UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

REGIONAL TRENDS:
FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA IN 2025

Chad © UNHCR/Jutta Seidel

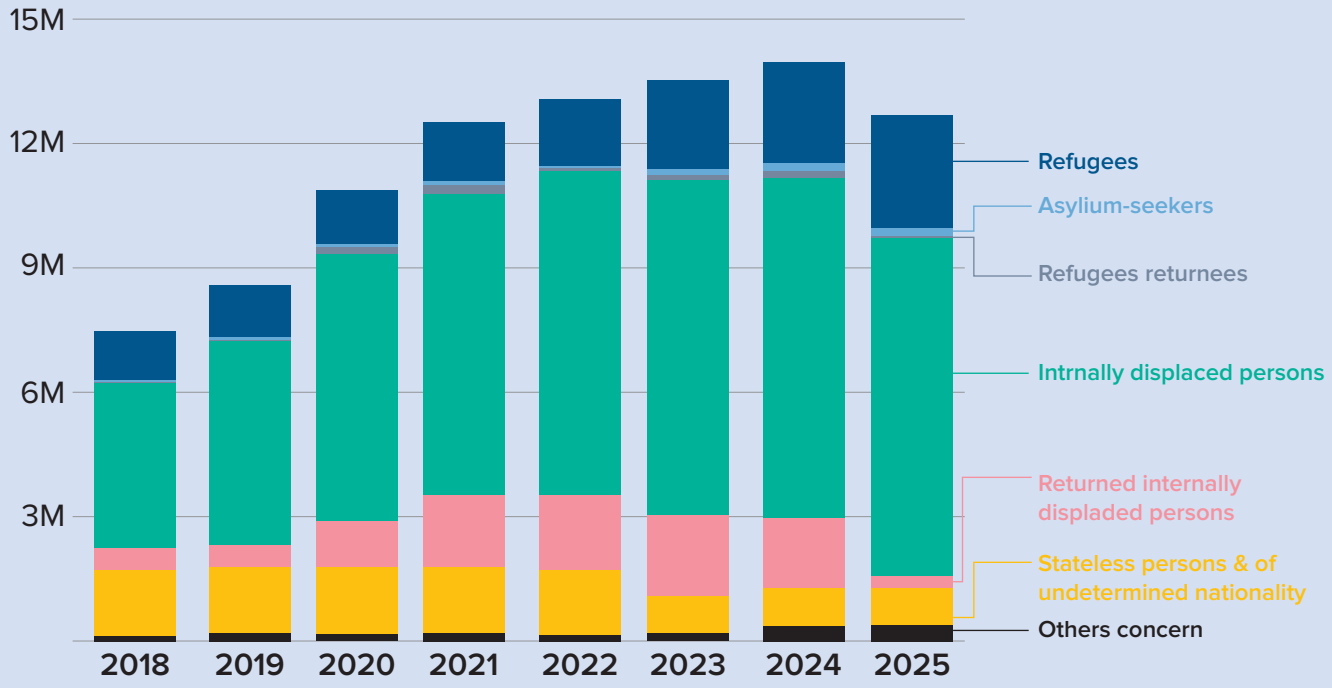
This Regional Trends Summary on forced displacement in the West and Central Africa region presents displacement statistics as of April 2025. Aligned with the *Global Trends Report*, it offers a regional lens on displacement dynamics, highlighting key emerging trends over the past year and within a five-year period.

Chad, Rapid Influx of Sudanese refugees in desperate need. © UNHCR/Caitlin Kelly

Trends at a Glance

12.7 MILLION

FORCIBLY DISPLACED AND STATELESS PEOPLE
in West and Central Africa as of 30 April 2025



65%
OF THE POPULATION UNDER UNHCR'S MANDATE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA ARE INTERNALLY DISPLACED.

80%
OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN THE REGION ARE WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

47%
OF ALL REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS ARE IN CHAD, MOSTLY FLEEING THE ONGOING WAR IN SUDAN.

33%
OF REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE ARE WITHIN THE CENTRAL SAHEL.

As of 30 April 2025, West and Central Africa hosted 12.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless individuals, including 8.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 2.9 million refugees and asylum-seekers. This total reflects a 48 per cent increase since 2020, when official figures stood at 8.6 million, underscoring a worsening forced displacement crisis.

