

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

December 2021

Key figures

221,922

Central African Refugees are currently living in the DRC

5,500

refugee voluntarily repatriated towards CAR from Mole, Boyabu and Inke camps (North and South Ubangi Provinces) in 2021

1,650

refugees and local community students who have benefitted of school kits in 19 schools in North Ubangi Province

Highlights

As of 15 December 2021, **5,500 people** (1,566 households) have been voluntarily repatriated from **Mole, Boyabu and Inke camps, North and South Ubangi Provinces**, in security and safety by UNHCR in collaboration with its partners.

In December 2021, **UNHCR and the CNR** have conducted a **physical verification exercise targeting 9,092 people** in out-of-camp localities of Monga and Kanzawi (Bas Uele) and in Mogoro, North Ubangi Province

In December 2021, **5,005** refugees have benefitted from a **WFP cash-for-food distribution** at the Modale development hub, North Ubangi Province.



The Head of UNHCR Gbadolite sub-delegation hands over a uniform to a first-grade student at Salongo 2 school in Nzakara, North Ubangi Province ©UNHCR/ Ghislaine Nentobo

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.

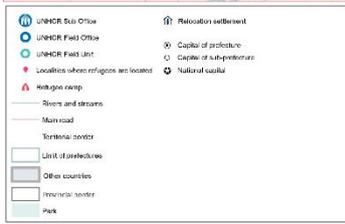
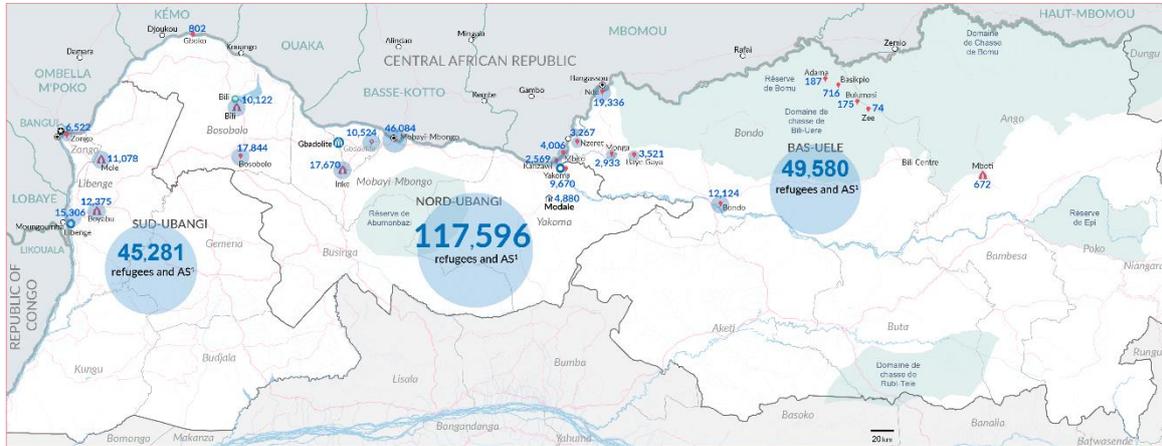
Out of more than 220,000 CAR refugees in the DRC, 26% live in the four camps managed by UNHCR and by the DRC government in North and South Ubangi Provinces; the overwhelming majority live on the banks of the border rivers in hard-to-reach border areas, including in Bas Uele province, often within communities 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, several 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 of refugees to parts of CAR deemed safe by UNHCR CAR and DRC country offices.

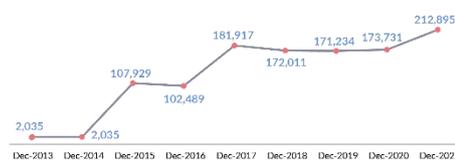
CAR REFUGEE POPULATION IN THE DRC

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, in Bosobolo Territory, North Ubangi Province. In these areas, local authorities have reported since the beginning of October a new influx of approximately 9,000 new Central African asylum seekers, who are believed to have fled insecurity in Bambari and Kouango, CAR, according to local authorities' estimates. UNHCR continues to monitor the security situation in CAR in this context. A biometric registration exercise is also planned and will be conducted jointly by a UNHCR and CNR team, in order to confirm exact figures to inform the humanitarian response.



Central African refugees evolution in DRC from 2013 to 2021



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All translations and exact dates and the frequency used in this map do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

I. PROTECTION NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

CAR refugees continue to face multiple challenges related to insufficient resources and logistical constraints as humanitarian actors struggle to access the vast and remote border localities in which the majority of new refugees have spontaneously settled. Security incidents still being reported in some areas continue to pose protection risks.

