



West Africa

Recent developments

Benin
Burkina Faso
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Côte d'Ivoire
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Liberia
Mali
Niger
Nigeria
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Togo

The peace process in Côte d'Ivoire is looking increasingly bleak. On 30 August 2005, the South African Government announced the end of its mediation efforts, blaming the deadlock on the *Forces nouvelles* and the opposition parties. With the announcement that presidential elections will not take place as planned at the end of the President's constitutional term on 30 October 2005, heightened political tension and an increase in security incidents may result in population outflows into neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the renewed commitment expressed by the African Union will result in moves in putting the peace process back on track.

In Guinea, the socio-economic situation remains poor despite the Government's efforts, under pressure from its development partners, to raise political and economic standards. The economy is plagued by high inflation which, compounded by the devaluation of the currency, has resulted in an increase in fuel costs of more than 100 per cent in a single year. On the political front, tensions continue within the Government and there has been speculation about the possibility of a *coup d'état*. The regional contingency plan is updated on a regular basis.



The political situation in Sierra Leone remains stable while the country continues to face the challenges of post-conflict recovery. Progress has been made on political and economic governance, consolidation of peace (improving the country's capacity for conflict prevention) and investment has been attracted for development projects. Preparations are under way for elections scheduled for 2007. Following Sierra Leone's path, the improving political, social and security situation in Liberia has allowed almost 40,000 refugees to return to their homes with UNHCR's assistance from October 2004 to October 2005, while more than 150,000 have returned spontaneously. It is expected that with the holding of free and fair elections on 11 October 2005 and the establishment of an elected Government, UNHCR will be able to shift from facilitation to promotion of return movements.

Repatriation was facilitated following the signing of a tripartite agreement in April 2005 between the Governments of Nigeria and Cameroon and UNHCR, and by September some 7,500 Nigerian refugees had returned home. These refugees had spent more than two years in exile in neighbouring Cameroon. The repatriation is expected to be

completed in 2006 with the return of the remaining Nigerian refugees.

The political crisis in Togo started in February 2005 with the death of the former President, followed by disputed presidential elections in April. The situation degenerated into massive civil unrest and caused an influx of over 40,000 refugees to Benin and Ghana as well as the displacement of some 10,000 people within Togo. Since June 2005, tensions in Togo have subsided somewhat, and repatriation of the Togolese will be considered as soon as conditions there are conducive to return in safety and dignity.

In Guinea-Bissau politics remained volatile and the security situation unpredictable. Following a *coup d'état* which ousted former President Kumba Yala, a transitional president was nominated to rule the country, while arrangements were made to return Guinea-Bissau to a democratic State. This culminated in the June 2005 presidential elections, which were declared free and fair by all international observers, resulting in the election of former president João Bernardo Vieira. Mindful of the prevailing fragile situation, the UN Country Team in Bissau drew up a regional contingency plan.

In late December 2004, a peace accord was signed between the Senegalese Government and the rebel *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* (MFDC). Talks on disarmament and the reintegration of ex-combatants followed, increasing the hopes for lasting peace in the region. The latest negotiations on the practical modalities of the agreement took place in February 2005 and appear more promising than the three previous peace accords of 1991, 1993 and 1995. The negotiations once again included the question of the repatriation of Senegalese refugees.

In sum, three categories of situation will be found in West Africa in 2006.

- Countries where solutions are being actively implemented and consolidated: Sierra Leone, where the reintegration programmes were completed by the end of 2005; or Liberia, where the peace process is being consolidated allowing more and more refugees to opt for repatriation.
- Countries where existing tensions must be closely monitored: Guinea-Bissau, for which regional and inter-agency contingency plans must remain in place (despite relatively peaceful recent elections); Côte d'Ivoire, where the political situation could lead to a further deterioration, and possibly a humanitarian crisis; and Guinea, where the socio-economic situation remains fragile in a volatile regional environment.
- New situations, such as the crisis in Togo, where election-related unrest has triggered refugee movements to Ghana and Benin since April 2005.

Strategic objectives

One objective for UNHCR in 2005, to be further developed in 2006, was to strengthen its partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS has been working at various political and humanitarian levels, including monitoring the political and security situation in countries at war or at the post-conflict stage and intervening if appropriate. ECOWAS and UNHCR have cooperated in responding to different refugee, returnee and internal displacement



situations. Special Representatives of ECOWAS have been appointed in Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo.

The return and reintegration of Liberian refugees remains the main strategic objective for the region. It is expected that the period October 2005 to July 2006 will mark the high point in the return of Liberian refugees. It is anticipated that after the elections, UNHCR will be able to accelerate activities and encourage large-scale repatriation. In order to ensure the safety and security of refugees throughout 2006, UNHCR will endeavour



Benin: A newly-arrived Togolese refugee in Agoue digs trenches around tents to prevent flooding during the rain.
UNHCR / J. Björgvinsson

to enhance the national protection capacity of the governments of asylum countries.

