countries were



Guinea: Life in exile begins – registration of new arrivals at Sédimay, Macenta.  
UNHCR / F. Diariou Tounkara

closed in December 2001. It is estimated that, in 2003, refugees in the four countries covered by the office in Benin will number at least 8,000, most of them from Central African Republic and the Great Lakes region, as well as Nigeria, Togo and East African countries. Given the similarity of living conditions in the four countries, the Office plans to harmonise the activities implemented. Through its partners, UNHCR will support refugees' participation in employment programmes, as well as quick impact projects and micro-credit activities designed to generate employment for refugees and help them to attain self-sufficiency. Vocational training programmes with a direct link to employment will also be considered. UNHCR also plans to support the placement of refugees in employment generation programmes funded by development actors, including other UN agencies. Targeting the most vulnerable refugees, the Office will fund, albeit on a reduced scale, health and primary assistance programmes, such as housing, food, and community services activities.

Programmes in **Cameroon** have been severely hampered by the closure of the Office in Yaoundé in late 2001. The arrival of some 20,000 Nigerian refugees at the beginning of 2002 necessitated the temporary re-establishment of UNHCR's presence in the country through short-term missions. In this context, it has been decided to re-open the office in Yaoundé in 2003. Its work will focus on the provision of assistance to the remaining 12,000

Nigerian refugees in the western part of the country, as well as on a review of assistance programmes for urban refugees.

The **Central African Republic (CAR)** hosts some 50,580 refugees, mainly Congolese, Rwandans and Sudanese. UNHCR will continue to emphasise local settlement and self-sufficiency through agricultural activities and micro-projects. It is not foreseen that the situation in Sudan will allow a sizeable number of refugees to return in 2003. The Office will therefore continue its efforts to settle Sudanese refugees locally in the

Mboki area. The office in Bangui will provide assistance and protection to the urban refugees. In the case of Rwandan refugees, the programme will focus on durable solutions such as resettlement and repatriation where possible. Should conditions improve in CAR, UNHCR will facilitate the return of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The number of Central African refugees in neighbouring countries is currently estimated at some 15,000.

The office in CAR has also been overseeing programmes in **Chad** after the closure of the Ndjamena office in December 2001. Many urban refugees in Chad continue to be vulnerable, and UNHCR will provide them with material assistance to ensure that their needs are met.

**Gabon** hosts 12,700 refugees, mainly from the Republic of the Congo (RoC) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and some 5,600 asylum-seekers. Refugees will continue to receive individual assistance in the health, food and education sectors. UNHCR will intensify its efforts to strengthen the Government's capacity to reduce the backlog of asylum applications. If security in RoC improves, UNHCR will seek to facilitate the repatriation of Congolese refugees from Gabon. In addition to the repatriation programme, the Office will continue its efforts to resettle individual refugees who are at risk, including the 42 pending emergency cases.

UNHCR will re-open its office in the **Gambia** in 2003 in order to be better placed to protect and provide assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in the country. The Office will urge the Government to adopt national legislation for the protection of refugees. At the same time, assistance will be provided to some 10,000 urban refugees as well as the 2,500 Senegalese who arrived in 2002, after fleeing the conflict in the Casamance region. The assistance provided to the refugees will focus on the health, education, community services and income generation sectors. The Office will also facilitate and promote the voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees to their place of origin.

In **Ghana**, the newly established regional resettlement hub for West and Central Africa will coordinate all resettlement activities in the region by providing support, training and policy guidance. Based on a review of refugee population data carried out together with the Government in 2002, the number of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country is now estimated at some 42,000. UNHCR will implement a comprehensive registration and documentation exercise for all asylum-seekers and refugees. The Office will continue to implement comprehensive measures to address the priority needs of refugees on a community basis. Efforts will focus mainly on the sectors of health, education, child protection, sanitation and waste disposal, communal infrastructure, security and safety, income generation and skills training. UNHCR will support the Ghanaian authorities in re-establishing national refugee mechanisms and help the government to increase their capacity to handle refugee matters and asylum applications. The Office will also promote the voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees through an information campaign as well as the provision of transport-related assistance.

There are some 4,350 refugees in **Nigeria**, most of them Liberians and Sierra Leoneans. UNHCR is promoting the voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leoneans, but the situation in Liberia remains fragile, with little sign of imminent improvement. The Office foresees a constant, fairly small, influx of Liberian refugees in 2003 and will provide protection and assistance to these new arrivals.

The **Senegal** office covers programmes in **Mali**, **Guinea-Bissau** and **Cape Verde**. The Senegal office will continue to provide international protection and life-sustaining assistance for refugees, asylum-seekers and other people of concern to UNHCR in these countries. The office in Dakar will also lobby for the adoption of a national refugee law in Guinea-Bissau. Efforts are ongoing to achieve durable solutions for Mauritanian refugees living in Senegal and Mali. UNHCR will facilitate and promote the return of refugees originating from various countries in the sub-region, especially Sierra Leoneans. It is hoped that peace talks concerning the Casamance region of Senegal will bear fruit, allowing the return of Senegalese refugees living in Guinea-Bissau.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Benin	845,515
Cameroon	539,063
Central African Republic	2,110,550
Côte d'Ivoire	8,930,023
Gabon	3,160,571
Gambia	704,908
Ghana	1,620,404
Guinea	23,371,111
Guinea-Bissau	42,900
Liberia	7,297,662
Mali	53,400
Nigeria	1,079,478
Senegal	1,143,484
Sierra Leone	31,811,834
Regional Activities <sup>1</sup>	2,140,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>84,851,503</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes care and maintenance, voluntary repatriation and resettlement assistance for urban refugees as well as scholarships for refugee students in West African countries.