

Republic of the Congo

Main objectives

- Continue to support the organized voluntary return of refugees, support their re-integration and provide them with basic health care.
- Continue to support the organized voluntary repatriation of refugees from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda.
- Maximize the protection of refugees living in the Republic of the Congo (RoC), and provide material and social assistance to groups with special needs, while encouraging them to become self-reliant.
- Pursue durable solutions for those refugees who will not or cannot repatriate, in particular resettlement and local integration, in partnership with other agencies.
- Strengthen the ability of the *Comité national d'assistance aux réfugiés* (CNAR) to reach fair and efficient decisions on refugee status determination (RSD) and ensure that asylum-seekers, refugees and returnees benefit from legal assistance.



Total requirements: USD 9,577,669

Working environment

Recent developments

The security situation continues to improve, except in the Pool area, where armed rebels retain control of some territory and frequently loot trains and rob civilians and humanitarian workers. There has been little improvement in the socio-economic situation of the country, with the majority of the population continuing to live in poverty and facing high unemployment, inadequate health care, substandard education and a dearth of other social services.

The repatriation exercise carried out in 2005 had resulted in the return of more than 3,000 refugees to DRC at the time of publication. If planned elections are held in the DRC and the security

Planning figures		
Population	Jan 2006	Dec 2006
DRC (refugees)	34,800	4,830
Rwanda (refugees)	4,850	3,850
Returnees	4,000	2,000
Asylum-seekers	3,630	3,630
Angola (refugees)	1,630	1,130
Other (refugees)	210	210
Total	49,120	15,650

situation stabilizes further, particularly in Equateur, more refugees might choose to repatriate.

Following improvements in oil sector transparency, the IMF released almost USD 90 million of previously withheld funds and RoC was approved for a Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) for the period December 2004 to December 2007. As part of the conditions, further oil sector transparency, completion of several audits in both oil and forestry sectors and continued debt and arrears repayments will be necessary.

Constraints

Despite numerous activities undertaken to promote their voluntary repatriation, very few Rwandan refugees have decided to return. Many have attained an advanced level of economic integration and wish to remain in RoC. Others fear reprisals from a limited number of persons within the community who oppose return to Rwanda. In addition, refugees expressed concerns about recent events in Rwanda, such as the return of refugees from Uganda and the activities of the tribunals (community tribunals which are providing an opportunity for genocide survivors, defendants and witnesses to present their cases in an open and participatory environment). All these factors have significantly hampered the promotion of voluntary repatriation.

Some Angolan refugees, mainly from the Province of Cabinda, are not willing to repatriate. They are well integrated socially and economically, and continue to take a "wait and see" approach regarding the security situation in Cabinda.

The voluntary return of RoC refugees living in Gabon can only occur if organized repatriation movements take place in safety and security. A marked improvement in security and access by humanitarian workers would have to precede return to Pool. The Government, with the support of development agencies, must build up the social and physical infrastructure in returnee areas, not only in Pool, where there is widespread destitution, but also in the departments of Kouilou, Niari and Lekoumou.

Poor socio-economic conditions countrywide severely hamper the local integration of refugees. Of an estimated population of three million people, some 70 per cent are considered to be living in poverty. The economy has stagnated for several years, unemployment is prevalent, and infant mortality remains high.

Women and girls face a high risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). There is a very high incidence of domestic and sexual violence against women and girls in RoC, due to prevailing social and cultural attitudes.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

The Government of RoC will coordinate, through CNAR, the registration of refugees for voluntary repatriation, and meetings of the various Tripartite Commissions on the repatriation of refugees. UNHCR will continue to support CNAR with technical advice on refugee status determination and refugee law, as well as training sessions for all involved in the decision-making process. Activities will include assisting CNAR in the design and implementation of standard case processing procedures as well as prioritizing among the existing backlog of asylum cases awaiting decisions. A national NGO will be identified to provide legal services for asylum-seekers, refugees and returnees, as well as to carry out human rights promotion activities.

Repatriation activities will be coordinated by the UNHCR office in Brazzaville in close collaboration with field offices in Betou and Impfondo and implementing partners. The UNHCR offices in Brazzaville and Kinshasa will confer regularly, as will the respective field offices located on both sides of the Oubangui River, which marks the national border between RoC and DRC.

UNHCR will call for all United Nations Development Assistance Framework initiatives to include activities aimed at facilitating the local integration of the remaining Rwandan, Angolan and DRC refugees, as well as of RoC returnees from Gabon, Benin and DRC.



Refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo aboard a small canoe on the Oubangui River near a refugee settlement in the village of Malebo. *UNHCR / J. Ose*

In the second half of 2006, UNHCR will undertake a planning exercise to phase out activities in the north-east of the country, working on the assumption that by the end of 2006 the majority of refugees from DRC will have repatriated. Nevertheless, given the likelihood that a certain number of DRC refugees will choose local integration and that fresh refugee movements from some neighbouring countries cannot be totally excluded, the field office in Impfondo will remain open in 2007, and will also cover the zone extending from Betou to Loukolela.

UNHCR will increase the capacity of local authorities and civil groups to prevent and respond to SGBV and to provide support to victims. UNHCR will continue to assist victims in pursuing legal remedies against perpetrators, advocate full

judicial review of complaints filed and provide for the medical and psychosocial needs of victims. The Office will encourage women in refugee and returnee communities to create and enlarge support groups to monitor and respond to SGBV cases as appropriate. Public awareness and human rights sessions will target law enforcement, military and judicial authorities.

