



West Africa

Recent developments

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The international community has in recent years shown an unprecedented level of commitment to the restoration of peace and stability to troubled West African nations. In Liberia, this has been demonstrated by the deployment of 15,000 UNMIL peace-keeping troops to disarm and demobilize ex-combatants while restructuring the security sector. A similar endeavour helped restore stability to Sierra Leone two years ago. Now the numbers of UNAMSIL peace-keepers are being reduced as Sierra Leone's police and armed forces develop the capacity to secure the country. In Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations has deployed a multinational force of 6,250 UNOCI peace-keepers alongside 4,000 French peace-keeping troops. The implementation of DDRR (demilitarization, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation) programmes by peacekeeping missions is encouraging. However, the risk remains that, unless a regional approach is adopted, veterans from multiple conflicts will continue to drift from country to country and jeopardize stability in the entire region.



At the political level, ECOWAS and the African Union have been at the forefront of international efforts to find negotiated solutions for countries riven by civil war. African leaders laid the groundwork for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed by the Government of Liberia, rebel groups and political parties. Similar efforts are being made to bring together the parties to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, where a climate of mutual mistrust continues to obscure the prospect of peace. Côte d'Ivoire remains divided. The south is controlled by the Government while the north, which is inaccessible to humanitarian agencies, is controlled by the *Forces nouvelles*. The run-up to the planned October 2005 elections may occasion additional tensions.

Liberia has seen further positive developments on the political, security and humanitarian fronts since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra in August 2003. The National Government of Transition, which was installed in October 2003, has been fully constituted and implementation of the peace accord remains on track. The disarmament of ex-combatants by UNMIL continues, and resulting security gains have enabled humanitarian agencies to deploy to previously inaccessible areas beyond Monrovia.

These developments herald an era of optimism for the hundreds of thousands of Liberian civilians, including refugees and IDPs, who have endured the effects of more than a decade and a half of civil war. As confidence in the peace process spreads, Liberia's IDPs return to their places of origin. Likewise, by mid-2004 over 50,000 Liberian refugees had returned spontaneously from border areas in neighbouring countries, prompting UNHCR to launch the facilitated voluntary repatriation operation for Liberian refugees in October 2004.

Political stability continues to prevail in Sierra Leone, where State authority has been restored throughout the country. However, the country is confronting the challenges of post-conflict recovery. Massive investment in development assistance is needed to bring about sustainable peace and economic growth.

Preparations are under way to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees who have lived in exile in Cameroon for the past two years. This follows negotiations with the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria as well as consultations with the refugees, some of whom have expressed the desire to return home.

Strategic objectives

The organized repatriation of Liberian refugees who opt to return will be a key objective for UNHCR in 2005. Tripartite agreements were signed in September between the Government of Liberia, UNHCR and the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Sierra Leone. These agreements provide the legal framework for the repatriation operations and spell out the rights and obligations of the parties. UNHCR has now published its *Multi-Year Operations Plan for the Return and Reintegration of Liberian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (2004-2007)*, which will guide the coordination and implementation of the programme, including mass information, registration, convoy movements, reintegration and protection activities for the entire return process.

The voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees has been successfully completed. Overall, some 280,000 Sierra Leonean refugees have returned home from countries in the subregion since the operation started in 2001. That leaves only very small groups of Sierra Leonean refugees still in countries of asylum and desirous of alternative long-term solutions. The activities in support of reintegration of returnees in Sierra Leone will be maintained throughout 2005 with continuing gradual handover to development agencies.

Preventing and addressing the consequences of sexual and gender-based violence are among the highest priorities in the field of refugee protection in West Africa. The supply of sanitary materials to both female refugees and displaced women is now integrated into all UNHCR assistance programmes.

Another of UNHCR's highest priority objectives is refugee child protection, which entails monitoring and the provision of assistance to protect the rights of children, including the right to education. Special attention will be paid to the needs of separated children. The best interests of the child will remain paramount at all times. Family tracing and reunification will be implemented in close cooperation with the governments, ICRC and other humanitarian actors. The strategy for repatriation



Sierra Leonean refugees repatriate home from Guinea. UNHCR

of Liberian refugees incorporates measures to prevent separation of family members during the return trip.

