

UNHCR Response to the emergency situation in the northern Democratic Republic of the Congo

19 August 2021

Key figures

221,694

Central African Refugees are currently living in the DRC

73,645

CAR Refugees biometrically registered between January and July 2021

4,040

Newly arrived CAR refugees relocated to the Modale settlement, North Ubangi Province

Highlights

In August, UNHCR and the National Commission for Refugees (CNR) distributed 4,126 refugee identity cards to newcomer CAR refugees in North and South Ubangi Provinces

More than 200 CAR refugees living in Mole and Boyabu refugee camps in South Ubangi Province have received their first COVID-19 vaccine shot, as part of a national inoculation drive to curb the spread of the virus.

In August, UNHCR and partners relocated 335 Central African refugees from Yakoma to the Modale settlement, North Ubangi

Operational Context

Political upheavals in the Central African Republic (CAR) following the latest Presidential elections in December 2020 resulted in an influx of thousands of refugees into the provinces of North Ubangi, South Ubangi and Bas-Uele. By 30 June 2021, UNHCR in coordination with its government partner the National Commission for Refugees (CNR) had biometrically registered 73,645 newly arrived refugees. Prior to this influx, an estimated 173,000 CAR refugees were already living in the DRC, having fled electoral-related violence and instability in 2014 and 2017.

Only 26% of these refugees live in the four refugee camps managed by UNHCR and by the DRC government in North and South Ubangi Province; the overwhelming majority live on riverbanks in hard-to-reach border areas, often within host communities with limited resources. Their living conditions are dire. They often have little or no access to clean water, sanitation facilities, or food.

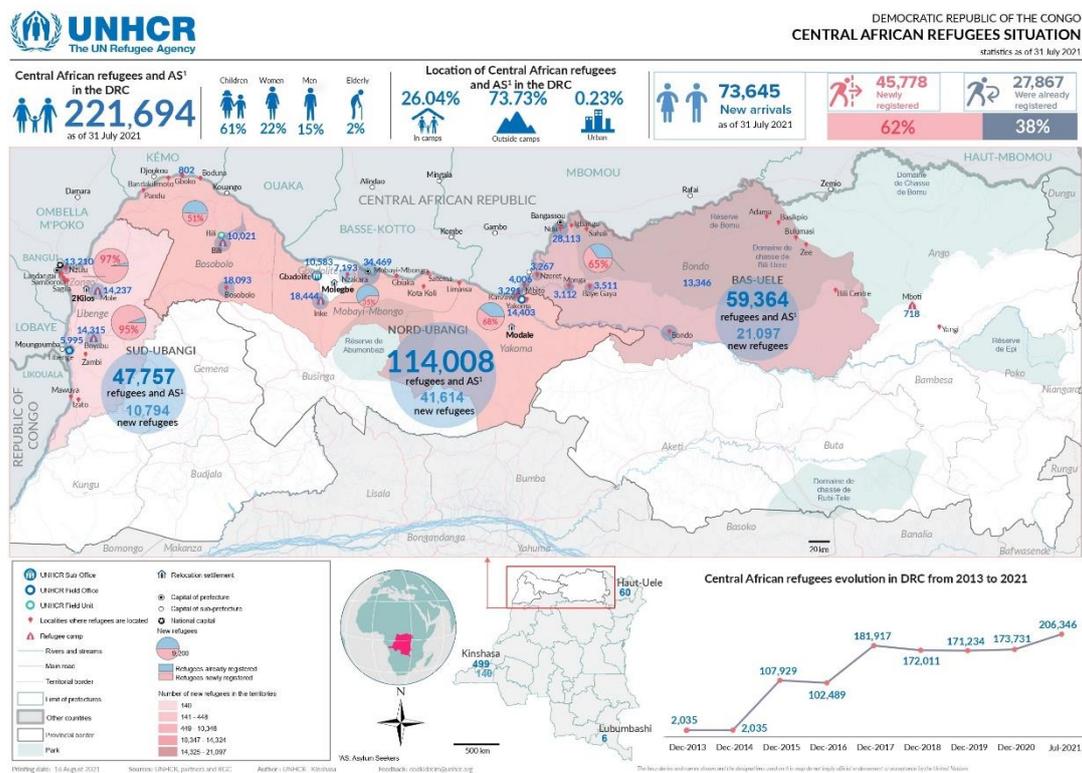


UNHCR and partners provide emergency supplies to a refugee who was relocated from the border area of Yakoma to Modale settlement, North Ubangi Province © UNHCR/Issa Mamadou

UNHCR and the National Commission for Refugees (NCR) are working together to implement UNHCR's Policy on Alternatives to Camps, which aims to avoid the establishment of refugee camps and to give refugees the opportunity to become active members of the community, while contributing to the enrichment of host communities as well.

