

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

01 October 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

7,062

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

Highlights

As of 29 September, **UNHCR** and the **National Commission for Refugees (CNR)** verified **21,251 CAR refugees** in an ongoing exercise targeting some 29,000 persons in **Mole and Boyabu camps**, South Ubangi Province.

UNHCR and partners facilitated the **distribution of cash-for-food by WFP** to about **14,863 CAR refugees** and vulnerable host community members in Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province.

Local authorities in Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province have **granted around 9000 hectares of arable land** for agriculture to CAR refugees in the localities of Sidi and Boduna, North Ubangi Province.



Liz Ahua, UNHCR DRC Representative greets a baby at the Modale health centre supported by UNHCR, during a visit to North Ubangi with the Permanent Secretary of CNR. © UNHCR/Ghislaine Nentobo

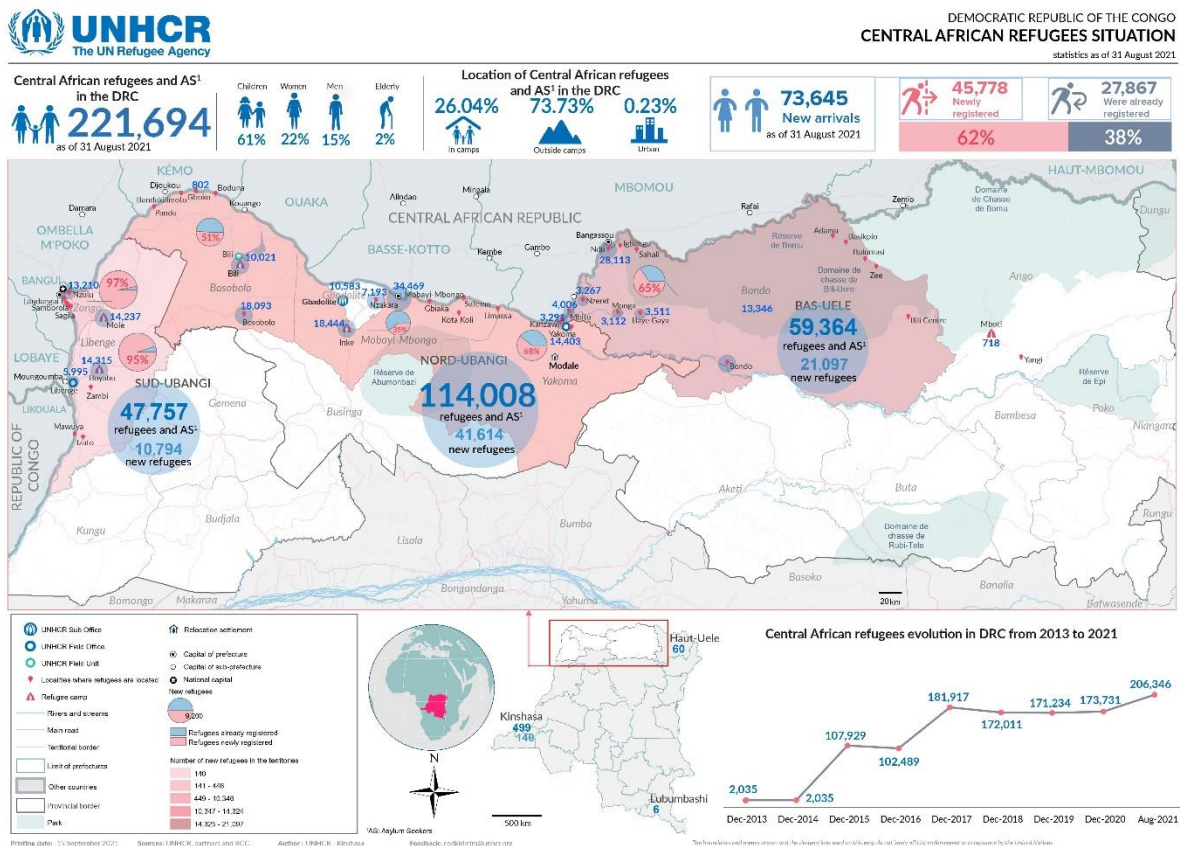
Operational Context

Political upheavals in the Central African Republic (CAR) following the latest Presidential elections in December 2020 resulted to 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, after having fled election-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 the National Commission for Refugees (CNR) are working together to implement UNHCR's Policy on Alternatives to Camps, which seeks 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. To this extent, a number of villages across the three Provinces have been identified by UNHCR and its partners to function as 'development hubs', where socio-economic infrastructures will be rehabilitated or constructed, and livelihoods activities implemented to foster the resilience and self-sufficiency of both refugees and host populations.

