

Migration flows originating from and within West Africa are very often of a mixed nature and arise from traditional movements linked to nomadic patterns and trading, labor, climate changes and refugees fleeing persecution or conflict. States in the region are often countries of origin, transit and destination for both refugees and migrants. Criminal networks take advantage of vulnerable persons who face the risk of being trafficked.

In this context, UNHCR has a responsibility to assist States in identifying and protecting persons in need of international protection amongst these mixed flows and developing “protection-sensitive” migration strategies. UNHCR also advocates for more effective implementation of the ECOWAS Protocols on free movement, right of residence and establishment so as to increase opportunities for local integration of refugees and former refugees.

## What have we achieved so far?

UNHCR has been working actively with the National Refugee Commissions to ensure that asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless and other people in need of international protection are properly identified and channeled through the appropriate procedures, and additionally with the ECOWAS Commission to strengthen the protection component of the regional protocols and policies.

In November 2008, UNHCR co-organized with IOM, OHCHR and ECOWAS, a Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration in West Africa. Subsequent inter-agency collaboration has led to a number of achievements, including:

- Training for immigration and border authorities, human rights practitioners and protection staff on protection principles within mixed migration flows, including best practice cooperation amongst stakeholders and the development of appropriate referral mechanisms;
- Joint research by UNHCR and IOM on stranded migrants in West Africa and on migration and statelessness; and
- Publication of a guideline on “Protection of refugees and other persons on the move in the ECOWAS spaces”.



## What are the opportunities?

There remain a number of opportunities for UNHCR to further collaborate with States and the ECOWAS Commission to strengthen regional protection of persons of concern in mixed flows, including:

- Developing more effective protection sensitive entry systems at borders and reinforcing appropriate referral mechanisms for persons in need of protection;
- Harmonizing State practice regarding onward movements of asylum seekers and refugees;
- Promoting the inclusion of provisions to protect stateless persons in migration legislation;
- Improving the use of the ECOWAS migration framework to develop local integration strategies for refugees and former refugees; and
- Increasing cooperation with States and the ECOWAS Commission to develop protection sensitive national and regional migration policies.

