

Gulf of Guinea Joint Response Plan 2024

for refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, and host communities

February
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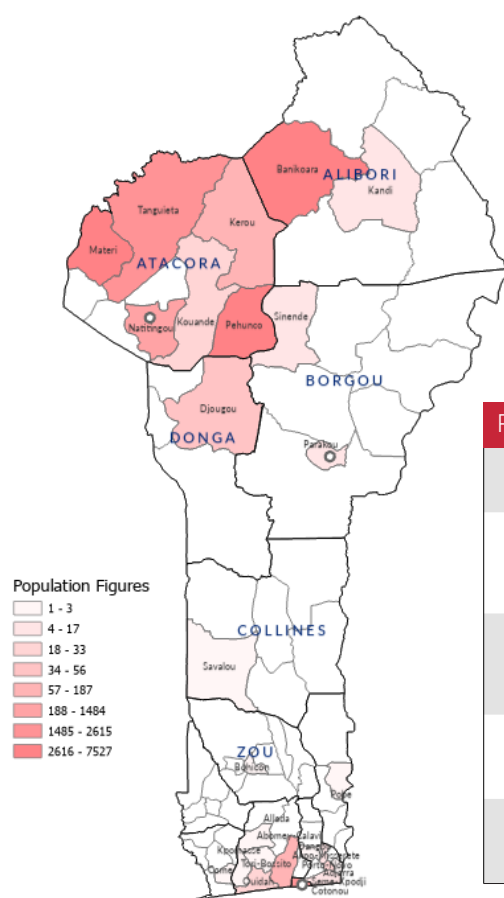
Benin Response Plan Report



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1. Operational context

MAP POPULATION OF CONCERN



Population figures. By the end of 2024, Benin hosts close to 25,000 refugees and asylum-seekers (among which 20,357 are registered) in the northern part of the country. 9,847 refugees were registered in 2024 in the Alibori and Atacora regions, and to a lesser extent in the Donga and Borgou regions. 3,931 of them were granted refugee status (the remaining cases are still being processed). This marks a significant increase in registrations compared to 2023, when 7,875 individuals were registered.

Population Groups in Affected Regions (Alibori & Atacora)

	December 2023	December 2024
Refugees and asylum-seekers - estimate	15,000	24,691
Refugees and asylum-seekers - registered	10,729	20,357
Internally displaced persons - estimate	8,785	12,501
Internally Displaced Persons - Counted	-	5,805

This increase is due to both new arrivals (2,865) and the registration of 7,308 individuals who arrived between 2021 and 2023 as a result of intensified registration operations in 2024. Two campaigns were conducted by the Permanent Secretariat of the National Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons (SP-CNRA) in May/June 2024 and November/December 2024 in Alibori and Atacora. Despite these efforts, it is considered likely that the number of unregistered potential asylum-seekers/refugees remains significant (see priorities for 2025). Among the refugees and asylum-seekers registered in 2024, the vast majority (84%) come from Burkina Faso, with a smaller proportion from Niger (16%). The total number of registered asylum-seekers and refugees throughout Benin is 23,255 at the end of 2024.

The data collection and updates on internally displaced persons (IDPs) conducted as part of the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) program with the Beninese Agency for Civil Protection (ABPC) estimate 12,501 IDPs (5,223 IDPs in the municipality of Banikoara, 3,072 IDPs in Karimama, 107 IDPs in Kobli, 1,419 IDPs in Kérou, 2,148 in Matéri, and 532 IDPs in the municipality of Tanguiéta). The ABPC conducted an initial registration of IDPs in the departments of Atacora and Alibori at the end of 2024. A total of 2,605 IDPs were registered in Alibori (municipalities of Banikoara and Kandi). In the Atacora department, 3,200 IDPs were registered (1,300 in the municipality of Matéri, 1,515 in Kérou, and 385 in Natitingou). A second phase of registration is scheduled for February 2025 and will include the municipalities of Karimama for Alibori and Tanguiéta and Cobby for Atacora.

