

**COUNTRY
CHAPTER**

BEN

BENIN

BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BENIN



1. Resettlement Policy

The Government of Benin recognizes and supports the respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms and international conventions on the protection of refugees particularly in the spirit of burden-sharing as set out in the 1969 Convention of the Organization of African Unity. In order to strengthen international solidarity in the search for durable solutions, the Government of Benin has signed a project for resettlement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

2. Purpose

The Republic of Benin recognizes that resettlement is an important instrument in the search for durable solutions. It has the support of UNHCR for resettlement on its territory of refugees whose safety is threatened or endangered because of their vulnerability and for whom the project will provide sustained asylum.

3. Criteria for Refugee Eligibility and Asylum

Persons who qualify for resettlement are refugees as defined in the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 relating to the Status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol, in the Convention of the Organization of African Unity of 10 September 1969 and the Mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the legislation of Benin.

4. Criteria for Resettlement

Persons who are to be resettled should have refugee status as set out in Section 2 above and must satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

4.1 Need for Juridical or Physical Protection

In case of threat:

- a) of immediate or longer-term refoulement
- b) of arrest, detention or arbitrary imprisonment because of their refugee status
- c) of a risk to physical safety or that their human rights may be compromised in the same conditions that necessitated flight from the home country, then resettlement is the only solution available for protection.

4.2 Survivors of Violence and Torture

Refugees victims of physical and psychological torture need special medical attention. Benin will examine possibilities for their resettlement in the country in the light of its capacity to provide adequate medical care.

4.3 Refugees with Medical Needs

A refugee suffering from a serious disease who cannot be cared for either in the country of first asylum or after a temporary medical evacuation may be resettled in Benin if there is available treatment to give hope for cure. Resettlement will be offered according to the medical capacities of Benin.

4.4 Women at Risk

When they are deprived of the support of their spouse, family or communities of origin, some women refugees are subjected to serious threats to their physical and/or psychological safety (rape, sexual harassment, violence, exploitation, torture etc.) which increases their need for legal and physical protection.

4.5 Children

An unaccompanied minor is a person of under eighteen (18) years of age and for whom no one is responsible either by law or custom. Resettlement of a minor in Benin may be a solution if there are members of the family or community group permanently settled in the country or who have refugee status. In all cases, the best interest of the child is taken into account.

4.6 Elderly

As much as possible, refugees of a certain age who have members of their family or of their community of origin in Benin are accepted for resettlement in the country. Exceptionally, families will be identified to receive people who have no relatives in Benin.

4.7. Refugees with no hope of Local Integration

In some cases refugees are unable to integrate in their asylum country because of their cultural, social, religious and/or educational profile. After a certain period spent in the country without any prospect of repatriation in a near future, resettlement may be a solution to be considered.

5. Admissibility for Resettlement

Placed under the responsibility of the Government and in close collaboration with UNHCR, admissibility for resettlement is determined on a legal and humanitarian basis by a Selection Committee. The Committee must ascertain that resettlement is the most appropriate solution for the candidate.

The Selection Committee comprises:

- a representative of the Ministry of the Interior, Security and Territorial Administration (MISAT)
- a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC)
- a representative of the Ministry of Justice, Legislation and Human Rights (MJLDH)
- two representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- a representative of PARINAC.

6. Resettlement Allocations

The Government of Benin offers an average of two hundred and forty (240) places for two years, which covers sixty (60) families.

7. Selection Procedures

7.1 Submission and Processing via Dossier Selection

The candidate's file must include:

- a duly completed and signed UNHCR Resettlement Registration Form (RRF)
- an annex explaining why the candidate was recognized as a refugee and should be resettled
- a medical report
- a social report if necessary
- any other relevant documentation

7.2 Routing of Submission

The dossier is submitted by UNHCR to the Selection Committee. Dossiers may also be submitted by the Embassies in Benin through UNHCR to the Selection Committee who will solicit their assistance for additional information.

7.3 Submission and Processing via In-Country Selection

Under certain circumstances, particularly according to the number of dossiers involved, the Selection Committee may, with the agreement of UNHCR, delegate two (2) of its representatives to go to the country of first asylum in order to interview the candidates.

7.4 Processing Times

The length of study of applicants' dossiers must not exceed one (1) month. Should there be an urgent need for protection, deadlines for study of the caseloads are

reduced and the Selection Committee must make a decision within a week.

