

KEY FIGURES:

>8.3 million people of concern in West and Central Africa*

>5 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

>1.2 million refugees

>692,000 stateless

>27,000 asylum seekers

>1.4 million returnees

21 countries and 4 situations

Mali situation:

138,653 Malian refugees: in Niger (56,499), Mauritania** (56,668), and Burkina Faso (25,492).

840,430 IDPs: in Burkina Faso (560,033), Mali (201,429) and Niger (78,968).

Nigeria situation:

241,039 Nigerian refugees in Niger (119,541), Cameroon (109,340) and Chad (12,158).

2,569,065 IDPs in Nigeria (2,018,513), Cameroon (270,870), Chad (170,278) and Niger (109,404).

Central African Republic situation:

593,733 Central African refugees in Cameroon (292,863), the DRC (173,185), Chad (94,101), the Republic of Congo (22,198), Sudan** (9,289) and South Sudan** (2,075).

600,136 IDPs in Central African Republic

Cameroon situation:

50,443 Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria.

679,393 IDPs in Cameroon.

Voluntary repatriation – Côte d'Ivoire: A total of **3,017 Ivorian refugees** have repatriated in 2019.

MAIN HIGHLIGHTS**Political and security developments**

▪ Across the **Sahel**, November and December 2019 have seen a continuous deterioration of the security situation with rising numbers of incidents and forced displacements, especially in Liptako-Gourma, where Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger share common borders. Exploiting underlying fragility factors (social tensions exacerbated by large-scale extreme poverty, rapid demographic growth or the impact of climate change), armed groups/extremists increasingly attack civilian targets such as schools and health centers, as well as state institutions or security forces. An attack in Burkina Faso on 25 December killed 42 civilians, almost all of them women, in one of the deadliest assaults to hit the country in nearly five years of violence. In Inates, near the Mali border in western Niger, 71 soldiers were killed and 12 wounded on 10 December. In Mali, 49 soldiers and one civilian died in an attack on a Malian armed forces camp in Ménaka on 1 November and, on 25 November, 13 French soldiers lost their lives during combat operations near Gao in one of the French forces' deadliest incidents in decades. In this challenging context, France's president Macron has invited his counterparts from each G5 Sahel countries to meet on January 13 in Pau, southwestern France, to lay the groundwork for increased international support.

▪ In **Burkina Faso**, the armed conflict continues to spread and intensify across the country, reaching unprecedented levels of violence despite the strengthened military presence. On 3 November, the Mayor of Djibo (Soum province of the Sahel) was ambushed and executed in front of several bystanders. On 22 November, a security post in Goudoubo refugee camp was also attacked by armed men. Even if refugees and UNHCR's staff and partners are not targets, this growing insecurity drastically limits humanitarian access and assistance in the most affected areas and forced UNHCR to temporarily relocate its staff from Djibo, to work remotely. Assistance to those who are still living in Djibo is now provided through partners, and UNHCR continues to assist locals and refugees who have arrived in Dori, Bobo Dioulasso and Ouagadougou. As the number of IDPs increased over ten-fold this year alone to reach 560,000 by end of November, Burkina Faso is at critical juncture and assistance is being scaled up to address the growing humanitarian needs. Among other measures, members of the Humanitarian Country Team agreed to activate seven clusters including Protection and Shelter/NFI led by UNHCR, as well as Nutrition, Education and WASH led by UNICEF, Food Security led by WFP and FAO and Health led by WHO. A Working Group on Humanitarian Access has also been created to address this growing issue. In this highly challenging operational context, UNHCR has decided to extend its L2 Emergency in Burkina Faso and sustained its effort to provide IDPs and refugees with protection and assistance, starting with civil documentation. In 2019, over 76,000 birth certificates, 15,000 nationality certificates and over 7,000 National Identity Card have been issued to displaced populations and their hosts across Burkina Faso. This brings to 157 850 the total number of people who received identity documents with UNHCR support since 2017.

▪ **Costal Countries.** As insecurity continues to spread to east and south-east Burkina Faso, areas bordering **Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Ghana and Benin** run the risk of being destabilized. Though still limited, Burkinabe refugees have been reported fleeing towards Ghana and an attack was perpetrated on the night of 30 November to 1 December against the Yendéré police station on the border with Côte d'Ivoire.

▪ **Mali.** On 28-29 November, the 13th meeting of the Tripartite Commission Mali-Niger-UNHCR took place in Mali. Members of the Tripartite discussed the regional security context and the situation of over 57,000 Malian refugees in Niger. Since early November, UNHCR facilitated the return of over 3,700 refugees to Mali, including through cash interventions. Although returns continue to take place, due to some security improvements in specific regions such as Timbuktu, the overall situation in Mali remains extremely precarious with large areas around Gao and Mopti outside of Government control, despite significant international support.