The number of people displaced and stateless between January and April 2025, stood at around 400,000 and was mainly hosted in Chad and the Sahel countries. However, compared to April 2024, the overall number of displaced people dropped by 9 per cent. This decline is attributed to improved data collection methodologies, particularly the documentation of IDP returnees over the past five years.

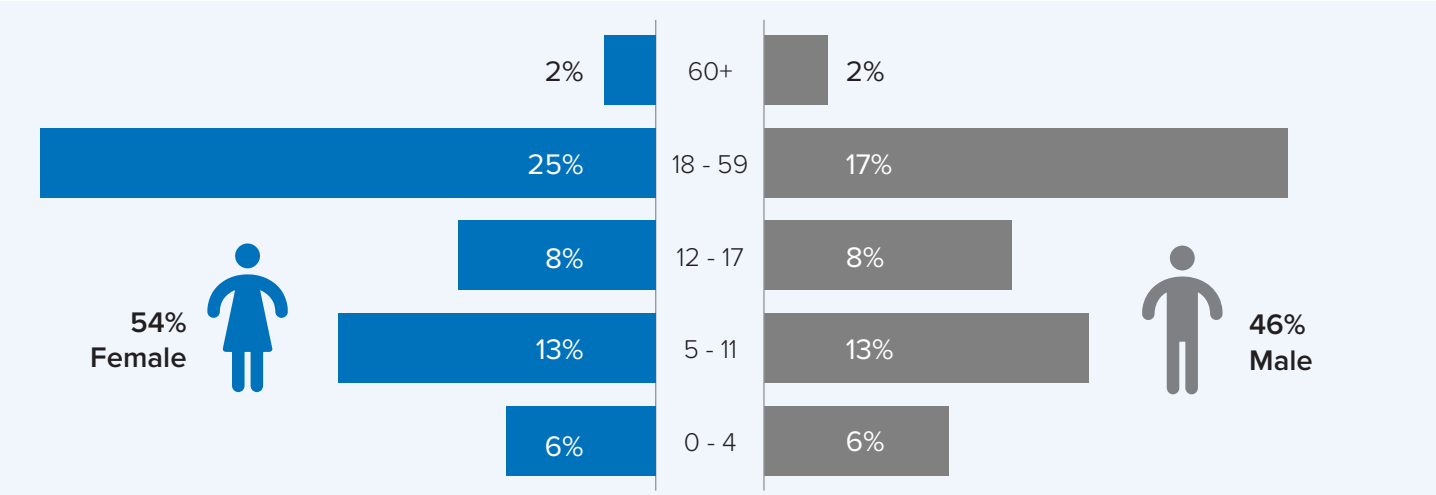
IDPs continue to represent the largest share of the displaced population. Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon remain the most affected, hosting 44, 25, and 12 per cent of the region's IDPs, respectively—figures that reflect continuing insecurity and growing humanitarian needs in the Lake Chad Basin and the Central Sahel.

The number of refugees and asylum-seekers increased by 13 per cent over the past year. Chad now hosts nearly half of the region's refugee population, followed by Cameroon with 15 per cent. Most refugees originate from Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Nigeria, which together account for nearly 75 per cent of the region's refugee outflows.

An estimated 631,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly from Chad, Niger and Mali are currently unregistered, due to insufficient human and material resources needed to promptly respond to mass and continuing arrivals, posing challenges for protection and assistance.

West Africa is also home to over 900,000 stateless persons or individuals of undetermined nationality, primarily in Côte d'Ivoire and Cabo Verde.

Demographics of forcibly displaced people in West and Central Africa as of 30 April 2025



Women and children account for 80 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers in West and Central Africa

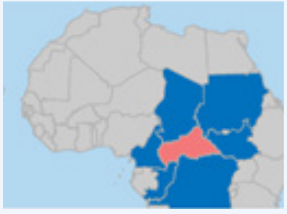
Rukaiya Abdullahi, 14, centre, laughs with her friends Fatila Lawan, left, and Aisha Muhammed, right, at the El-Miskin camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Maiduguri, Borno state, northeastern Nigeria. © UNHCR/Colin Delfosse

Overview of the four forced displacement crises (situations) in the region

CAR SITUATION

689,837 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

442,723 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

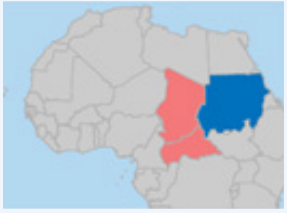


As of 30 April 2025, over 1.1 million citizens of the Central African Republic (CAR) remained forcibly displaced, nearly 150,000 fewer compared to the same period in 2024, marking a slight improvement attributed to more voluntary returns, after years of protracted displacement. About 442,700 Central Africans are displaced within CAR, over 283,400 are in exile in Cameroon, more than 207,100 are in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 141,700 in Chad, 35,400 in the Republic of Congo, 10,000 in Sudan, and 2,800 in South Sudan.