Efforts at all levels will be made to maintain or improve standards of assistance in order to allow refugees in exile a dignified life and minimize the vulnerabilities which lead to exploitation. UNHCR will continue to support urban refugees both by supporting local structures and by intervening directly to help them to reach self-sufficiency during their stay in exile.

The Office will continue to work closely with the governments of asylum countries on establishing, upgrading or updating national refugee legislation in line with international policies on refugee issues. Capacity building of relevant government departments will also be carried out to enhance their capability to handle refugee-related matters appropriately.



Working in partnership with governments, other UN agencies and humanitarian actors, UNHCR will pursue the development of multi-sectoral integrated HIV/AIDS programmes and subregional projects such as the Mano River initiative. The regional technical officer for HIV/AIDS will provide technical support to the country programmes.

Monitoring of the fragile socio-economic and political situation in the region will enable UNHCR's country offices to update contingency plans accordingly, in close collaboration with other humanitarian actors already working in the region. In this context, the Office will maintain the regional stockpile of non-food items in Accra capable of serving operations in the region.

A new, separate structure called a regional technical support hub, established at the end of 2004, will continue its operation throughout 2005. Hub officers will provide technical support and

expertise to the operations in the region, incorporating current policy priorities, with the greatest possible efficiency and benefit for refugees (within the limitations of funding available). The regional technical support hub will absorb the regional resettlement hub, established in 2003 to strengthen the management of resettlement activities in west and central Africa through monitoring, coordination and technical support. Key regional resettlement activities will include: building the identification, referral and processing capacity of UNHCR offices; developing, harmonizing and implementing operational criteria; adhering to fair and transparent procedures; as well as improving planning and coordination.

Operations

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

In 2005, UNHCR's regional representation in Benin will continue to support an estimated 14,600 refugees in **Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger** and **Togo**. Assistance to integrate locally will be provided to approximately 10,300 refugees living in the four countries and unable to return home (to Rwanda, RoC, and certain areas of DRC). In conformity with the Agenda for Protection, UNHCR in Benin will reinforce its voluntary repatriation programme, in addition to pursuing activities geared towards self-reliance for refugees and reinforcing the intervention capacity of implementing partners. Special efforts will be made to strengthen the income-generating programme, including small-scale economic activities as well as formal employment for those with the necessary skills and qualifications. In 2005, education, vocational training and income-generating activities will target female refugees. Specific attention will be devoted to the most vulnerable, including unaccompanied minors, the elderly, single heads of household, the handicapped, and the chronically ill, who will be supported both materially and psychosocially. Children's education will continue to be supported.

In **Cameroon**, UNHCR has continued to conduct refugee status determination with its implementing partner since the reopening of the UNHCR office there in 2003. In the absence of national legislation on refugee issues, all refugees qualify for direct protection under UNHCR's mandate. Cameroon hosts nearly 60,000 refugees and over 6,000 asylum-seekers, mainly from central and west African countries. This number includes 17,000 Nigerian refugees who arrived in late 2002 following ethnic clashes in Taraba state. The objective in 2005 is to improve the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, and in particular to advocate the adoption of a domestic law on refugee status and the formation of a national eligibility committee. To that end, draft legislation has already been prepared and is expected to be submitted to Parliament. UNHCR will continue to promote and disseminate information on refugee law among the Cameroonian authorities and civil society.

UNHCR will continue its programme of voluntary repatriation for urban refugees and is gradually introducing a large-scale repatriation process for Nigerian refugees. The repatriation programme is expected to start in late 2004. A local settlement programme for some 42,000 urban refugees will meet the needs of the most vulnerable for health care, education and vocational training. Looking ahead, UNHCR will also develop a programme of local integration (focusing on agro-pastoral activity and sanitation) for Nigerian refugees who remain after the repatriation programme has been concluded.

