Voluntary Repatriation of CAR Refugees – July 2025

UNHCR has facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 5,126 Central African refugees from the Eastern Regions (East, Adamawa and North) of Cameroon since January 2025. Under the CAR Platform—a regional coordination mechanism supporting durable solutions for Central African refugees—there has been renewed momentum for sustained durable solutions efforts, driven in part by the improving security situation in the Central African Republic identified safe areas.

Cameroon has demonstrated strong political will and leadership through active participation in strategic dialogues, including the recent Steering Committee meeting in Brazzaville held in February 2025. The Government of Cameroon has made concrete progress in advancing voluntary repatriation, issuing refugee identity documents, and promoting socioeconomic inclusion—core commitments under the 2022 Yaoundé Declaration and its regional roadmap. These efforts underscore Cameroon's sustained commitment to protection and long-term solutions for displaced populations in the region.

Context

As of 30 June 2025, Cameroon recorded 2.1 million forcibly displaced people, including 430,000 refugees and asylum-seekers primarily from the Central African Republic (67%) and Nigeria (30%), and approximately 1.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees.

Since 2013, Central African Republic (CAR) refugees have continuously arrived in different waves, predominantly in the North, East and Adamawa regions, few others in the urban areas of Douala and Yaoundé. Of the nearly 288,000 Central African (CAR) refugees hosted by the country, 53% are women and girls, 44% are 18 years and older and 63% fall within working age bracket of 15 to 64 years.
While some 20% of CAR refugees are hosted in seven sites in the East and Adamawa region, others, 80% live peacefully amongst the host population in more than 300 villages. Of the total CAR refugee populations, 47% are school-age children 5 to 18 years, 30% of refugees have primary school education, 6% secondary education, and 1% university education.

While new displacements have significantly decreased, UNHCR Cameroon has also facilitated the voluntary repatriation of over 19,000 refugees -- including 5,126 in 2025 -- to CAR since the signing of the tripartite agreement in 2019.

In close collaboration with the Government of Cameroon, UNHCR is implementing its 2022–2026 Multi-Year, Multi-Partner Strategy — a comprehensive framework designed to strengthen protection, enhance coordination, and promote durable solutions for refugees and forcibly displaced persons. This strategy aligns, nationally, with Cameroon's National Development Strategy (NDS2030), the Yaoundé Declaration, and regionally, with the Support Platform for Solutions for forced displacements linked to the Central African crisis.

2025 Voluntary Repatriation

As of mid-July 2025, Cameroon has facilitated the voluntary return of 5,126 Central African refugees. In response to improved security and progressive political stability in the Central African Republic (CAR), the operation has continued with convoy frequency, now operating twice weekly, and each convoy targeting up to 300 returnees. A structured mechanism for collecting return intentions remains active since early June 2025, with 4,611 refugees having confirmed their willingness to return—part of a broader pool of over 60,000 individuals who registered interest over the past year. Compared to June 2024, when 571 refugees were repatriated, the same period in 2025 saw a notable increase, with 1,039 individuals returned.

This reflects a comprehensive, protection-driven approach rooted in close coordination between the Governments of Cameroon and the Central African Republic, under the framework of the CAR Platform and in line with the Yaoundé Declaration. It is the result of joint planning and a shared commitment to ensure that repatriation is voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable. In CAR, reception conditions are being carefully assessed and strengthened to ensure that returning populations are not placing additional strain on local infrastructure or social services. Instead, return areas are planned to be supported through targeted interventions that enhance resilience and facilitate reintegration, including access to basic services, housing, and livelihoods.

The return process also seeks to leverage the skills and experiences that refugees have acquired during their displacement in Cameroon. By aligning reintegration plans with community-based approaches, both countries are fostering conditions where returnees can access lifesaving services and respond to their individual and family needs in a meaningful way within their home communities.