CAR & CHAD (SUDAN SITUATION)

816,474 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

6,360 REFUGEE RETURNEES



As of 30 April 2025, the conflict in Sudan had displaced approximately 12.7 million people globally, with Chad hosting around 779,500 and the Central African Republic receiving nearly 530,000 since April 2023. Arrivals during the first quarter of 2025 were estimated at 53,500 in Chad, including some 7,500 Sudanese crossing into Wadi Fira and Ennedi Est, in eastern Chad in April, and more than 8,200 in CAR. Chad is projected to receive about 250,000 Sudanese refugees by the end of the year—stretching its already limited resources.

LAKE CHAD BASIN

345,065 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

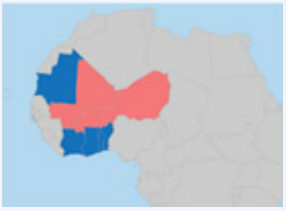
3,123,529 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

The Lake Chad Basin continued to face a protracted humanitarian crisis affecting populations across Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Initially triggered by conflict in northeastern Nigeria in 2014, the crisis progressively expanded, displacing approximately 3.4 million people across the region as of 30 April 2025. The main drivers of displacement remained ongoing violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups, chronic poverty and extreme weather events.

SAHEL PLUS SITUATION

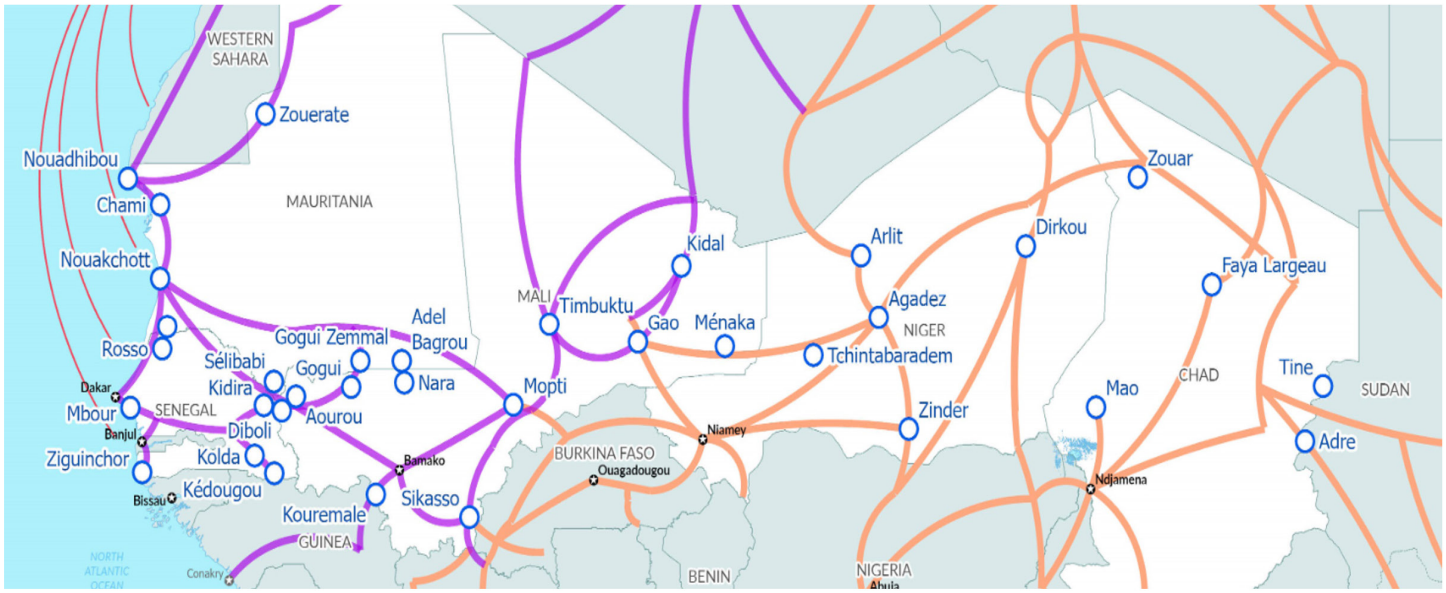
1,056,618 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