I. CAR REFUGEE POPULATION IN THE DRC

Emergency biometric registration of new arrivals has officially ended, but UNHCR has set up a mechanism for continuous registration of small groups of arrivals including people who might be fleeing from ongoing disarmament operations by the CAR government or ethnic conflicts in certain localities.



II. PROTECTION NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

- Most CAR refugees are living in dire conditions in remote, hard-to-reach areas close to the riverbank, without basic shelter and facing acute food shortages. They are dependent on catching fish and on what the local villagers can spare. Nearly 13,000 of them are in need of urgent shelter assistance.
- Vast distances, extremely poor road conditions and heavy rains heavily affect the capacity of UNHCR and other humanitarian actors to reach people in need.

- The absence of sufficient trucks in the area is slowing down UNHCR’s efforts to relocate thousands of refugees to the Modale settlement in North Ubangi Province.
- There is a need to rebuild, rehabilitate and equip social infrastructures across the northern Provinces. In Boyabu camp, South Ubangi Province, the local school has been destroyed following torrential rains, leaving only few remaining classrooms which are becoming overcrowded.
- Over 26,000 vulnerable children, including unaccompanied and separated children, out-of-school children and children with disabilities as well as children who have been exposed to violence, have been identified during several protection assessment and required targeted support.
- Sexual and gender-based violence remain a major concern, with over 178 SGBV cases documented amongst CAR refugees from CAR, most of whom occurred in CAR territory. Difficulties in providing emergency cash assistance further exacerbate risks of SGBV.
- There is an urgent need for hygiene kits to support women and girls of reproductive age to practice good menstrual hygiene, to reduce exposure to SGBV and to allow them to fully participate in all the aspects of social life.
- More resources are needed to implement livelihood activities, such as farming and fishing, which are at the heart of the “alternative to camp”, approach in order to strengthen self-reliance of refugees and to improve the resilience of impoverished host communities.
- More sanitary and hygiene facilities such as water points, latrines and showers are urgently needed to improve access to clean water for both refugees and host communities and to prevent the spread of diseases and protect the intimacy of refugees, especially women and girls.
- In the location hosting refugees existing health facilities are understaffed, poorly equipped and lack essential drugs. There is a need to support these local structures through rehabilitation of some structures, mobile clinics and the distribution of equipment and drugs.
- Constant supply of nutrition supplements and therapeutic foods are also needed to address the increasing numbers of acute malnutrition among CAR refugee children, whose family members have no means of livelihood and who stand little chance of surviving without emergency aid or support from local communities, who are themselves experiencing acute poverty.
- There is need for mobile clinics to improve access to quality healthcare for refugees living in very remote areas.



UNHCR medical partner AIDES screens a refugee child for malnutrition in Sidi, North Ubangi Province. © UNHCR/Claris Achu.

III. MULTISECTORAL RESPONSE



PROTECTION

- Since April 2021, UNHCR and partners are working to relocate Central African refugees away from dangerous conditions in remote border areas near Yakoma into safer settlements further away from the borders. As of 18 August, a total of 4,040 CAR refugees (1,105 households) have been relocated to the Modale settlement, North Ubangi Province.
- Between 13 and 14 August, UNHCR and the CNR distributed 1,214 refugee identity cards to CAR refugees who recently arrived in Gomba, North Ubangi Province. A total of 4,126 refugee IDs have been distributed since April 2021 in various localities in North and South Ubangi provinces. These identity cards enable free movement of refugees within the DRC and enhance access to social and economic services.
- UNHCR and partners are providing multi-sectoral assistance to all SGBV survivors, including psychosocial support and access to legal assistance.