The pursuit of gender equality and programmes for refugee women and children, in 2006, will include gender and age mainstreaming throughout UNHCR's West Africa operations. The prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence will remain a high priority.

UNHCR will work with host governments and continue to advocate for refugee legislation to better protect refugees and asylum-seekers. This will include efforts to create a legal environment

conducive to the sustainable local integration of refugees who choose to remain in their country of asylum.

In line with UNHCR's priorities for refugee children, the Office will focus on the prevention of various forms of exploitation faced by refugee adolescents. If there are no opportunities for formal education, they will be provided with vocational and skills training as well as income-generating activities.

HIV/AIDS interventions in conflict and post-conflict settings in West Africa have focused on

promoting prevention, especially life skills training, capacity building and distribution of information, education and communication materials. In 2006, UNHCR, together with its implementing partners, plans to expand voluntary counselling and testing as well as prevention of mother-to-child transmission and post-exposure prophylaxis for rape victims. UNHCR will continue to advocate that refugees have equal access to antiretroviral therapy when it becomes available to local populations.

In view of the fragile socio-economic and political situation in the subregion, UNHCR will be reviewing and updating contingency plans to enhance its regional emergency response capacity. In this context, UNHCR will retain the regional stockpile of non-food items in Accra. The stockpile will serve both for possible emergencies and ongoing repatriation operations.

Operations

UNHCR has established a **Regional Support Hub** in Accra to offer direct support in areas such as resettlement, registration, refugee women and children, health coordination and HIV/AIDS. Used strategically and in combination with repatriation programmes or local integration plans, these functions enhance the overall protection environment in the region and support the search for durable solutions. The Hub is staffed by a multidisciplinary team and will concentrate on monitoring compliance of processes and systems; ensuring age and gender mainstreaming; providing technical assistance and capacity building to strengthen emergency response capacities in the region; and developing stronger networking and outreach of activities at the regional level. It will also help find durable solutions in the region, with a focus on reintegration and local settlement, and enhance external relations.

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

In 2006, UNHCR's Regional Office in Benin will continue to provide protection to an estimated

20,000 refugees and 1,300 asylum-seekers in **Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger** and **Togo** under its regular programme. Local integration assistance will be provided to approximately 10,300 refugees who are living in the four countries and are unable to return home to Rwanda, the Republic of the Congo (RoC) and certain areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In conformity with the *Agenda for Protection*, UNHCR in Benin will reinforce the Government's protection capacity and the voluntary repatriation programme, in addition to pursuing activities geared towards self-reliance for refugees and strengthening the intervention capacity of implementing partners. Special efforts will be made to make the income-generating programme more effective, including small-scale economic activities as well as formal employment for those with the necessary skills and qualifications. In this context the Regional Office will implement recommendations formulated as a result of the 2005 protection gaps analysis and the national consultations related to Benin and Burkina Faso held in September 2005 in Cotonou. In 2006, education, vocational training and income-generating activities will target female refugees in particular. Special attention will be devoted to groups with specific needs, including unaccompanied minors, the elderly, single heads of household, the handicapped and the chronically ill, who will be supported both materially and psychosocially.

In addition to the regular programme the Regional Office in Benin will continue to provide protection and assistance to some 27,500 Togolese refugees who arrived in Benin in April 2005. The Office will assist their voluntary repatriation as soon as it becomes possible for them to return to Togo in safety and in dignity.

At the beginning of 2006, **Cameroon** will host some 40,000 refugees and some 6,800 asylum-seekers, mainly from Central and West African countries. This number includes some 7,500 Nigerian refugees (from an influx of 17,000 who arrived in late 2002 following ethnic clashes in Taraba state). Over the course of 2006, the Office will improve the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, and will focus, in particular, on the establishment and the effective implementation of a national eligibility committee, following the

passing of refugee legislation in July 2005. UNHCR will work with the Government to streamline the refugee status determination (RSD) process and reduce the backlog of some 6,000 asylum cases, as well as to implement an improved registration and identity document system for the refugee population. In building up the capacity of the Cameroonian authorities to conduct RSD, UNHCR's aim is to eventually hand over this activity to the Government. Working in conjunction with the national authorities and human rights groups, the Office will work to raise awareness and address any problems affecting the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Following the signing of the tripartite agreement for the repatriation of Nigerian refugees, some 7,500 Nigerian refugees had returned to Nigeria by September 2005 and 2,500 more were expected to repatriate by the end of the year. Another 2,500 are expected to repatriate in 2006 and a local settlement programme will be implemented to facilitate the integration of those opting to remain in Cameroon. The programme will focus on agro-pastoral activities and sanitation.

The Office will continue to promote and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of urban refugees and local integration activities will be reinforced to encourage self-reliance. These will include educational programmes, vocational training and income-generating activities. The Office will also continue to provide medical care for persons of concern as well as making available hygienic kits to female adolescents and women. It will also focus on strengthening and empowering women's groups, and will continue to provide social support and material assistance to elderly and disabled refugees, single female-headed households, unaccompanied minors and others with acute needs. In collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, UNHCR will continue to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS among persons of concern.