2,967,291 NTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS



The number of forcibly displaced people within the Sahel has continued to grow. At the end of April 2025, approximately 4.3 million people remained forcibly displaced across the Sahel, nearly twice the 2.4 million reported at end-2020. Over three quarters of forcibly displaced people in the Sahel region were internally displaced within their own country, with nearly 2.1 million of them in Burkina Faso. The region continues to face a complex and deteriorating humanitarian situation, marked by a steady rise in violence that disrupts lives, displaces communities and hinders access to essential services and protection. At the same time, extreme weather events are increasing across the region, with widespread floods affecting millions of people, destroying homes and infrastructure.

Mixed Movements/Route-Based Approach



West Atlantic route
Central Mediterranean route

Mixed Movements: Many countries in the region serve as key transit points for people moving toward North Africa and Europe along well-established migration routes. These include the West Atlantic Route—running through Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, and Senegal to the Canary Islands (Spain)—and the Central Mediterranean Route, from North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia) to Europe. These journeys carry serious protection risks, including death, physical violence, trafficking and exploitation.

Irregular arrivals along the West Atlantic Route have increased in recent years, with a 200 per cent increase between 2022 and 2024. However, the first quarter of 2025 has seen a reversal of this trend, with a 34 per cent decrease in arrivals compared to the same period in 2024. From January to March 2025, approximately 10,500 individuals arrived in the Canary Islands. The most reported nationalities along this corridor were Malian, Senegalese, and Guinean.

Route-Based Approach: To address the complexity of mixed movements, UNHCR and IOM, developed the Route-Based Approach, which provides a strategic framework for coordinated interventions along key points of the journey—from origin, through transit, to destination. The Route-Based-Approach emphasizes the need to bring protection and solutions closer to those on the move, not only at the destination. The approach is intended to ensure individuals have access to accurate information and safe alternatives before attempting dangerous journeys. In 2024, UNHCR strengthened border monitoring, community-based referral mechanisms and asylum systems and provided 1,370 refugee youth with higher education scholarships as part of the operationalization of the Route-Based Approach in Chad, Mali and Niger.

Chad. Sudanese refugees arrive at border in Adre fleeing violence. © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

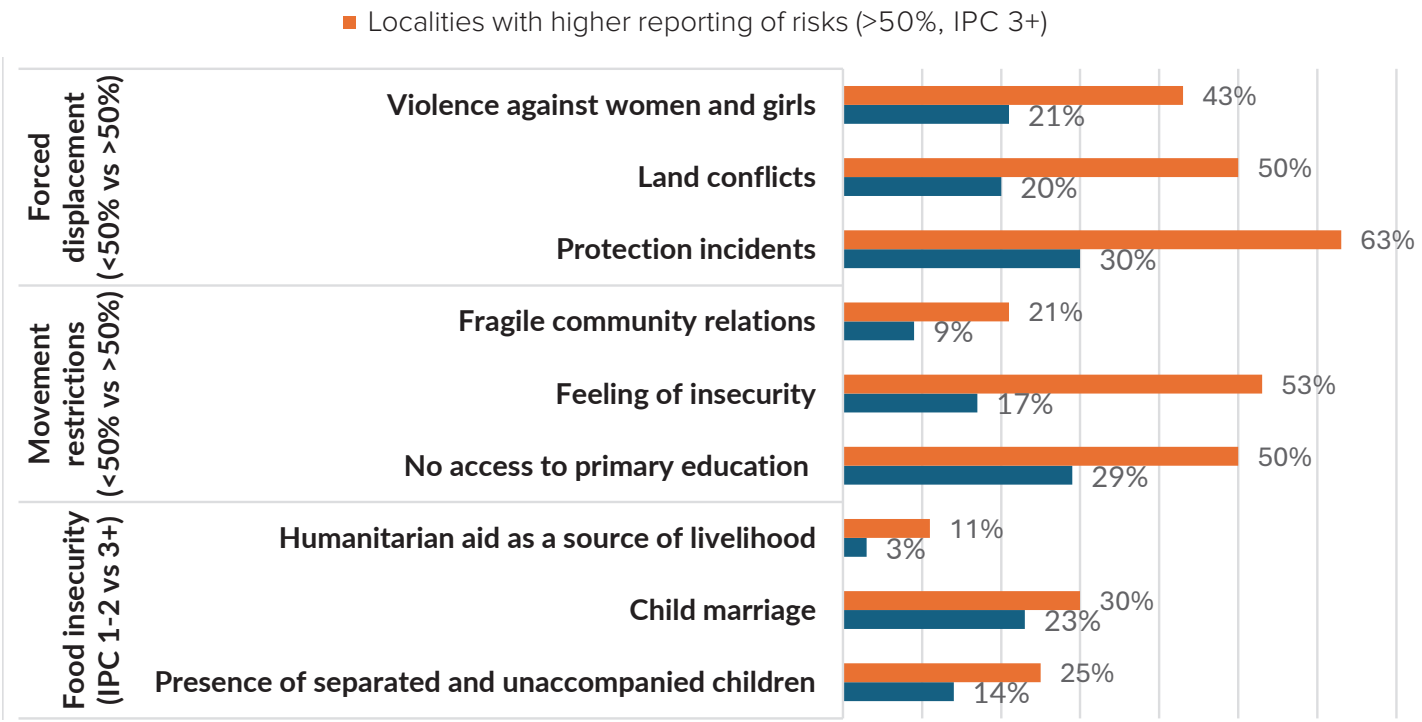
Forced displacement, movement restrictions and food insecurity are exacerbating protection risks for millions of people in West and Central Africa