*Key figures include refugees, internally displaced, stateless persons and returnees.
**Country not in West and Central Africa

- **Niger.** The ongoing violence and instability in the north-western Nigerian states of Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina continues to affect the bordering areas of Niger, especially western Tahoua region, and Jawalki where refugees have been fleeing since May 2019. Attacks on villages

continues in the Maradi region of Niger. There has also been notable activity in the department of Madarounfa bordering Nigeria. Rooted in a dramatic increase in tensions between farmers and pastoralists, Haoussa and Fulani, this conflict has led to a new humanitarian emergency in Niger's border regions around the city of Maradi in the departments of Guidan Roumji, Guidan Sori and Tibiri where over 45,000 refugees have arrived so far. Since their arrival more than 95% of Nigerian refugee children in Maradi have not received any form of education with figures equally alarming among the host populations, owing to social, economic and infrastructural challenges. To address the situation, UNHCR has prioritized the rehabilitation of schools and the improvement of the water infrastructure in the villages which have generously accepted to host refugees. UNHCR has also opened a health center in Garin Kaka in October where both refugees and the local population have free access to primary health care including, among others, ante- and post-natal care, mental health and psycho-social support, family planning and malnutrition care. Other similar centers will be opened in the identified opportunity villages to expand and strengthen the ailing health infrastructure which was weak long before the arrival of refugees. Furthermore, UNHCR has been subsidizing mobile clinics in border villages to expand coverage to the most remote areas, and is providing, alongside partners, medicines and staffing to health centers in Dan Kano, Guidan Roumji, Soulloulou and Tiadi, in addition to the medical screening desks set up at all the registration centers and the transit center

- **Education in Central Sahel.** Armed groups in Central Sahel continue to disrupt education by targeting students, teachers, and education infrastructures. In Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), threats to education personnel, attacks on education facilities and the use of schools for military purposes have severely disrupted education for more than 460,000 students and left more than 11,000 teachers unable to work or displaced by the violence between April 2017 to November 2019. In the same period, over 3,200 schools have closed in the region, including almost 2,000 in Burkina Faso and more than 1,200 in the northern and central regions of Mali (OCHA, December 2019). In these regions, conflicts and emergencies tend to exacerbate existing problems such as child marriage and gender-based violence. In this challenging context, UNHCR continues to engage with government, humanitarian and development partner to invest in education, particularly in girls' education, and facilitate the inclusion of refugees and internally displaced persons in education system, is a critical part of UNHCR's strategy. To ensure coherence between regional strategies on education and livelihoods and the comprehensive approach promoted by the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR's Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa held a joint Education & LEI workshop on 19-21 November 2019 in Dakar. The objective was to support country offices advocating for and operationalizing the inclusion of refugees in national systems and to explore new partnership opportunities to facilitate economic inclusion of refugees through employment and entrepreneurship.

Population movements

- **Voluntary repatriation of Central African refugees.** Despite the security situation remaining volatile, Central African Republic has seen the first voluntary repatriation of refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with the return of some 400 refugees from Mole refugee camp to Bangui on 21 November. The start of this voluntary repatriation program, facilitated by UNHCR, follows a tripartite agreement signed in June 2019 by UNHCR and the governments of CAR and the DRC where around 172,000 CAR refugees are living. During a visit to the Central African Republic from 2 to 5 December, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, met with President Faustin-Archange Touadéra to discuss the efforts still needed to create the conditions for informed, safe, dignified and sustainable returns. There are nearly 600,000 refugees from CAR in neighboring countries and a similar number displaced inside its borders. Continued protection in hosting countries or in places of displacement is needed for those who do not feel safe to return home. Since 2017, UNHCR has facilitated the voluntary repatriation of over 13,500 CAR refugees to their country of origins from DRC as well as Cameroon and the Republic of Congo, countries that have signed tripartite agreements with CAR and UNHCR in 2019. This is in addition to an estimated 127,000 spontaneous returns and pendula movements back and forth between



UNHCR's High Commissioner Filippo Grandi and Regional Bureau Director for West and Central Africa, Millicent Mutuli, greeting returning refugees in Bangui on 2 December 2019 (credit: UNHCR)

asylum countries and CAR since 2016. Returnees said improved security in their areas of origin and the peace agreement between the CAR government and armed groups were the main reasons for their decision to return home.

- **Mixed movements.** On 31 December, a group of 124 refugees were evacuated out of Libya to the UNHCR Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Niger where they are provided with humanitarian assistance while further options for them, such as

Evolution of refugee population in West & Central Africa
(4% increase since January)



Evolution of IDP population in West & Central Africa
(28% increase since January)



resettlement, are pursued. In 2019, a total of 835 refugees got evacuated by UNHCR from Libya to the ETM in Niger.

Global Refugee Forum

- On 16-18 December, the first-ever [Global Refugee Forum](#) brought together, in Geneva, refugees, heads of state and government, UN leaders, international institutions, development organizations, business leaders and civil society representatives, among others. The aim of the Forum was to generate new approaches and long-term commitments from a variety of actors to help refugees and the communities in which they live in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018. In all, the Global Refugee Forum was attended by some 3,000 participants, including refugees, and 750 delegations and over 770 pledges have been made globally for financial, technical, and material assistance in areas ranging from employment, to places in schools for refugee children, new government policies to enable greater inclusion of refugees in society, solutions like resettlement, clean energy, infrastructure and better support for host communities and countries. The Sahel took center stage at the Global Refugee Forum, as [UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#) drew attention to the “extremely difficult and tragic situation” and called for a reinforcement of the humanitarian action, development and security in the region.