Protection environment. The year 2024 was particularly difficult for the populations in several northern departments of Benin, marked by a resurgence of attacks by armed groups and floods. As in 2023, the departments of Alibori and Atacora were the hardest hit. In 2024, a total of 217 security incidents were reported, including clashes that resulted in the deaths of 20 people among the defense and security forces (FDS). The municipalities of Matéri and Tanguiéta (Atacora), Karimama and Banikoara (Alibori) remain the most sensitive areas. Insecurity is also increasing in other municipalities such as Kandi and Ségbana (Alibori), Kalalé (Borgou), and Péhunco (Atacora).



According to protection monitoring data *P21* (3,230 households interviewed), nearly 50% of respondents reported facing obstacles at the border, mainly due to the lack of identity documents. Only 63% have an identity document. 10% stated that they were turned away before being able to enter the country. 93% feel safe in Benin. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains by far the leading protection incident, followed by labor exploitation. Regarding GBV, areas away from home (while fetching water, collecting firewood, going to the fields) are identified as the main areas of risk. 90% believe that relations between communities are good. The main causes of tension are access to land and housing, followed by access to resources and lack of economic opportunities. The lack of financial resources, a consequence of the lack of economic opportunities, is seen as the main reason preventing children from attending school. 60% of respondents stated they do not intend to return to Burkina Faso.



©WFP Cash assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers – Banikoara (Benin)

2. Main achievements

Pillar 1. Analysis: Data collection and analysis

 <p>FIELD VISITS TO IDENTIFY AND MONITOR PROTECTION NEEDS</p> <p>37</p>	 <p>COORDINATION MEETINGS WITH AUTHORITIES</p> <p>31</p>
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Pillar 2. Assistance: Coordinated immediate humanitarian response

 <p>PEOPLE WHO RECEIVED FOOD SUPPORT</p> <p>29,030</p>
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Pillar 3. Prevention: Community integration and resilience

BENEFICIARIES OF ACUTE MALNUTRITION PREVENTION PROGRAMME	CHILDREN (6-59 MONTHS) TREATED FOR SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION TAKEN FOR TREATMENT	GUARDIANS OF CHILDREN AGED 0-23 RECEIVING INFANT & YOUNG CHILD FEEDING ADVICE
4,106	11,634	23,751

PEOPLE RECEIVING HYGIENE KITS (WASH)	PEOPLE WITH ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER	CHILDREN WITH LEARNING MATERIALS
20,820	159,924	19,710

Pillar 4. Protection

REFUGEES REGISTERED ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS	PEOPLE ASSISTED WITH CIVIL STATUS DOCUMENTS	PEOPLE ACCESSING GBV RESPONSE & PREVENTION SERVICES
		
11,960	7360	5561

Strengthening registration and data collection. The partners of the Joint Response Plan provided technical and financial support to the ABPC for the registration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and to the SP-CNRA for the registration of refugees, improving the accuracy of the data and strengthening the coordination of the response. Two refugee registration operations took place in May-June and November-December 2024, preceded by training for SP-CNRA staff to ensure proper and complete data collection. By the end of 2024, resources were increased to ensure that asylum-seeker certificates could be issued on-site. Protection monitoring, P21, was launched mid-year and provided initial information on protection issues, needs, and the level of inclusion of refugees.

For IDPs, the registration process began in 2024, allowing essential data to be gathered to support future planning and assistance efforts. This initiative helped improve the monitoring of displacement trends and the identification of the most urgent needs.



©UNHCR Registration of refugees/asylum-seekers with SPCNRA – Atacora (Benin)

In August 2024, ten agencies, under the coordination of the GTIA-PRC, pooled their resources to conduct a multisectoral needs assessment with the authorities in the Alibori municipality, enabling a collective and comprehensive understanding of the needs and priorities of affected populations. The government was also supported and strengthened in operationalizing a Mobile Vulnerability Monitoring (mVAM) system, which feeds into the national early warning system by tracking food prices and market functionality in the northern regions of Benin. These data were collected semi-annually to identify areas of vulnerability and feed into the Harmonized Framework in 2024.