In 2024 and 2025, around 29,700 interviews conducted through Project 21 (P21), a community-based, regional, and inter-agency protection monitoring system in conflict-affected communities in five countries revealed that forced displacement, movement restrictions, and food insecurity are deeply interconnected and collectively exacerbate protection risks, especially for vulnerable groups such as women and children.

Protection risks and impacts from 2024 to 2025

- **Forced displacement**, often driven by insecurity, significantly increases protection incidents by over 100 per cent—particularly violence against women and girls and drives land conflicts, while restricting access to essential services such as healthcare and water and intensifying inter-community tensions.
- **Movement restrictions**, often due to recurrent threats by non-state armed groups and military operations, further limit access to education by over 40 per cent, reduce access to civil documentation and to land, twice heightening feelings of insecurity and social fragmentation.
- **Food insecurity** drives negative coping mechanisms, with a rise in child labour, early marriage of more than 30 per cent, It is also associated with increased school dropout rates, declining access to basic services, and a deterioration of social cohesion.

Indicators of protection in zones with lower or higher reported risks linked to forced displacement, movement restrictions, and food insecurity, in the Central Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and eastern Chad in 2024



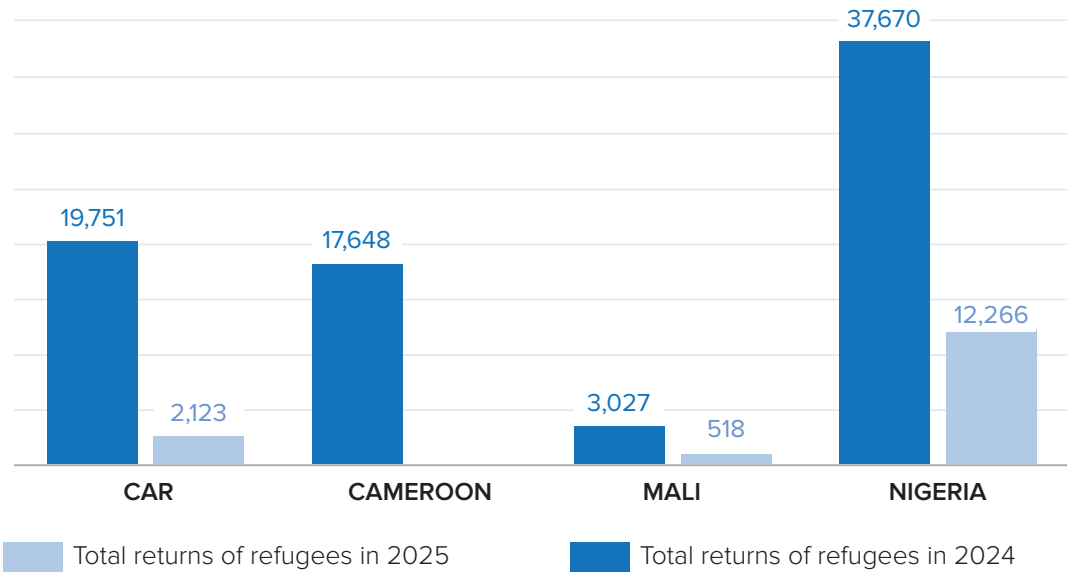
Solutions

Voluntary returns of refugees and IDPs

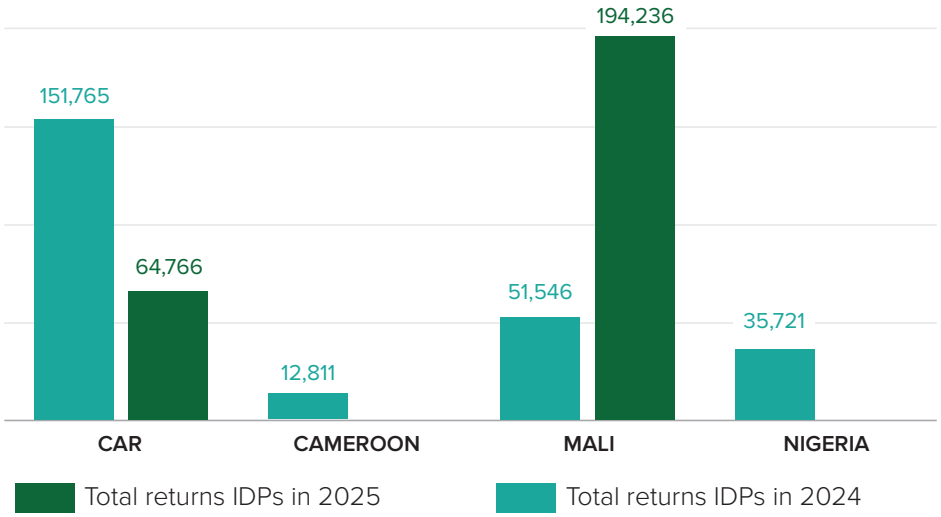
Voluntary repatriation of 46 refugees from the Central African Republic - Departure from Maya Maya Airport, 19.11.2024 © UNHCR/Elena LAURIOLA

