

Republic of the Congo

Main objectives

- Provide over 68,000 refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with international protection and humanitarian assistance.
- Facilitate the return of refugees who express the wish to repatriate if the conditions in their country of origin permit.
- Organize the repatriation of Congolese returnees from Gabon and facilitate their reintegration in cooperation with national and international development agencies.
- Arrange the voluntary repatriation of Angolan refugees and complete the local integration of those who have opted for this possibility.
- Provide the *Comité national d'assistance aux réfugiés* (CNAR) with material and technical support to enable it to carry out refugee status determination (RSD).



Working environment

Recent developments

In 2004, the security situation in the Republic of the Congo (RoC) significantly improved, although the presence of armed rebels in the area of Pool is a lingering cause for concern. The population of this area, including returnees, lives in extremely poor conditions and needs humanitarian assistance. The peace accord signed by the Government and the rebels in March 2003 has yet to be implemented (the rebels subsequently increased their demands).

The IMF has continued to withhold funds pending evidence of progress in the management of natural resources and in the campaign against corruption. As a consequence, both the refugees and

Planning figures		
Population	Jan 2005	Dec 2005
DRC (refugees)	58,828	35,000
Rwanda (refugees)	5,868	4,000
Angola (refugees)	3,881	2,000
Total	68,577	41,000

Total requirements: USD 6,930,184



Rwandan refugees at Loukolela on the Congo river preparing for their repatriation to Kigali by air. *UNHCR / B. Bossard*

the majority of the local population are suffering from chronic poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care and sub-standard education.

Positive developments in Angola and Rwanda have allowed the sustained promotion of voluntary repatriation to those countries. In DRC however, setbacks in the peace and reconstruction process have dashed many refugees' hopes of early repatriation. The census of April and June 2004 revealed a fall in the refugee population. This may be explained by spontaneous returns and/or the over-estimation of earlier figures.

Constraints

Poor transport infrastructure limits access to the DRC Congolese refugees in the north-east of RoC and hampers the delivery of humanitarian assistance to them. The unreliable transport infrastructure inevitably leads to the tendency to rely solely on UNHCR's fleet of planes, trucks and boats for transportation to and from remote areas. The maintenance of such a fleet is a constant challenge owing to the lack of adequate servicing facilities and the difficulty of obtaining spare parts. These refugees remain reluctant to return home

mainly because of the presence of armed elements and the lack of basic social services in Equateur Province in DRC.

Although some Rwandan refugees have continued to return in 2004, many claim that they expect more positive signs of reconciliation from the Rwandan Government before opting for return. As in several other countries in the region, there is a noticeable resistance to the idea of repatriation amongst the Rwandan refugees.

RoC Congolese refugees in Gabon put their reluctance to return down to the absence of economic opportunities in their home country. They are also disheartened by the prospect of attempting to transport their personal belongings without an adequate road network.

Despite the fears expressed by the Angolan Government that returnees will not be able to sustain a livelihood in Luanda, the majority of Angolan refugees wish to be repatriated there. The refugees have stressed that prevailing insecurity in Cabinda is the reason for the lack of enthusiasm for return to that province.



Rwandan refugees at a camp at Loukolela village on the Congo river. In the foreground, an MSF drinking water project.
 UNHCR / B. Bossard

The Government of RoC is encountering serious difficulties in the rehabilitation of its education and health systems. Consequently, there may be delays in transferring the management of schools and sanitation in the camps still housing Angolan refugees to state authorities. The Government is unlikely to include refugee issues (including RSD procedures) in its budget. Financial and technical support from UNHCR to CNAR will therefore be unavoidable.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

On status determination for individual asylum-seekers arriving in RoC, UNHCR will maintain its support to the eligibility process of the CNAR and the training of civil servants in charge of it. UNHCR will also continue to support the committee and the relevant Ministries with the issuance of electronically printed identification cards, and the drafting of appropriate legislation for refugees.

Refugees from DRC

UNHCR will help to ensure that refugees are able to move freely, have access to agricultural land and fishing zones, and run small-scale businesses. This will be done through regular field visits to the 80 sites hosting refugees and through repeated campaigns on their rights and duties. The Office will also support the involvement of refugee women in committees, working groups and food distribution and will give priority to women's access to micro-project funds. The Office will pay particular attention to the welfare of schoolgirls in an effort to reduce the school dropout rate among girls.