7.5 Recourse Processing

Should the application for resettlement be rejected, UNHCR may request a revision of the case on the basis of additional information submitted to the Selection Committee.

7.6 Entry Formalities

In accordance with the legislation of Benin on immigration, all formalities for entry must be fulfilled and costs and taxes paid for each candidate whose dossier has been accepted. The Government of Benin will facilitate the completion of these formalities.

8. Private Sponsorship

Non-governmental organizations, Churches, communities and individuals may sponsor refugee-candidates for resettlement in accordance with the Ministries, members of the Selection Committee. The sponsor is responsible for the travel, the installation and the integration of the resettled refugee and their dependants. Nevertheless, when so advised by the Ministries, members of the Selection Committee and UNHCR may also assist the sponsor (travel or installation costs).

9. Family Reunification of Refugees

9.1 Policy concerning Family Reunification of Refugees

Unity of the family is a factor considered to favour the development of refugees and increases their chances of integration in the country of resettlement.

In support of the principle of family unity as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Government of Benin is committed to facilitating the reunion of members of the same family of refugees on its territory. Priority is given to the members of a nuclear family.

9.2. Criteria for Family Reunification

Family reunification concerns the following persons:

- spouse of the resettled refugee
- dependent children of the resettled refugee
- other relatives dependent financially or emotionally on the refugee for whom separation from them would be intolerable
- adopted children.

9.3 Routing of Applications

Members of families already living in Benin initiate the applications for family reunification and submit them to UNHCR who transmits them to the Selection Committee.

9.4 Verification of Relationships

This takes place on the basis of official documents such as marriage, birth or adoption certificates annexed to the application for family reunification or, in the absence of such documents, a sworn declaration is required. When there are no documents at all available, verification takes place on the basis of information acquired through interviews of the persons concerned by UNHCR.

10. Medical Requirements

Once they have arrived in Benin, persons accepted for resettlement will undergo medical screening procedures whenever necessary. Costs for such examinations will be covered by UNHCR or by the organism designated for that purpose.

11. Travel

Travel costs are covered by UNHCR and/or the person (sponsor) financially responsible for the resettlement.

12. Status on Arrival

All visas granted are permanent visas. As for refugees in Benin, resettled refugees are assimilated to nationals of the country. Refugees resettled in Benin may opt for voluntary repatriation and, to this end, may be assisted by UNHCR in accordance with relevant procedures.

13. Domestic Settlement and Community Services

13.1 Actors

UNHCR, the Government of Benin, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as operational partners of UNHCR are responsible for the integration of resettled refugees. Resettled refugees are expected to make useful contributions to the functioning of Beninese society.

13.2 Reception

Accepted refugees are met at the point of entry and accompanied to their place of residence by one or more persons in charge of the project.

13.3 Orientation

Resettled refugees are assisted by the Service for Social Orientation/Social Services in close collaboration with NGOs, members of PARINAC during the first weeks of their arrival. The orientation aims at identifying the needs of each refugee as well as the support he/she will need for integration.

13.4 Housing

Resettled refugees can be housed for up to one year after their arrival according to available resources and individual requirements. After this period the resettled refugees pay for their own accommodation and can settle elsewhere according to their requirements or degree of integration. However, the Government of Benin may decide on their place of residence for reasons of security or to ensure better chances of integration.

13.5 Health

Resettled refugees have the right to medical care. They have the same access as nationals to services and health care.

13.6 Other Needs

Resettled refugees may receive assistance to cover their needs for food, clothing and domestic goods up to one year after their arrival.

13.7 Education/Employment

The Government of Benin grants the same treatment to resettled refugees as to nationals for access to education, the right to employment and social benefits.

14. Language Training

Refugees who do not speak French will receive accelerated tuition in French and in a local language for those who so request.

15. Integration Activities

The purpose of the resettlement programme is to allow refugees to become locally integrated as quickly as possible and to achieve self-sufficiency within the Beninese society.

To this end, the Government of Benin will grant the same advantages to resettled refugees as to nationals for agricultural or commercial activities.

The Government of Benin will facilitate the acquisition of Beninese nationality according to the laws in force to refugees who apply for it. UNHCR, the implementing partner, the Job Searching Network /PARINAC are the main actors in integration activities.