Gambia is host to some 7,400 refugees, mainly from Sierra Leone, Senegal and Liberia. In 2005, UNHCR in Gambia will continue to strengthen the protection of refugees by pursuing the elaboration and adoption of national refugee legislation. The Office will promote local integration, with a particular focus on vocational training, and will continue to provide medical and basic education assistance to the most needy. Agricultural activities will be implemented for refugees in rural Bambali camp. During 2004, the Sierra Leonean voluntary repatriation programme was concluded. UNHCR's policy of ceasing all forms of material assistance to the Sierra Leoneans led to the closure of Basse refugee camp.

Nigeria hosts nearly 8,000 refugees and more than 1,100 asylum-seekers, mainly from Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC, Chad and Sudan. During 2004, 107 Sierra Leoneans were repatriated. For those who cannot go back home (about 800), UNHCR is investigating the possibility of offering immigration and naturalization, as provided for by national legislation and the statutes of ECOWAS. UNHCR has started an information campaign with registration of Liberian refugees in preparation for their voluntary repatriation. It is expected that, with the resumption of facilitated repatriation to Liberia in October 2004, some 1,000 Liberians may opt to return home before the end of the year. In 2004, UNHCR increased the construction of shelters in order to accommodate the Liberian refugees. The activities in the camp were implemented in line with preparations for voluntary repatriation as soon as the situation in Liberia is sufficiently improved. Despite all these efforts, there will be additional requirements for shelter in the Oru Refugee camp in 2005. UNHCR has continued to educate refugees regarding the negative impact of sexual and gender-based violence on the whole of society, and has worked closely with refugee leaders in order to make sure that the message is understood and acted upon. In 2005, UNHCR will continue to protect both camp-based and urban refugees. Assistance for refugees in 2005 will cover shelter, education, health and income-generating activities. The Office has also identified a group of 100 refugee women who will benefit from assistance in the form of funds for micro-projects to enhance their self-reliance.

Preparations are underway for the repatriation of some of the 17,000 Nigerian refugees from Cameroon. Subsequent to the signing of a tripartite agreement, UNHCR envisages a phased approach for the return and reintegration of Nigerian refugees. Upon their return, UNHCR will support their immediate requirements for food, shelter, health, education and community services. Sustainability will be promoted through medium - and longer-term development programmes and the rule of law in partnership with the Government of Nigeria and relevant UN agencies.

In 2004, UNHCR in Nigeria was reconfigured. Operations staff remained in the field office in Lagos while the country representation staff

moved to Abuja, the capital, and where ECOWAS holds its Headquarters.

UNHCR's regional representation in Senegal will continue to coordinate international protection, promotion of repatriation and local integration for 41,000 refugees living in **Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mali** and **Senegal**. UNHCR will maintain its role in the process of resettlement of refugees to third countries, when other options are not deemed to be feasible. The refugee population is mainly from Senegal, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Rwanda.

After the installation of a new Government following legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau, UNHCR persuaded the new authorities to draft the country's first law on refugees. The bill will be submitted to the National Assembly of Guinea-Bissau for approval.

During the first four months of 2004, UNHCR carried out the repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees who expressed the wish to return to their home country (only 79 out of over 2,800 Sierra-Leonean refugees were repatriated from Senegal, Mali and Guinea Bissau). The office in Dakar will continue to provide international protection and limited assistance to the Mauritanian refugees in Senegal and Mali. The principal concern remains the absence of suitable documentation for the refugees of Mauritanian origin. UNHCR will tackle this politically sensitive problem. Almost 8,000 Senegalese refugees registered

in Gambia and Guinea-Bissau hold hope that peace talks between the Senegalese Government and the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* will begin soon and allow them to return in safety and dignity.

UNHCR will make special efforts to ensure access to local community services for the most vulnerable urban refugees.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Benin	1,215,174
Cameroon	1,824,612
Côte d'Ivoire	10,915,922
Gambia	679,937
Ghana ¹	8,080,179
Guinea	23,002,652
Liberia	44,120,090
Nigeria	1,463,596
Senegal	1,647,792
Sierra Leone	25,043,136
Regional activities ²	3,634,225
Total	121,627,315

¹ Includes the newly-created regional support hub in Ghana.

² Includes care and maintenance, voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement assistance for urban refugees as well as scholarships for refugee students in West African countries.