For the repatriation operations, UNHCR will collect information and organize the registration of candidates, campaigns, transportation and logistics. The facilitation of repatriation activities will be launched as soon as the situation in Equateur province, DRC, promises minimal yet sustained safety. These operations, to be undertaken in accordance with a Tripartite Agreement signed by

DRC, RoC and UNHCR, will be implemented and monitored through regular meetings between the parties.

Refugees from Rwanda

Most of the six thousand Rwandan refugees living in RoC have achieved a satisfactory level of self-sufficiency, and with the exception of a few vulnerable cases, do not require material assistance from UNHCR. For this group, therefore, the promotion and implementation of repatriation will be the main activity.

Congolese returnees

With the improvement of the security conditions in RoC and the reopening of all border roads in the areas of Niari and Lekoumou, a notable increase in repatriation in 2005 is expected. Within the framework of the "4Rs" strategy (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction), UNHCR will collaborate with the Government of RoC and development agencies to monitor respect for returnee rights as guaranteed in the Tripartite Agreement. The Office will continue to rehabilitate essential infrastructure in the main destination villages and promote agricultural activities for some 2,000 vulnerable returnees to support their reintegration.

Refugees from Angola

Due to ongoing military activities in Cabinda Province in Angola there is a need for specific monitoring of the refugees' safety in the camps in Koni and Kondi-Mbaka in the province of Kioulou. UNHCR will continue to finance the health and education services of the two camps, while encouraging the Congolese authorities to take over the responsibility of running them, as this will also benefit the entire local population. Registration of candidates for repatriation to other provinces in Angola and their transportation by land or by air will be maintained.

Assistance

UNHCR will continue to give assistance for education and health care to refugees, while encouraging them to gradually shoulder this responsibility through the strengthening of community structures and processes. The prevention of HIV/AIDS and control of gender-based violence will be enhanced in both health-care units and community services. Victims will receive treatment, and the perpetrators of violence will be punished.

Urban refugees in Brazzaville and Pointe Noire, the majority of whom are from DRC, will continue to receive limited assistance for their integration, psychosocial support and basic health-care services.

Desired impact

The activities described above will enable the majority of refugees to benefit from the same living conditions as nationals and to rely only exceptionally on UNHCR's assistance. If conditions in the countries of origin do not deteriorate, continued repatriation, though in limited numbers, should lead to a significant reduction in the refugee population in RoC. With regard to RSD procedures, UNHCR's support to the CNAR should improve its capacity to provide a more independent and higher quality of service.

Organization and implementation

Management structure

UNHCR in Brazzaville will oversee the operations undertaken in the country and provide the logistical support needed for their implementation in collaboration with national and international implementation partners. The three field offices in Bétou, Impfondo and Loukolela will support the main office. Staff will include 11 international, 43 national members, and six UNVs.

Coordination

UNHCR will coordinate its programmes with three key ministries: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Francophony; the Ministry of Security and Police; the Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity, Humanitarian Action, War Invalids and the Family. Implementation partners include three NGOs and the CNAR. The Office is participating in the inter-agency Consolidated Appeals Process. UNHCR will work in close collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator and UN Agencies, specifically on questions of security, the optimal use of resources and the inclusion of refugees and returnees in their development programmes.

Offices

Brazzaville

Bétou
Impfondo
Loukolela

Partners

Government agencies

Comité national d'assistance aux réfugiés
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Francophony
Ministry of Security and Police
Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity, Humanitarian Action, War Invalids and Family

NGOs

Commission d'entraide pour les migrants et les réfugiés
International Rescue Committee

Others

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit

Budget (USD)

Activities and services	Annual Programme
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,290,656
Community services	280,635
Crop production	76,594
Domestic needs	209,997
Education	470,000
Fisheries	7,000
Health	425,000
Income generation	80,000
Legal assistance	230,524
Operational support (to agencies)	490,942
Sanitation	16,550
Shelter/other infrastructure	106,500
Transport/logistics	726,569
Water (non-agricultural)	45,589
Total operations	5,456,556
Programme support	1,473,628
Total	6,930,184