Accountability to affected populations. The partners of the Joint Response Plan have paid specific attention to accountability to affected populations (AAP), whether through optimizing community feedback mechanisms or relying on local mobile phone companies. This initiative aims to strengthen accountability towards affected individuals by disseminating messages about the availability of services, processing, and the rapid response to queries. AAP activities also included conducting participatory assessments and community consultations as part of the design of interventions, ensuring that these interventions addressed specific needs, particularly through the establishment of cash assistance tailored to vulnerable groups. Feedback from displaced persons contributed to adjusting the modalities of food and nutrition assistance, including improving the integration of host families into cash transfer programs and enhancing access to nutritious products in local markets. A pooling effort was also made with humanitarian partners to centralize and harmonize communication channels with displaced persons, allowing for better coordination and responsiveness in handling community feedback. To this end, the toll-free number 189 is planned to be strengthened to become a single entry point for the United Nations for complaints and feedback from affected populations, ensuring a swift and effective response to their concerns. Information-sharing sessions were organized in partnership with local leaders, thus fostering transparency and trust between humanitarian actors and displaced communities. Finally, awareness campaigns on the reporting of sexual

abuse were conducted in targeted communities, thereby reinforcing protection measures and the accountability of humanitarian actors. These efforts are part of a broader dynamic aimed at ensuring secure and dignified access to assistance while strengthening community engagement in the implementation of humanitarian and resilience interventions.

Launch of cash-based interventions. The implementation of cash transfer interventions reached 29,030 displaced persons, ensuring that essential food needs are met while supporting access to nutritious products in local markets. This emergency response mechanism was established with the ABPC. Operationally, collaboration was set up with local NGOs and municipal focal points to provide emergency cash assistance. A rapid needs assessment was conducted to analyze the gaps related to cash transfers and the functionality of local markets in order to plan a cash transfer that would cover non-food needs and the economic resilience of both displaced people and host communities. The transfer will take place in 2025.

At the same time, a new cash transfer program including a nutrition component for pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as children aged 6 to 23 months from both host families and displaced households, was established in the departments of Alibori and Atacora.

This program includes, in its nutrition component, support for pregnant and breastfeeding women as well as children aged 6 to 23 months from displaced households and host families, extending the nutrition package to these families as well. In 2024, 1,772 households in Alibori were assisted. In Atacora, a vulnerability analysis conducted among displaced households revealed 1,026 households classified as “poor” and “very poor” that will benefit from upcoming assistance. This analysis provides an updated list of vulnerable individuals to optimize the effectiveness of interventions in 2025 and reduce inclusion errors by ensuring better resource allocation. By strengthening the targeting and integration of vulnerable groups, the program aims not only to meet the immediate needs of food-insecure households but also to foster sustainable improvements in their nutritional and economic resilience.



©WFP Women's cooperatives which produce enriched flour – (Benin)

3. Coordination and synergy

Strengthening of coordination mechanism with the authorities. Since the beginning of the crisis, stakeholders have prioritized the coordination of actions, relying on a community-based approach in the northern departments of Benin. In Atacora, coordination is led by the Prefect and has been supported by the creation of thematic working groups. Efforts are underway to establish a similar dynamic in Alibori. This collective effort has prompted the government, through the ABPC, to engage more actively in coordination initiatives. The Permanent Secretariat of the National Commission for Refugee Assistance (SP-CNAR) has also officially opened an office in northern Benin, which will enhance its presence on the ground and improve the consideration of the specific needs of affected populations. Thematic groups focused on child protection in emergencies at the municipal level (PESU) have been supported and have proven effective in assisting local authorities, including municipal offices, in needs analysis, alerting, reporting, and carrying out certain follow-up activities. Seventeen municipalities have been supported in the development of their contingency plans and in strengthening prevention and early warning mechanisms in the WASH sector. The GTIA-PRC continues to facilitate coordination with government entities through ABPC. The GTIA-PRC's intervention has been based on a coordinated approach to situational analysis and evidence generation. A joint needs assessment was conducted in northern Benin in July 2024, followed by an assistance mission in December 2024 in Banikoara (Alibori). In 2024, the GTIA-PRC developed an emergency plan for the departments of Atacora and Alibori. This plan covers 15,634 refugees, 5,223 internally displaced persons, and nearly 2,000 members of host communities.