Urban Voluntary Repatriation – Status Update

No voluntary repatriation of urban refugees has taken place since the beginning of 2025, though interest remains high—particularly among Central African nationals.
A total of **63 individuals (33 families)** in **Yaoundé and Douala**, including **one asylum seeker**, have formally applied for voluntary return. Processing is underway. While Bangui remains the primary return destination, some applicants have requested return to less secure areas such as Man (Ouham Pendé) and Bedamara 2, requiring additional risk assessments.

Voluntary Repatriation convoy in east region of the Lolo-Kentzou-Beberati stretch. Photo: UNHCR/Richard Atem

Challenges

The voluntary repatriation operation continues to face multiple logistical, administrative, and financial constraints that threaten to slow progress and undermine the sustainability of returns for Central African refugees. While efforts have accelerated in recent months, key barriers persist:

- **Lack of critical infrastructure in key departure areas:** Refugees in the Boumba and Ngoko department remain cut off due to a non-functional ferry crossing, which currently prevents their inclusion in organized convoys. Without urgent investment in transport

infrastructure, entire segments of the refugee population remain excluded from return opportunities.

- **Restricted access to certain return areas in CAR:** The process to clear Ouham Pendé prefecture—home to a significant number of return candidates— is ongoing, delaying solutions for thousands. Ensuring humanitarian access would not only significantly accelerate the repatriation process but also offer a life-changing opportunity for thousands to rebuild their lives in dignity after years in exile—restoring family ties, reclaiming property, and reconnecting with their homeland.

- **High transportation costs for remote return routes:** The repatriation of refugees from Touboro to Nana-Mambéré and Mambéré-Kadéï prefectures in CAR involves substantial costs due to the long travel distance—requiring three days of transit and two overnight stays before reaching the border.

- **Delays in infrastructure development:** The planned transit center in Gado—critical to safely scaling up convoy departures and maintaining dignified reception conditions—is still unfunded. Without dedicated financing, the repatriation capacity remains constrained.

- **Enhancing Coordination for Returns:** Effective cross-border cooperation between Cameroon and the Central African Republic (CAR) remains essential to achieving durable solutions for CAR refugees. In the context of dwindling humanitarian funding for UNHCR operations in both countries, ongoing discussions have highlighted the urgent need to improve the efficiency of logistical arrangements through a fair and transparent cost-sharing mechanism—particularly for convoys to Berberati. Additional financial resources are also urgently required to support a harmonized and scalable approach that ensures refugees can return home safely, voluntarily, and in conditions of dignity.

Funding Constraints

In expanding the operation to include remote areas such as Touboro, and the planned construction of a new transit center in Gado, UNHCR Cameroon has identified critical additional funding needs to ensure the safe, dignified, and efficient return of Central African refugees.

Additional Budget Requirements:

- **To cover increased transportation** and logistical costs associated with extended convoy routes and higher frequency of movements.
- **To scale up return intention registration** efforts across the East, Adamawa, and North regions, ensuring timely data collection and informed planning.

- **For the construction of a new transit center in Gado**, necessary to accommodate the growing number of returnees and to uphold minimum protection and humanitarian standards during transit.
  This funding is essential to meet growing operational demands, enhance protection outcomes, and sustain the momentum of the voluntary repatriation process.

We thank our donors:

Australian Aid · Belgium partner in development · In partnership with Canada · Funded by European Union Humanitarian Aid · german humanitarian assistance · Irish Aid An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha Department of Foreign Affairs · KOICA Korea International Cooperation Agency · Kingdom of the Netherlands · Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft Confédération suisse Confederazione Svizzera Confederaziun svizra Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC · UKaid from the British people · United States · United Nations CERF · Education Cannot Wait a global fund for education in emergencies · King Salman Humanitarian Aid & Relief Centre · Joint SDG Fund · Toyota Tsusho

Private donors: Australia, Canada, Italy, Netherlands and other private donors.
Others (NGOs): Australia for UNHCR, España con ACNUR, Japan for UNHCR, and UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe and Sweden for UNHCR.