A UNHCR staff gives a identify refugee card to a refugee in Gomba, North Ubangi province. © UNHCR/Bobo Kitoko



EDUCATION

- UNHCR and partner ADDSE supported exam fees for the national primary school exam for 771 CAR refugee pupils in North Ubangi, South Ubangi and Bas Uele Provinces. Amongst the beneficiaries there were 22 newly arrived refugee children in Yakoma, who also received school uniforms from ADSSE.
- To improve the quality of learning and teaching, ADSSE donated 298 mathematics and French textbooks and pedagogic guides to pupils and teachers at the Izato primary school in Libenge Territory, South Ubangi Province, which hosts 90 CAR refugee and several Congolese pupils.
- UNHCR and partner ADSSE have donated building material (roofing sheets and nails) to refugee and host communities members to build three additional classrooms and an office at the primary school of Lembo, 30km from Gbadolite, North Ubangi Province.
- To decongest local schools, given the recent arrival of thousands of new CAR refugees, UNHCR and partner AIRD are building three classrooms and reinforcing other school infrastructures in Boroto and Bili, Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province, and in Elaka, South Ubangi Province.



SHELTER AND CORE RELIEF ITEMS (CRIs)

- UNHCR implementing partner AIRD has built 1,181 emergency family shelters at the new Modale settlement, North Ubangi Province. About 1,105 of the shelters are already occupied by refugee families recently relocated to the settlement.
- UNHCR partner AIRD has built 50 transitional shelters in support of the 359 persons with special needs relocated to Modale, to provide them with healthier and safer living conditions. 218 other persons have been identified to benefit for such shelters. UNHCR is providing them with core relief items.
- AIRD has begun the construction of a health centre in Modale to replace the emergency infrastructures raised since last April. The health centre will improve access to quality healthcare for both refugees and host community members.



WATER AND SANITATION

- In Modale settlement, North Ubangi Province, ACTED built 26 additional family latrines, for a total of 200 sanitary facilities built since April 2021, to reduce risks of diseases and exposure to SGBV incidents. 30 additional latrines have also been built for host community members in Modale village.
- UNHCR, through its partner ACTED, completed the construction of a sixth water point in Modale to improve drinkable water supply, despite significant challenges encountered in drilling due to the geology of the area. ACTED also set up six water management committees, to promote good hygiene practices and encourage sustainable management of water facilities at the settlement.
- To strengthen COVID-19 prevention, ACTED set up seven handwashing stations at the transit centre at Modale, North Ubangi, to encourage regular handwashing by both refugees and humanitarian workers at the settlement.



HEALTH

- UNHCR has handed over medical supplies and essential drugs to local authorities in North Ubangi Province, to strengthen the fight against COVID-19, including among others a GeneXpert machine for COVID-19 testing, testing kits, 30,000 face masks, 150 thermometers, 42,000 gloves and intensive care ventilators to be distributed to health zones in areas hosting CAR refugees.
- More than 200 CAR refugees living in Mole and Boyabu refugee camps in South Ubangi Province have received their first COVID-19 vaccine shot, as part of the national campaign against COVID-19.
- UNHCR partner AIDES distributed face masks to 592 CAR refugees during routine consultations and other activities at the Bili, Mole and Boyabu camps in North and South Ubangi Provinces.



UNHCR handed over medical supplies to North Ubangi authorities to support them in the fight against Covid-19 © UNHCR/Ghislaine Nentobo



LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY

- UNHCR partner AIDES supported 700 refugees and host communities farmers through the distribution of seeds, farming tools and capacity building to improve farming techniques in four CAR refugee camps in North and South Ubangi and out-of-camp areas in Bas-Uele Province. The refugees and local farmers, beneficiaries of this activity, will be harvesting peanuts and other food crops to cover their daily food needs and generate income to provide for their families by selling their products on local markets.

IV. COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

UNHCR is coordinating and leading the refugee response in northern DRC in collaboration with the CNR, four implementing partners (ADSSE, AIDES, AIRD, ACTED) and with other UN agencies (WFP, FAO and UNICEF), and international and local NGOs (World Vision, LIZADEEL, APEE).



V. POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS

UNHCR continues to assess the protection and security situation to eventually facilitate the voluntary returns of approximately 6,000 refugees from Mole, Boyabu and Inke camps to Bangui, Lobaye and Ombella'a Mpoko prefectures in CAR - where the security situation has been relatively stabilized – by the end of 2021. These repatriations had begun in 2019 but were temporarily suspended in March 2020 due to COVID-19 related restriction and in December, following the electoral crisis in CAR.

External / Donor Relations

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is grateful for the support of:

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