Engagement with development actors. In 2024, an eligibility process enabled Benin to benefit from the World Bank's window for host communities and refugees (WHR). An IDA 20 WHR allocation of 25 million USD was made available to support the Social Cohesion Project in the Northern Gulf of Guinea Regions (COSO) in 2025 in northern Benin. The project will target sites with high concentrations of refugees with support from the SP-CNRA. Additionally, the WURI project, supported by the World Bank, plans to register refugees in the National Register of Natural Persons (RNPP) in 2025 and assign them a unique identification number (Personal Identification Number Certificate/CNPI), which will facilitate their access to national services. A regional INTPA project funded by the EU has been developed by WFP, UNICEF, and IOM in Benin. With a budget of 2.5 million euros, the project will support refugees and internally displaced persons' access to basic national services, including education and social protection.

In 2024, the IOM's Climate Change-Resilient Communities project in northern Benin, funded by the IOM Development Fund (IDF), was launched. Through this project, young agropastoralists and IDPs from the commune of Matéri (Atacora) will be trained and equipped to set up Multi-Nutritional Block (BMN) production units in the context of the restricted access to the Controlled Occupation Zone (ZOC). In an effort to adapt and optimize resources, UNICEF has built on its operational presence in the North and its existing development programs funded by Canada, Luxembourg and the Netherlands to address the situation of forced displacement through child protection, child marriage prevention, school enrollment (especially for girls), and the establishment of social protection systems.

WFP is implementing a resilience project funded by Australia and Denmark, aiming to strengthen food security and livelihoods of vulnerable communities through income-generating activities and improved access to markets for small producers. The project is linked to school feeding efforts. Continuing this, and still related to school canteens, in partnership with the African Development Bank (AfDB), WFP is developing a livelihood strengthening project in response to the challenges posed by climate shocks and increasing economic vulnerabilities. This initiative will also support the Beninese government's social protection efforts by integrating beneficiaries of resilience programs into the Single Social Register (RSU). This approach aims to facilitate their inclusion in sustainable social safety nets while improving their access to economic opportunities.

Expansion of the partnership framework around the Joint Response Plan. The year 2024 was marked by the expansion and revitalization of the partnership framework around the Joint Response Plan beyond its initial composition (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, and WFP).

The security and climate situation's impact on populations in northern Benin led to an increased presence of NGOs and development actors in the Alibori and Atacora departments. These organizations have integrated into existing mechanisms, and ad-hoc operational coordination structures were established to ensure regular information exchange between actors and with government initiatives. The partnership framework now includes other UN agencies (UNFPA), international NGOs (Educo), and national organizations (Benin Red Cross, SIAN'SON, DEDRAS, Caritas Benin).



©UNICEF
Child protection
monitoring visit –
Koklannou (Benin)

4. Overview of key needs and priorities in 2025

Identification and registration of asylum-seekers, and data collection on refugees and internally displaced persons. Strengthening refugee registration is a priority to ensure the most up-to-date data and to expand the protection space. It is estimated that the end-of-2024 figures only partially reflect the reality of forced displacement from Burkina Faso and the Niger. In 2025, the increased presence of the SP-CNRA in the northern region will facilitate registration operations. This dynamic should be supported, and efforts intensified to ensure that all eligible individuals are reached. The Protection Monitoring, P21, launched in 2024 in Benin, must be maintained and strengthened (particularly in terms of its dissemination) to inform and support inclusion dynamics. Multi-layered information on mobility, vulnerabilities, and the needs of IDPs and host communities, using DTM, will be collected, analyzed, and disseminated periodically in the Alibori and Atacora departments.