- **Refugee Returns:** Between January and April 2025, over 14,600 refugees voluntarily returned to Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and Mali, through UNHCR-facilitated and government-organized operations.
- Government-organized returns of over 12,000 Nigerian refugees comprising more than 7,000 people from Chad and nearly 5,000 from Niger to Borno State occurred outside tripartite legal frameworks. UNHCR advocated with the concerned governments to ensure that all returns take place in a coordinated manner that upholds protection safeguards and ensures sustainable return and reintegration.
- Of the 44,000 Cameroonian refugees who fled to Chad in 2022 following the Logone Birni crisis, about 35,000 had voluntarily and spontaneously returned home by the end of the first quarter of 2025. UNHCR plans to facilitate the return of 5,000 more refugees by the end of the year and to integrate the residual group into the overall caseload of urban refugees in Chad.
- Over 2,100 Central African refugees voluntarily returned from the DRC and Cameroon in 2025. Since 2017, about 52,900 refugees have returned to CAR—19,700 in 2024 alone, the highest annual return since the programme began; UNHCR facilitated 16,200 of these.
- Under the Yaoundé Declaration and CAR Platform, 300,000 refugee returns to CAR are projected by 2028, including 40,000 in 2025 especially from Cameroon and the DRC.
- Total returns of refugees in West and Central Africa in 2024 were estimated at 78,000.
- **Returns of IDPs**: Across the entire region, close to 260,000 internally displaced people have returned to their homes as of April 2025, with 194,200 in Mali and 64,700 in the Central African Republic.