I. CAR REFUGEE POPULATION IN THE DRC



The emergency activity of 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 operations by the CAR government or ethnic conflicts in certain localities.

II. PROTECTION NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Overall, the main challenges in the response to the latest CAR refugees influx remain unchanged. These are predominantly due to insufficient resources to meet the humanitarian needs and logistic difficulties to reach refugees in remote areas across the three provinces.

A majority of CAR refugees continue to live in precarious conditions in hard-to-reach areas close to the banks of the rivers forming the border with CAR, without basic shelter and facing acute food shortages. Nearly 13,000 households are still in need of urgent shelter assistance.



CAR refugees build shelters with the support of UNHCR on the land granted to them by local authorities in North Ubangi. © UNHCR/ Marianne Tshisamba

- Vast distances, extremely poor road conditions and torrential rains continue to greatly affect the capacity of UNHCR and other humanitarian actors to reach people in need.
- Insufficient availability of trucks and sanitary facilities are slowing down UNHCR's efforts to relocate thousands of refugees to the Modale development hub in North Ubangi Province.
- There is a need to rebuild, refurbish and equip community infrastructures across the northern provinces.
- 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 support.
- Sexual and gender-based violence remains a major concern, with over 194 cases documented amongst refugees, most of which occurred on CAR territory. Insufficient emergency cash assistance due to funding gaps further exacerbates risks of SGBV.
- There is an 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.
- 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 prevent the spread of diseases and protect refugee women and girls from related SGBV incidents.
- Existing health facilities in locations hosting CAR refugees are understaffed, poorly equipped and lack essential drugs. There is a need to support these local structures through rehabilitation of health centres and posts, mobile clinics and the distribution of more equipment and drugs.
- There is a continuous need for nutrition supplements and therapeutic foods to address the increasing levels 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, as these are themselves experiencing acute poverty.
- 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.

III. MULTISECTORAL RESPONSE



- As of 29 September, UNHCR and CNR have verified the presence of 21,251 individual (5,236 households) refugees in Mole and Boyabu camps, South Ubangi Province. The verification exercise launched on 11 September is continuing and will allow UNHCR to better plan protection and assistance to CAR refugees. An estimated 29,000 refugees are expected to be verified in the two camps.

- UNHCR also carried out the verification of 350 persons with special needs in Modale development hub, North Ubangi Province, ahead of the distribution of core relief items and other assistance to them.
- UNHCR and CNR are continuing intention surveys for voluntary repatriation of CAR refugees to parts of the Central African Republic such as the prefectures of Bangui and Lobaye, where the security situation has been assessed as relatively stable. As of 24 September, 4,421 refugees in Mole and Boyabu camps have confirmed their desire to voluntarily return to CAR, bringing the total of those willing to return to 26,887 including the refugees residing in Inke camp, North Ubangi Province.
- UNHCR and CNR continued the distribution of refugee identity cards in Boyabu camp and in the Modale development hub. As of 24 September, 7,062 IDs have been distributed in North and South Ubangi Provinces. The document eases movement for refugees and facilitates their socio-economic integration.
- In September, UNHCR and partners relocated another 290 CAR refugees (76 households) from Yakoma to Modale, North Ubangi Province, making a total of 4,532 individuals (1,199 households) moved to the settlement since April 2021. UNHCR and partners are providing multi-sectoral assistance to the newly relocated refugees. UNHCR and partners continued to provide multi-sectoral assistance to 194 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in and out of camp in northern DRC. UNHCR partner AIDES also carried out awareness raising on SGBV, reaching 3,016 refugees and host community members in five territories in the three provinces.
- UNHCR and partners assisted 1,739 separated and unaccompanied CAR refugee children in North Ubangi, South Ubangi and Bas Uele through conducting best interest determination (BID) assessments for children and providing psychosocial support.
- To strengthen protection for refugees and enhance peaceful co-existence with their hosts, UNHCR partner ADSSE, donated sport equipment including balls, boots, nets and other items to football teams comprising of both refugees and host community youths in Modale, North Ubangi Province.