- Insufficient financial resources affect the capacity to carry out the biometric registration of recently arrived refugees in the Province of North Ubangi (Bosoblo Territory) as well as of some refugees arrived in 2017 who have not been registered yet.
- Insufficient quantity of essential household items that cannot cover the needs of all refugees and asylum seekers, especially those living outside the camps.
- A majority of CAR refugees continue to be in dire need of shelter assistance, both in the new development hubs and in spontaneous sites in border localities along the Ubangi River.
- Vast distances, extremely poor road conditions and torrential rains continue to pose daunting challenges for UNHCR and other humanitarian actors to access people in need.
- Drinkable water remains insufficient in out-of-camp areas, including in the new development hubs in North and South Ubangi provinces. Some refugees are dependent on river sources which increases exposure to water borne diseases, especially amongst young children.
- Access to quality healthcare continues to be a major challenge: UNHCR support is limited to health facilities within refugee camps and eight health facilities outside of the camps because of insufficient funds.
- Existing health facilities in locations hosting CAR refugees are also understaffed, poorly equipped and often lacking essential drugs for prevalent diseases such as malaria. More resources are needed to support these local structures through rehabilitation of health centres and posts, mobile clinics, the distribution of more equipment and drugs.

- 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, which themselves experience 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 (psychosocial support as well as cash assistance for host families etc.)
- Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains a major concern, with 542 cases documented amongst the old and new refugee caseload as of 31st December, among which are 385 cases of rape. Difficulties in providing emergency cash assistance further exacerbates risks of 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

- The voluntary repatriation operation in North and South Ubangi came to its year-end on 15 December 2021. During 2021, 5,500 refugees (1,566 households) living in the camps of Mole, Boyabu and Inke were repatriated to Bangui and to the Ombella M'poko and Lobaye prefectures in CAR in dignity and security by UNHCR and its partners, in collaboration with the DRC and CAR governments. The operation will continue in 2022 and will also involve refugees outside the camps, given the 10,000 CAR refugees who have confirmed interest in being repatriated through intention surveys. More than 5,000 other people were also repatriated between 2019 and 2020.
- In December, the CNR and UNHCR conducted a physical verification exercise targeting 9,092 people (2,215 households) in Monga and Kanzawi in Bas Uélé and in Mogoro in North Ubangi, with the aim to produce reliable statistics on the refugees living in out-of-camps locations. Since October 2021, 38,869 Central African refugees have been verified in North, South Ubangi and Bas Uélé
- In North and South Ubangi, refugees continue to spontaneously relocate with the assistance of UNHCR and partners. To date, 614 households have self-relocated in WENZE, South Ubangi, and more than 1,680 in the development hub of Sidi, Bosobolo Territory (North Ubangi). In WENZE, UNHCR have allocated 482 land plots granted by local authorities to recently relocated households for the construction of their shelters and for agriculture.
- UNHCR and its partners continue to provide multi-sectoral assistance to SGBV survivors. Almost all survivors have benefited from psychosocial assistance, 103 have benefited from economic and/or educational reintegration, while 13 have benefited from legal assistance and 261 from medical care. Awareness-raising activities carried out by UNHCR, AIDES and community protection structures have made it possible to develop community-based prevention measures in order to reduce the risk of SGBV



A CAR refugee family in front of their transitional shelter at the WENZE Development hub in South Ubangi ©UNHCR/ Ghislaine Nentobo



EDUCATION

- In North Ubangi Province, UNHCR, through its partner AIDES, supported 19 schools in the territories of Yakoma and Mobaye Mbongo with school supplies and equipment, school kits (consisting of French and math books, notebooks, pens, pencils, etc.) within the context of the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) project, in order to improve the study conditions of refugee and indigenous children.
- As part of the implementation of the ECW project, UNHCR's partner AIRD has launched a project to build 100 classrooms in Yakoma and Mobaye Mbongo Territories (North Ubangi Province). Currently, two six-classroom buildings are under construction at the Salongo 2 primary schools in Nzakara, Mobaye Mbongo Territory, which host 448 pupils, including 293 refugees and 155 indigenous people.



UNHCR partner ADSSE distributes school supplies and uniforms to students in 19 schools in North Ubangi province ©ADSSE/ Junior Nsambi



SHELTER AND CORE RELIEF ITEMS (CRIs)

- As of January 2022, 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.
- In WENZE, South Ubangi, AIRD has built 60 transitional shelters for people with special needs and 30 additional shelters in Sidi, Bosobolo Territory, (North Ubangi Province).
- At the Modale development hub, AIRD completed the construction of 158 transitional shelters and 35 latrines, while 379 households also started the construction of their own transitional shelters after receiving conditional cash for shelters from UNHCR.
- UNHCR partners have continued the construction of basic community infrastructures, including health centres and schools, in the development hubs of WENZE (South Ubangi) and Sidi (North Ubangi), in line with the Alternative to Camps approach. In Modale, in North Ubangi, the health centre and six school classrooms are being completed.
- During the month of December, in South Ubangi, UNHCR through its partner ADSSE assisted 1,889 refugees (466 households) recently relocated to the new development hub of WENZE with essential household items including mosquito nets, blankets, buckets, soap and solar lamps.