Returns of IDPs in 2024 and during the first quater of 2025



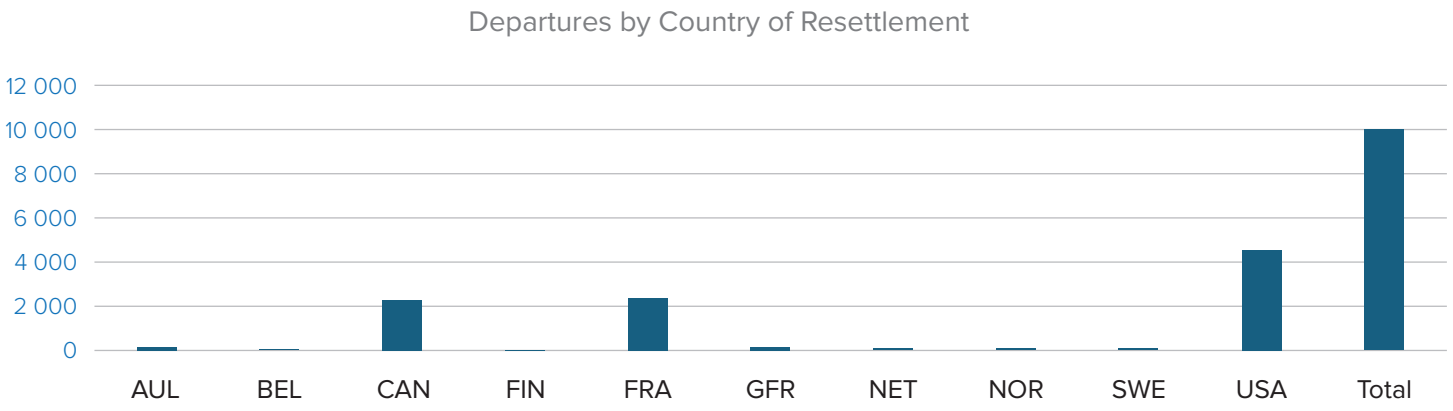
Returns of IDPs in 2024 and during the first quater of 2025

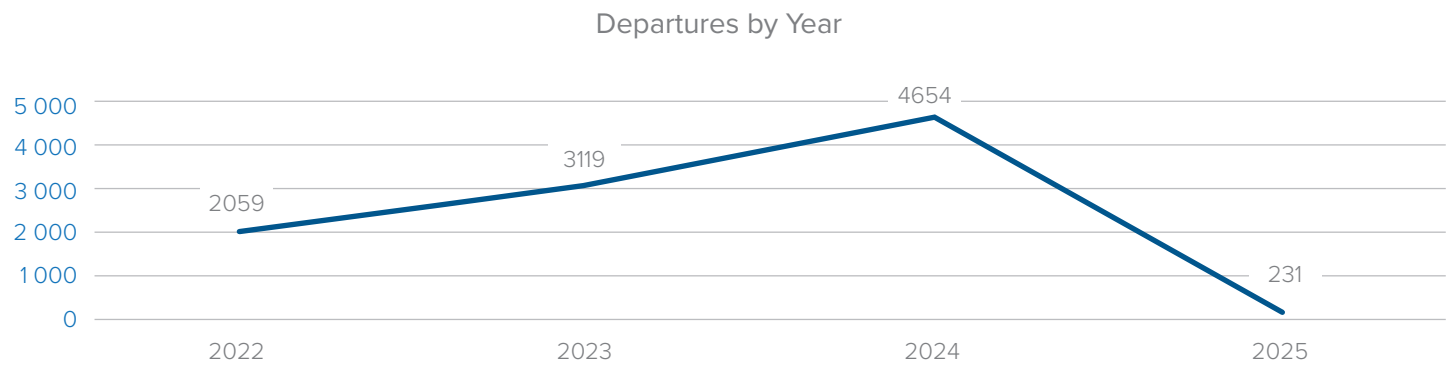


Former Central African refugees arrive home in Carnot after spending years in Cameroon. © UNHCR/Insa Wawa Diatta

Resettlement:

Resettlement Departures





- In 2024, departures for resettlement rose by 34 per cent, reaching about 4,600 individuals, up from approximately 3,100 in 2023, marking the highest number of departures in the region in five years.
- The highest departures were from Chad, followed by Cameroon and Nigeria, while nationals of the Central African Republic and Sudan, comprised the highest number of people resettled.
- Of the 10 countries of destination, the United States of America received the highest number of refugees followed by France and Canada.
- This increase was due to higher resettlement submissions comprising about 4,000 individuals from 14 countries in the region. Submissions have seen year-on-year growth between 2022 and 2024.
- In 2025, UNHCR expects to process resettlement submissions for fewer displaced people from West and Central Africa. The regional resettlement quota has been reduced by 64 per cent compared to 2024, due to the limited quotas offered by resettlement countries.

Naba Akbar Azien, an 8-year-old Sudanese girl poses in front of a building in Metché, a refugee site in eastern Chad. © UNHCR/Nicolo Fillipo Rosso

Chad © UNHCR/Nicolo Filipo Rosso

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FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA IN **2025**

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