UNHCR will continue to provide basic humanitarian assistance to some 1,500 of the 6,700 refugees registered in **the Gambia**, mostly Liberians. The Office will seek to strengthen the protection of refugees by pressing for the adoption of a national refugee law. UNHCR will promote self-reliance, focusing on vocational training, and will continue

to provide medical and basic educational assistance to vulnerable refugees.

In 2004, the Sierra Leonean voluntary repatriation programme ended, with only 250 refugees opting to return and another 6,000 remaining in the country of asylum. The latter group continues to enjoy administrative and legal support from UNHCR. When conditions in their home countries allow it, the Office will promote voluntary repatriation for Liberians and Senegalese.

Nigeria hosts some 8,000 refugees and over 1,100 asylum-seekers originating mainly from Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC, Chad and Sudan. In 2006, UNHCR will undertake to strengthen the protection capacity of the Government of Nigeria and pursue durable solutions for both camp-based and urban refugees. In 2005, 107 Sierra Leoneans were repatriated and durable solutions were sought for the remaining 650. UNHCR reviewed the options afforded by national legislation and the ECOWAS Treaty and will advise refugees on naturalization and regularization of their stay through immigration.

Following the signing of tripartite agreements for the repatriation of Liberian and Nigerian refugees, some 1,000 Liberian refugees were repatriated and more refugees are expected to return to Liberia as the country stabilizes. A further 10,000 Nigerian refugees will have repatriated from Cameroon by the end of 2005 and another 2,500 are expected to repatriate in 2006. The Office will continue to coordinate activities with all partners, including the Government of Nigeria and United Nations agencies, to ensure the smooth reintegration of returnees, as well as reconstruction and rehabilitation activities in line with the "4Rs" concept.

In 2006 UNHCR plans to resettle some 240 refugees from Nigeria in close coordination with the Regional Hub in Accra. While working towards a phase out of Oru camp, where some 5,700 refugees live, UNHCR will endeavour to enhance the capacity of the Government to assume its primary role in the management and delivery of protection and assistance to refugees. The Office will also explore with the Government the feasibility of a comprehensive plan for self-reliance and local settlement and integration through community development

for Oru camp refugees. Standards of protection and assistance in the camp will be closely monitored and improved. UNHCR is actively working towards the eradication of sexual and gender-based violence in refugee and returnee settlements, and HIV/AIDS prevention and gender equality will remain a priority in 2006.

In line with the Memorandum of Understanding signed between UNHCR and ECOWAS, UNHCR will play an increasingly robust role in addressing issues of forced displacement in the subregion. UNHCR will work closely with the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat with a view to developing comprehensive approaches to: 1) prevent further flight by addressing root causes of forced population displacement; 2) prepare for and respond to new refugee emergencies through political and humanitarian capacity building; 3) implement the revised ECOWAS Treaty and its Protocol on free movement and the right to establish residence in another ECOWAS member State as applicable to persons of concern to UNHCR; 4) find durable solutions to the current refugee situations in West Africa through sustainable reintegration programmes, resettlement as a burden-sharing tool and rehabilitation of refugee-affected areas; and 5) mitigate the negative impact of unaddressed consequences of violent conflicts through post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

In 2006 UNHCR's Regional Office in Senegal will continue to coordinate programme operations with regard to international protection, the promotion of repatriation and the local integration of nearly 41,000 refugees living in **Cape Verde, Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal**. The refugee population in the four countries originates mainly from Senegal, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Rwanda. The Regional Office will also provide strategic, technical and managerial support to UNHCR's office in the Gambia.

In 2006, UNHCR will focus on continuing to promote durable solutions for roughly 1,000 urban refugees originating mostly from Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, ROC and DRC, without losing sight of the protracted plight of the 26,000

Mauritanian refugees living in Senegal and Mali. Resettlement will be pursued in cases where other durable solutions are not feasible. A principal concern remains the absence of suitable documentation for the refugees of Mauritanian origin in Senegal. UNHCR will continue to handle this situation and special efforts will be made to encourage the governments concerned to solve the problem of these refugees. In close collaboration with the Senegalese Government, UNHCR will support a programme to facilitate access to local community services for urban refugees with special needs.

It is hoped that following the peace accord the situation in Casamance will allow for the repatriation of roughly 7,900 Senegalese refugees living in Guinea-Bissau and the Gambia. If current negotiations bear fruit, UNHCR expects to be a key player in the process of repatriation of refugees from these two countries.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme Budget
Benin	1,512,089
Cameroon	2,338,327
Côte d'Ivoire	9,682,813
Gambia	726,099
Ghana ¹	8,531,345
Guinea	15,413,060
Liberia	39,084,990
Nigeria	3,440,989
Senegal	1,845,745
Sierra Leone	17,281,205
Regional activities ²	4,044,042
Total	103,900,704

¹ Includes the Regional Support Hub in Accra.

² Includes material assistance, voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement of urban refugees; regional stockpile; as well as scholarships for refugee students in West African countries.