Refugees from DRC

If refugees from DRC repatriate in the numbers expected over the course of 2005, 34,800 will remain in sites along the banks of the Oubangui River at the beginning of 2006. The majority are already self-sufficient in terms of food, through fishing, agriculture and small-scale commercial activities. But the communities are not able to

cope with their needs for health care, education and assistance to groups with special needs. UNHCR will continue to provide assistance to meet these basic needs, undertake protection activities, particularly prevention of and response to incidents of SGBV, regularly monitor refugee rights and pursue durable solutions.

Refugees from Rwanda

Figures for September 2005 indicate that there are some 5,200 Rwandan refugees in RoC. UNHCR will continue to promote the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees and advocate for the Congolese Government to prevent elements within the community from intimidating potential returnees. Mass information activities will continue, including encouraging returnees to visit RoC to inform refugees on conditions of return. While a significant number of Rwandan refugees are now able to satisfy their basic needs, some still live in precarious conditions. UNHCR will work to regularize the status of those wishing to remain in RoC.

Refugees from Angola

A census taken from January to July 2005 showed over 2,800 Angolan refugees living in RoC. Following organized repatriation, some 2,200 refugees remained at the end of September 2005. A number of spontaneously settled Angolan refugees, mostly living in the provinces of Kouilou, Nairi, Lekoumou and Boenza have integrated locally and have never been registered. The majority, who are from the province of Cabinda, support themselves through raising livestock and agriculture. In 2004, UNHCR phased out its assistance activities to Angolan refugees including those in the sites of Komi and Kondi-Mbaka in Kouilou province as they have attained a certain level of self-sufficiency. The Office will continue to monitor them from the protection perspective. This will include ensuring that they have proper documentation, that their rights are respected, and that voluntary repatriation is organized for those who decide it is safe to return to the Province of Cabinda. Towards the end of the year, an analysis of the intentions of those remaining in RoC will be undertaken to determine long-term solutions for them. UNHCR will

advocate regularization of the status in RoC of those who opt not to repatriate.

Congolese returnees

Of the approximately 15,000 Congolese refugees still in Gabon, Benin and DRC, it is estimated that 2,000 could choose voluntary repatriation in 2006. The main destinations will be Niari, Lekoumou, Pool and Brazzaville. UNHCR will continue to organize voluntary repatriation movements, support their reintegration into the communities of final destination and provide basic health care. Development actors will also be approached to encourage more investment in Pool.

Assistance

UNHCR will continue to assist refugees with primary education and basic health care services, while encouraging them to become more self-reliant. Particular attention will be given to HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness, and assistance to victims of SGBV. Activities envisioned include safe and efficient blood transfusion facilities in hospitals, educational campaigns on SGBV for local traditional leaders, and support to women's empowerment groups. Activities in 2006 will also include control of deforestation caused by the presence of refugees and rehabilitation of the refugee-impacted areas.

Urban refugees living in the two biggest cities, Brazzaville and Pointe Noire, most of them from DRC, will be provided with assistance for local integration and basic health care.

Desired impact

Planned activities in 2006 are intended to result in durable solutions for the majority of the refugees in the north of the country and permit UNHCR to gradually reduce its presence there. Repatriation and local integration should also address groups of refugees in other parts of the country, leaving UNHCR with the task of assisting the reintegration of Congolese returnees, mainly from Gabon.

Organization and structure

Management structure

The UNHCR office in Brazzaville will supervise the operations in the country and support the three field offices in Betou, Impfondo and Loukolela. Staff will include 11 internationals (one JPO), 43 nationals and eight UNVs.

Coordination

UNHCR will coordinate its activities with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Francophony, the Ministry of Security and Police and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity, Humanitarian Action and Family. UNHCR will collaborate with one international and three national (including one governmental) implementing partners. UNHCR will work in close coordination with the UN Resident Coordinator and other UN agencies for the inclusion of refugees and returnees in development programmes and will participate in the inter-agency Consolidated Appeals Process.

Offices

Brazzaville

Betou
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 and Family

NGOs

Agence d'assistance aux rapatriés et réfugiés au Congo
Commission d'entraide pour les migrants et les réfugiés
International Rescue Committee
Médecins d'Afrique

Others

FAO
ICRC
UNAIDS
UNDP
UNFPA
UNICEF
WFP
WHO

Budget (USD)			
Activities and services	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget¹	Total
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,507,588	1,276,832	3,784,420
Community services	256,360	102,770	359,130
Crop production	111,975	0	111,975
Domestic needs	83,164	24,262	107,426
Education	363,718	30,000	393,718
Forestry	70,000	150,000	220,000
Health	370,247	60,749	430,996
Income generation	133,456	0	133,456
Legal assistance	221,685	171,065	392,750
Operational support (to agencies)	466,489	199,000	665,489
Sanitation	10,550	15,000	25,550
Shelter/other infrastructure	33,175	25,050	58,225
Transport/logistics	518,673	704,000	1,222,673
Water	60,508	1,404	61,912
Total operations	5,207,588	2,760,132	7,967,720
Programme support	1,609,949	0	1,609,949
Total	6,817,537	2,760,132	9,577,669

¹ The figures refer to the supplementary programme for the repatriation and reintegration of Congolese (DRC) refugees.

Note: The Supplementary Programme Budget does not include a 7% support cost (USD 193,209) that is recovered from each contribution received to meet indirect costs in UNHCR (field and headquarters).