WATER AND SANITATION

- At the WENZE development hub (South Ubangi Province), UNICEF and the partner ACTED, with the technical support of UNHCR, have built two boreholes for the provision of water, while in Modale, ACTED has completed the construction of a third borehole. UNHCR partner World Vision has also started the construction of a borehole equipped with a solar pump in the development hub of Sidi, Bosobolo Territory (North Ubangi). This village has huge water supply challenges, the water source being located more than 3km away.



HEALTH

- As of 31 December 2021, 481 CAR refugees have been vaccinated against COVID-19 in Mole and Boyabu camps (South Ubangi Province). Among them, 281 people have received two doses of AstraZeneca and 280 people have been vaccinated with Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Sinovac and Moderna.



CASH BASED INTERVENTIONS

- In Sidi, Bosobolo Territory (North Ubangi Province), UNHCR distributed cash assistance for the purchase of essential household items to 3,911 households, including 3,716 refugee households and 195 local community households. Women of childbearing age received additional money for the purchase of dignity kits.
- UNHCR and partners also distributed cash for shelters to 500 vulnerable refugee households who spontaneously relocated to the development hub of Sidi, Bosobolo Territory. In addition, a standard amount of \$40 was given to all households without distinction for the construction of their latrines.
- A similar distribution of cash for shelters took place at the development hub of Wenze (South Ubangi Province) benefitting 569 refugee households. 54 households have already started the construction of their transitional shelters thanks to such assistance. As part of the same activity, UNHCR and partners also distributed cash for the purchase of essential household items to both refugee and host communities.
- At Modale development hub, in the Province of North Ubangi, the World Food Programme (WFP) in collaboration with UNHCR distributed cash-for-food assistance targeting a total of 5,005 people (1,404 households).



LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY

- Within the framework of a joint WFP-UNHCR resilience project, approximately 5,550 people (925 households), including 2,820 refugees living in the refugees hosting localities of Congo Rive, Sambolola and Sagila (South Ubangi Province) continue to receive cash assistance. Each beneficiary receives money to participate in income generating activities such as market gardening and fruit tree planting in the targeted host localities. This three-month project aims to strengthen the socio-economic resilience of both refugees and host community members.
- Thanks to the support of UNHCR and AIDES, the agropastoral cooperative "Maboko" of the Mole camp (South Ubangi Province), composed of 17 refugees and 13 host community members has invested in a project of building 30 fishponds on the banks of a stream located near the camp which will be used to develop fish farming activities. To date, four of the 30 ponds are being developed.



*Mole refugees and members of the host community work together to develop a fishpond in Mole, South Ubangi
©HCR/Wassy Tshikama*

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, 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 of¹:

Donors for UNHCR operations in DRC in 2021

United States of America (47.1M) | CERF (6.1M) | Sweden (4.8M) | Country-Based Pooled Funds (2.3M) | Denmark (2.2M) | Japan (1.7M) | Canada (1.6M) | UN Peacebuilding Fund (1.6M) | Education Cannot Wait (1.5M) | European Union (1.5M) | France (1.2M) | Norway (0.6M) | UN Covid-19 MPTF (0.2M) | UN Programme On HIV/AIDS (0.2M) | Toyota Tsusho Corporation (0.15 M) | UPS Corporate (0.1M) | Unilever UK (0.1M)

Donors of regional or sub-regional funds in 2021

Germany (50.1M) | United States of America (33M) | Private donors Germany (11.9M) | Private donors Australia (11.1M) | Finland (5.8M) | Canada (5.6M) | Sweden (4.7M) | Japan (2.7M) | Private Donors Republic of Korea (2,6M) | Norway (2.3M) | France (2.1M)

Major donors of unearmarked funds in 2021

Norway (80M) | Private donors Spain (75.9M) | Sweden (75.4M) | United Kingdom (40.4M) | Private donors Republic of Korea (38.8M) | Netherlands (36.1M) | Denmark (34.6M) | Private donors Japan (30.9M) | Germany (26M) | Japan (23.4M) | France (20.2 M) | Private donors Italy (19.6M) | Private donors Sweden (16.9M) | Switzerland (16.4M) | Ireland (12.5M) | Belgium (11.9M) | Italy (10.7M) | Private donors USA (10.6M)

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¹ Funding update as of 29 December 2021