CAR refugees participate in a physical verification exercise in Boyabu camp, South Ubangi Province© UNHCR/ Bobo Kitoko



EDUCATION

- UNHCR and ADSSE have identified schools outside camp locations in North Ubangi, in which about 106 classrooms will be built, thanks to funding from Education Cannot Wait (ECW). The classrooms will contribute to decongesting existing education infrastructure, improve learning conditions as well as access to education for both CAR refugee and Congolese children.
- About 624 CAR refugee pupils whose fees were supported by UNHCR and partner ADSSE sat for the 2021 session of DRC's national primary school leaving certificate examination – TENAFEP, in North Ubangi, South Ubangi and Bas Uele Provinces, obtaining a success rate of 82 per cent.
- AIRD is continuing the construction of six classrooms in Modale, as well as other school infrastructures in Boroto and Bili, Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province, and in Elaka, South Ubangi Province.



SHELTER AND CORE RELIEF ITEMS (CRIs)

- During the month of September, AIRD completed 93 emergency shelters at the Modale development hub (North Ubangi Province), bringing the total of shelters that are finalised to 1,300. Of these, 1,185 have already been occupied by newly relocated refugees, as well as 13 semi-durables shelters for extremely vulnerable households.
- UNHCR partner AIRD completed the construction of a raft which will be used to cross the Uele river from Yakoma (North Ubangi Province) to Monga (Bas Uele Province). The new raft will facilitate the movement of humanitarian partners and transportation of emergency supplies to provide better protection and assistance to over 66,000 registered CAR refugees in Bas Uele Province. Until now, the only access to the zone has been using dugout canoes tied together to create a platform ferrying vehicles and persons across the river.

- UNHCR and partner ADSSE distributed 36 tarpaulins, 67 mosquito nets and 36 solar lamps to 123 CAR refugees recently relocated to Modale, North Ubangi. The materials will help the refugees in their new start in the settlement.



WATER AND SANITATION

- UNHCR and partner ACTED distributed 8,100 bars of soap to 4,050 refugees (1,073 households) at the Modale development hub, North Ubangi Province, to improve hygiene conditions and prevent the spread of diseases.



HEALTH

- In September, AIDES handed over essential drugs and medical supplies to the Yakoma and Wasolo health zones, North Ubangi Province. The material is destined to health facilities and will improve access to healthcare for refugees and host community members.
- UNHCR and AIDES have signed an agreement with North Ubangi provincial health authorities to improve access to healthcare for CAR refugee children under 5 years of age as well as pregnant women in health facilities in Bosobolo Territory, by providing them with essential drugs and medical supplies. A doctor from AIDES also carries out weekly assessments in the targeted health structures to promote that refugees receive the care they need.



LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY

- Following advocacy by UNHCR and CNR, local authorities in Sidi and Boduna, Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province, have donated over 9,000 hectares of arable land to CAR refugees, many of whom arrived during the latest influx. Land was also granted to accommodate these refugees in the two villages, where over 317 refugee families have so far spontaneously registered themselves with the local authorities. Another 3000 hectares have been approved by local authorities of Modale, to allow farming by newly relocated refugees.
- UNHCR and partners are facilitating the distribution of cash-for-food by World Food Programme to about 14,863 individual (3,780 households) CAR refugees and host community members in Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province.

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. POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS

In view of the progressive stabilization of the security situation in parts of Central African Republic such as Bangui and the Lobaye prefectures, and in line with the desire expressed by over 26,000 refugees through intention surveys, UNHCR and partners have begun preparations to resume voluntary repatriations of CAR refugees from Mole, Boyabu and Inke camps in North and South Ubangi Provinces. UNHCR plans to facilitate repatriations in

safety and dignity for about 6000 refugees starting in October 2021 until the end of the year. Voluntary repatriations of CAR refugees first began 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:

Donors for UNHCR operations in DRC in 2021

United States of America (47.1M) | Sweden (4.8M) | Japan (1.7M) | Canada (1.6M) | UN Peacebuilding Fund (1.6M) | Education Cannot Wait (1.5M) | European Union (1.5M) | CERF (1.5M) | France (1.2) | Country-Based Pooled Funds (1M) | Norway (0.6M) | UN Covid-19 MPTF (0.2M) | UN Programme On HIV/AIDS (0.2M) | Toyota Tsusho Corporation (0.2M) | UPS Corporate (0.1M) | Unilever (UK) (0.1M)

Donors of regional or sub-regional funds in 2021

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Major donors of unearmarked funds in 2021

Norway (80M) | Sweden (66.9M) | Private donors Spain (55.7M) | Netherlands (36.1M) | Denmark (34.6M) | Private donors Republic of Korea (28.5M) | United Kingdom (28.4M) | Germany (26M) | Japan (23.4M) | Private donors Japan (20.7M) | France (20.2M) | Switzerland (16.4M) | Private donors Italy (14M) | Ireland (12.5M) | Belgium (11.9M) | Private donors Sweden (11.9M) | Italy (10.7M)

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