

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

29 November 2021

Key figures

221,694

Central African Refugees are currently living in the DRC

15,360

refugee identity cards distributed in North Ubangi, South Ubangi, and Bas Uele Provinces.

5,033

refugees relocated from Yakoma to the Modale development hub, North Ubangi Province.

Highlights

Between 15 and 20 November, UNHCR and the DRC government facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 568 CAR refugees from Inke camp North Ubangi Province by UNHAS flight.

In November, around 8,105 CAR refugees in Nzakara, North Ubangi Province received core relief items including solar lamps, blankets, soap, mosquito nets and tarpaulins from UNHCR and ADSSE.

In November 16 15,756 refugees have benefitted from a WFP cash distribution in Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi province.



A CAR refugee family returns home via the UN humanitarian flight from Gbadolite to Bangui, after eight years living in DRC's Inke camp, North Ubangi Province © UNHCR/ Claris Achu

Operational Context

The declaration of a unilateral ceasefire by the CAR President, Faustin Archange Touadera, in October 2021 has brought hope for an overall improvement of the security situation in the country. For months CAR government and allied forces have conducted counter insurgency operations to regain control of areas held by armed groups, following widespread post-electoral violence in December 2020, which resulted in an influx of tens of thousands of refugees into northern DRC. 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. Statistics indicate that 27,867 individuals among these (7,701 households, representing 38% of the new arrivals) are people who had previously been registered by UNHCR as refugees and must have returned spontaneously to their country of origin before the December 2020 electoral crisis. Prior to this influx, an estimated 175,000 CAR refugees were already living in the DRC, after having fled political violence and instability in 2013, 2014 and 2017 respectively.

Out of more than 220,000 refugees in the DRC, 26% live in the four camps managed by UNHCR and by the DRC government in North and South Ubangi Provinces; the overwhelming majority live on the banks of the border rivers in hard-to-reach border areas, including in Bas Uele province, often with in 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 CNR are working together to implement UNHCR's Policy on Alternatives to Camps, which capitalizes on giving refugees the opportunity to become active members of the community, while contributing to the development of host communities. To this extent, four villages across the three provinces have been identified by UNHCR and its partners to serve as 'development hubs', where socio-economic infrastructures are being rehabilitated or constructed, and livelihoods activities planned, to foster the resilience and self-sufficiency of both refugees and host populations. The search for durable solutions continues to be a priority and has led to ongoing voluntary repatriations or refugees to parts of CAR deemed safe.

CAR REFUGEE POPULATION IN THE DRC

Following the end of the emergency biometric registration of new refugees, UNHCR set up a mechanism for continuous registration of any groups of new arrivals, including people who might be fleeing from ongoing operations by the CAR government or ethnic conflicts in certain localities.

In November, UNHCR and CNR continued joint protection border monitoring in the localities of Gbangi, Buda and Sidi, Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province. In these areas, local authorities have reported in early October a new influx of approximately 5,000 CAR refugees, who are reported to have preventively fled from insecurity and forced recruitments by armed groups in Bambari, CAR. A biometric registration exercise will be conducted by a UNHCR team in the coming weeks to confirm exact figures and to inform the humanitarian response.

- In development hubs and out-of-camp areas, more sanitary and hygiene facilities such as latrines and showers are urgently needed to prevent the spread of diseases and protect refugee women and girls from sexual and gender-based incidents.
- Constant supplies of nutrition supplements and therapeutic foods are needed to address the increasing levels of acute malnutrition among CAR refugee children, whose families have no means of livelihoods and who stand little chance of surviving without emergency aid or support from local communities, themselves experiencing acute poverty.
- 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 assessments and are receiving targeted assistance (psycho-social support as well as cash assistance for host families etc.)
- Sexual and gender-based violence remains a major concern, with over 392 cases identified among newly arrived refugees, for a total of 508 cases documented amongst the old and new refugee caseload since the beginning of the year. Most of the incidents occurred on CAR territory. Difficulties in providing emergency cash assistance further exacerbates risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).
- There is a continued urgent need for hygiene kits to support women and girls of reproductive age. Such kits would enable them to practice good menstrual hygiene, reduce exposure to SGBV, encourage regular school attendance amongst girls and allow them to fully participate in all aspects of social life.
- There is need for more financial resources to support the rehabilitation and development of community infrastructures as well as livelihood activities in the villages identified as development hubs to host CAR refugees, in line with UNHCR's Alternatives to Camps policy.

II. MULTISECTORAL RESPONSE



PROTECTION

- As of 23 November, UNHCR and partners have facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 3,399 CAR refugees from North and South Ubangi provinces, since the operation resumed in October 2021. This includes 568 persons repatriated from Inke camp to Bangui through UN humanitarian flight (UNHAS), as well as 1,478 refugees from Boyabu camp and 1,253 persons from Mole camp to Bangui and to Ombella M'poko and Lobaye prefectures. UNHCR plans to facilitate returns for 5,320 persons this year, out of the 10,000 CAR refugees who have confirmed interest in being repatriated through intention surveys.
- UNHCR and CNR delivered additional 2,691 refugee identity cards in November, for a total of 15,630 IDs distributed since April 2021 in Modale, Yakoma, Limasa, Gomba, Boyabu, Mole, Zongo, Bondo and Bosobolo. The document improves refugees' access to social and economic services as well as easing movements within the DRC.
- In Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province, about 927 refugee households previously living in makeshift shelters in border villages, have spontaneously relocated to Sidi village where local authorities have donated 6,000 hectares of land for shelters and agriculture. Refugees are building their own homes and are receiving multi-sectoral assistance from UNHCR and partners.