The UN Secretary General, António Guterres, at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva on 17 December 2019 (credit: UNHCR)

- During the Forum 13 West and Central Africa countries made 47 pledges focusing on protection capacity, jobs and livelihoods, education, health, energy and infrastructure and the search for solutions to forced displacement. Delegations from the region included five Ministers (from Chad, Cameroon, Guinea Bissau and Liberia), two ECOWAS representatives as well as civil society representatives. The Forum is a key element of the new Global Compact on Refugees that was affirmed by UN member states in New York in December 2018. Under the Compact, Global Refugee Forums take place every four years, meaning the next is scheduled for late 2023.

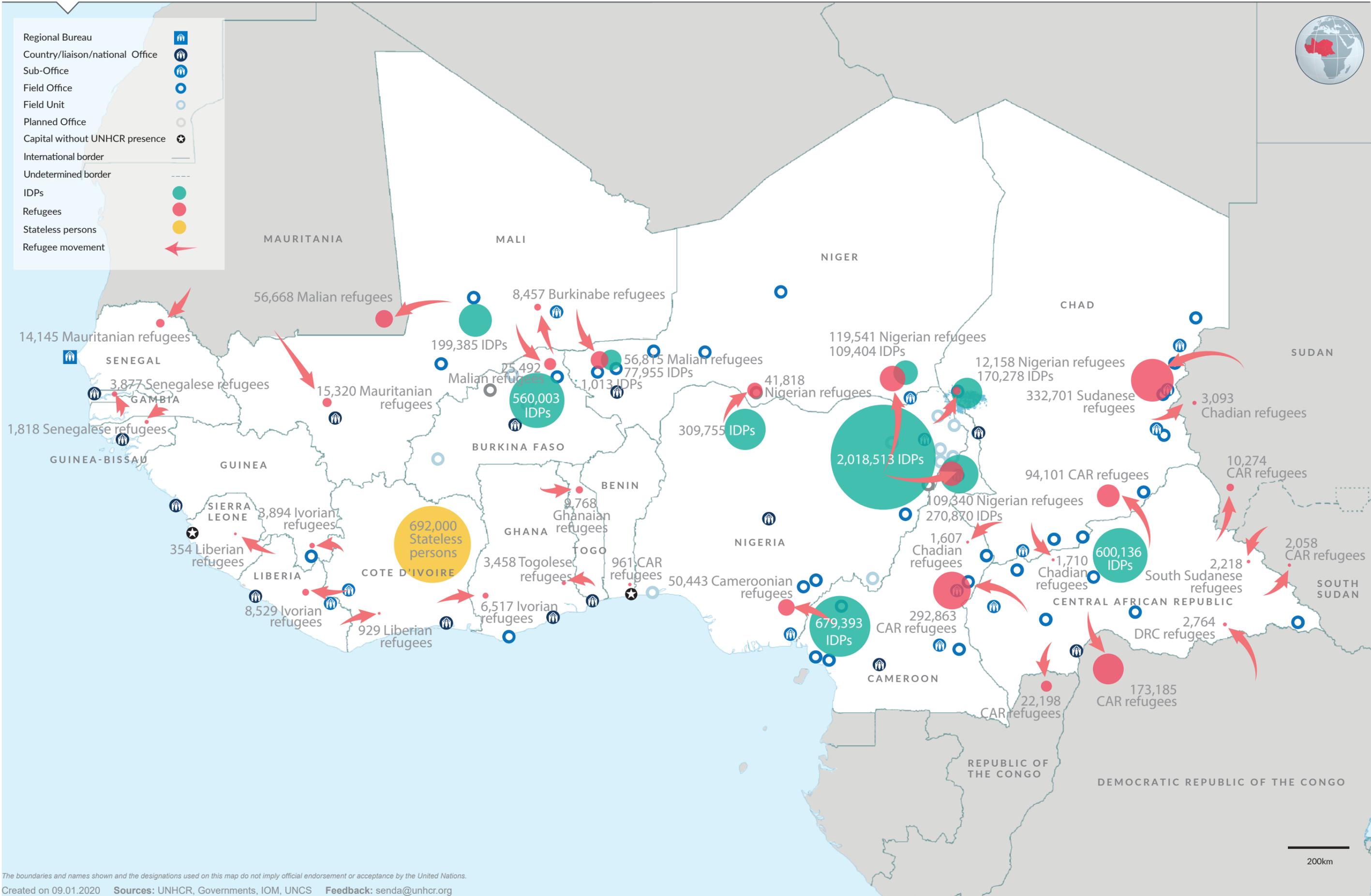
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