©UNHCR Registration of refugees/asylum-seekers with SPCNRA – Atacora (Benin)

Field and national level coordination. The efforts made in 2024 to strengthen coordination between actors and with authorities must be supported at all levels, from the field to the national level, particularly to ensure effective alignment between humanitarian and development interventions. The opening of the SP-CNRA office in northern Benin presents an opportunity to collectively improve the responsiveness of interventions, facilitate the monitoring of operations, and strengthen collaboration with local actors, including municipalities and civil society organizations.

The signing of formal agreements with national authorities will also streamline humanitarian coordination. A global Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with the ABPC for 2025, establishing a framework for enhanced collaboration in disaster management. An operational MoU was also added to address specific coordination needs, particularly for the registration of IDPs.

The Government has received support to strengthen its analytical capacity to effectively track vulnerabilities and manage risks. Through the Mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Monitoring (mVAM) system and the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), data collection and analysis on food security every three months were supported. This helped identify and monitor vulnerability “hotspots.” These data have been integrated into the national early warning system, facilitating evidence-based decision-making and more targeted responses to emerging food security threats.

Emergency and response preparedness. The political and security situation in the Sahelian sub-region suggests the need to anticipate new arrivals and reinforces the importance of strengthening the emergency preparedness and response capacities of actors working alongside authorities in northern Benin. In 2024, to ensure operational readiness, the Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPA) were updated to align with current emergency response needs.

This included integrating lessons learned from recent crises and adjusting protocols to address emerging risks.

Furthermore, in terms of emergency preparedness, it has become essential to pre-position key supplies (such as blankets, buckets, soap, clean containers, school kits, medical kits, etc.) within agency warehouses in Natitingou for the departments of Atacora and Donga, and in Parakou for the departments of Borgou and Alibori, to enable faster and more effective response.

Strengthening early warning systems as a central pillar of preparedness must be ensured. The mobile vulnerability monitoring system (mVAM) and the development of a geographic information system, which will feed into the national early warning system, should continue to be strengthened in 2025.

Social protection and economic inclusion. Evaluations conducted in the third and fourth quarters of 2024, particularly through vulnerability surveys and community consultations, highlighted the importance of expanding income-generating activities beyond just agricultural production. Access to livelihoods for forcibly displaced persons remains particularly low, especially due to difficulties accessing land. This situation directly impacts displaced persons' abilities to meet their basic needs, including food, while increasing their exposure to violence and abuse, particularly for those at risk of protection issues such as children and women.

In this regard, interventions related to agricultural food processing, aquaculture, and the development of local value chains, which allow for income diversification and improved economic resilience for households, need to be strengthened. Strategic links with solar school canteens offer relevant leverage, facilitating the supply of local products and strengthening the socio-economic impact of canteens on local producers.

While improving the coordination of interventions, particularly in terms of prioritizing beneficiaries, the implementation of cash transfer interventions focused on social protection must be reinforced. Actors will establish a Cash Working Group (CWG) to coordinate and harmonize cash transfer interventions with humanitarian and government actors. In collaboration with national authorities and the World Bank, the integration of cash transfer recipients into the Single Social Registry (RSU) should continue to facilitate their inclusion in social protection nets. The enrollment of refugees in the RNPP planned for 2025 by the government will serve as a first step to facilitate inclusion in the RSU. These initiatives aim to strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian responses and foster a transition to solutions that align with national social protection and resilience strategies.

Access to education. One of the major challenges in Benin since the onset of the security crisis has been the inclusion of refugee children in schools and training centers due to the fragility of the education system, which is often overwhelmed by the situation due to a lack of resources (desks, teachers, teaching materials). It is estimated that the enrollment rate for refugee children at the primary level is 37%, primarily due to a lack of family resources, according to P21 data. The issue of catch-up education for refugee, asylum-seeker and internally displaced children must also be addressed, alongside the issue of children who are out of school in host communities.

Ensuring access to education for all children by enrolling them in school or providing them with adapted alternative learning modalities remains a priority for 2025. The focus should be on strengthening an inclusive and resilient learning framework that considers improving infrastructure, providing educational materials, ensuring access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and interventions in child protection and nutritional health, as well as school feeding programs. School canteens, which provide a daily meal to students, improve their attendance and concentration in class.

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