Refugees from Boyabu camp, South Ubangi Province, return home to Bangui by boat thanks to UNHCR and CNR support © UNHCR/Ghislaine Nentobo



EDUCATION

- To improve learning conditions for both CAR refugees and Congolese pupils, UNHCR partner AIRD has begun construction of 30 classrooms in the localities of Nzakara and Lembo, North Ubangi Province.

SHELTER AND CORE RELIEF ITEMS (CRIs)

- As of 19 November, AIRD has completed the construction of 1,469 emergency shelters in Modale village, North Ubangi Province, and 88 semi-durable shelters for people with special needs.
- Six classrooms and a health centre are also under construction by AIRD in Modale. They will offer better health care and increased learning conditions for both CAR refugees and host community members, currently using emergency or makeshift structures.
- In South Ubangi, AIRD completed the construction of five dormitories ahead of the relocation of vulnerable CAR refugees to the new development hub in Wenze village, approximately 15 km from Zongo Centre.
- In Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi, AIRD started building a primary school and 30 shelters for vulnerable CAR refugees, who have expressed interest in relocating to the Sidi village.
- In November, UNHCR and ADSSE distributed start-off kits including kitchen sets, blankets, jerrycans, mosquito nets buckets and mats to 411 individual (78 households) CAR refugees who have spontaneously relocated to Sidi village. UNHCR and partners plan to distribute similar items to about 600 households in the area.
- To ease living conditions, UNHCR and ADSSE distributed core relief items comprising of kitchen sets, sleeping mats, buckets and blankets to 357 CAR refugees with special needs at the Modale settlement, North Ubangi Province.



Ongoing construction of the Modale health center in North Ubangi Province © UNHCR/Clariss Achu

WATER AND SANITATION

- To improve sanitation conditions and prevent diseases, ACTED has built 248 latrines for persons with special needs in the host communities in Modale village and 361 communal latrines for CAR refugees.
- To ensure access to drinking water for refugees, ADSSE has built a borehole and is currently setting up taps to facilitate water distribution at the Wenze village in South Ubangi Province ahead of the relocation of new refugees from surrounding villages.
- To improve hygiene and sanitary conditions and prevent diseases, UNHCR and ADSSE distributed over 8,000 bars of laundry soap to 4,002 CAR refugees (1,057 households) in the Modale development hub, North Ubangi Province.

HEALTH

- In North and South Ubangi Provinces, 2,318 refugees from Boyabu, Mole and Inke camps took rapid Covid-19 tests prior to voluntary returning to CAR. 34 persons were confirmed positive and have received treatment at the quarantine centres in Mole and Boyabu camps, before being repatriated with a special convoy.

- Viral load testing is essential for HIV treatment monitoring. A donation of testing equipment of HIV viral load in patients given to the UNHCR Gbadolite Sub Office will strengthen the response to HIV AIDS in health centres in camps and out of camp structures supported by UNHCR in North and South Ubangi Provinces.



CASH BASED INTERVENTIONS

- UNHCR and partners distributed cash for the construction of transitional shelters to 2,533 refugees (444 households) at the Modale development hub, North Ubangi Province.



LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY

- World Food Programme is distributing cash-for-food assistance to 15,756 refugees (4,071 households) in out of camp locations in Sidi, Bodouna, Gbangi, Dula and Boroto in Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province.
- To mitigate the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on refugees, UNHCR and AIDES supported the production of 1,170 reusable face masks at Boyabu camp, South Ubangi Province. A savings and loans scheme was also created to allow refugees to fund their activities.
- In Mole camp, South Ubangi province, 183 bags of cassava harvested from community farms supported by AIDES were sold by a farmers' cooperative of both refugees and host community members. Incomes from community farms will augment family revenue and strengthen food security and the local economy.
- In November, following advocacy from UNHCR, 163 CAR refugee and host community women in the localities of Congo Rive, Sambolola and Sagila in South Ubangi Province, received start-up kits for income generating activities through a WFP resilience project. An estimated 23,053 persons (4,650 households), including 9,784 refugees (2,405 households) In North and South Ubangi provinces, are currently benefitting from the project.
- In Modale village, AIDES distributed farming kits and seeds to 50 refugee households, while 22 additional families received cash assistance for income generating activities.



A group of women refugees produces face masks for the community of Boyabu, South Ubangi Province © UNHCR/ Wassy Musorongi

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), international and local NGOs (World Vision, LIZADEEL, APEE).



V. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The declaration of a unilateral ceasefire throughout CAR by President - Faustin Archange Touadera raises hopes for progressive stabilization of the security situation in some parts of the country. UNHCR

is expecting that more CAR refugees may want to voluntarily return to areas which are deemed safe, including Bangui, the prefectures of Lobaye and Ombella M'Poko, after the resumption of voluntary repatriation on 22 October 2021. UNHCR is facilitating over 5,300 returns before the end of the year and will likely continue in 2022, given the thousands of persons who are expressing interest in voluntary repatriations through intention surveys and community mechanisms.

External / Donor Relations

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

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