



**INTER-AGENCY REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN
CENTRAL AFRICAN REFUGEE EMERGENCY
IN THE NORTHERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
OF THE CONGO**

MARCH-DECEMBER 2021

NOTE:

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All statistics are provisional and subject to change. Except where indicated otherwise, all population figures provided in this report are as of March 2021.

PHOTO CONTENT:

Central African refugees departing a Core Relief Item distribution in Yakoma, Democratic Republic of the Congo © UNHCR/Helene Caux

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Foreword

The new refugee influx from the Central African Republic (CAR), underlines the cyclical nature of this humanitarian crisis, with influxes recurring every four years, which calls for a deeper reflection on how to respond. Conflict and insecurity inside CAR continue to cause significant forced displacement both within CAR and into neighboring countries, particularly affecting the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The deterioration of the security situation coinciding with rising tensions during election years (2013, 2017 and 2020) has now left about five per cent of the entire population of the CAR displaced inside the DRC. In the recent influx, according to local authorities in the DRC, some 92,000 Central African refugees fled to the DRC giving rise to a new and complex emergency. This is in addition to the existing CAR population already living in northern DRC.

This **Inter-Agency Refugee Response Plan (RRP)** seeks to address the complex needs of an increasing number of CAR refugees and asylum-seekers situated in a vast area that poses huge logistical challenges.

The protracted nature of the crisis is also heavily impacting the host populations with refugees situated in some of the most poverty stricken and underserved areas of the DRC that lack adequate access to services. While the local community has been generous, this refugee crisis compounds protection risks to refugees and asylum-seekers as it creates fertile ground for tensions over resources between refugees and host communities.

The Government of the DRC and RRP partners have scaled up efforts to provide protection and humanitarian assistance, save lives, improve living conditions and reinforce the resilience of Central African refugees and their host communities.

A comprehensive humanitarian response has been developed that addresses life-threatening needs and promotes, as much as possible, sustainable approaches and builds on an out-of-camp approach to benefit refugee and host communities alike. The RRP partners do so by enhancing synergies, ensuring compatibility with planned development activities in the region, in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees. Making this link is critical due to the challenges the region faces, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the significant logistical challenges in the areas where the refugees have settled.

In this Inter-Agency plan, coordinated by UNHCR and the DRC Government, RRP partners are appealing for a total of US\$ 69 million to assist around 92,000 new refugees and close to 100,000 host community members in 2021.

As part of this RRP, 16 partners will strive to jointly use their resources and bring their expertise to bear. Funding for this Inter-Agency plan will determine the amount of assistance that can be provided by RRP partners. Therefore, we count on the much-needed support of international community to realize the activities as set out in this Inter-Agency Response Plan, to address the unfolding emergency.

Eric Malu Mukandila

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Refugees, Ministry of the Interior, Democratic
Republic of the Congo

Liz Kpam Ahua

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

PLANNED RESPONSE

MARCH – DECEMBER 2021



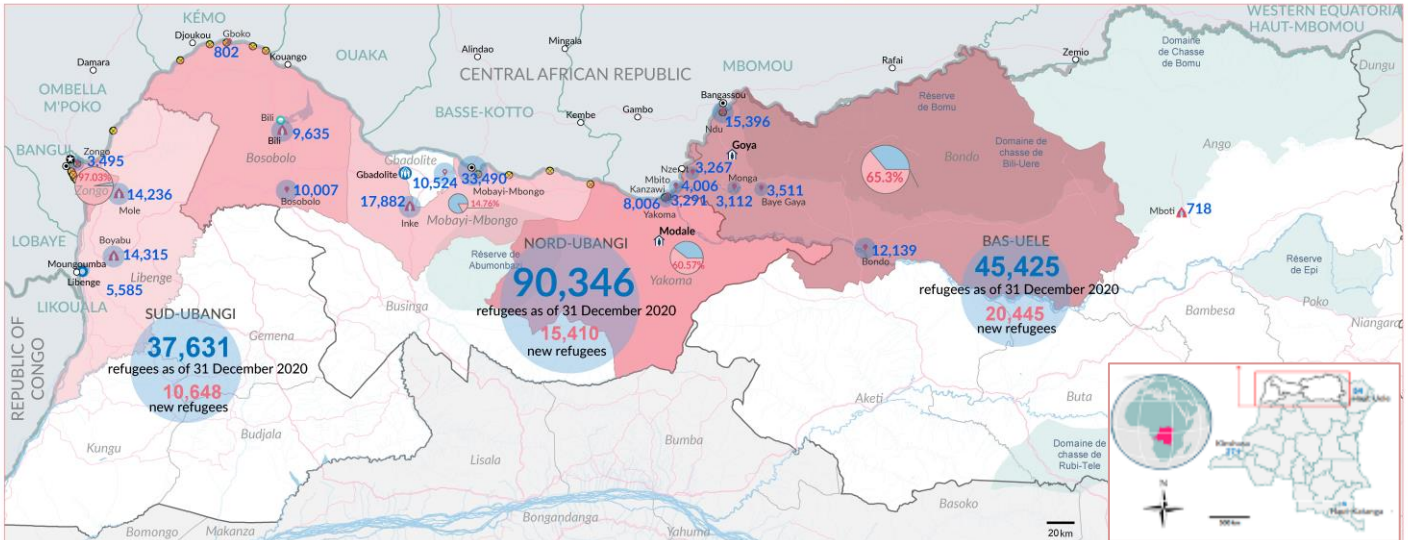
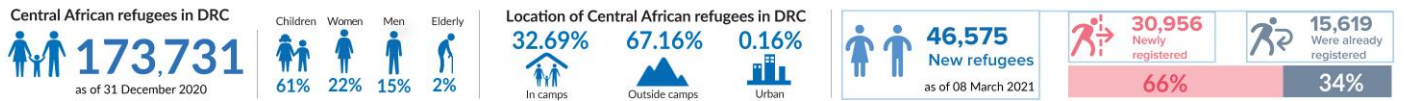
92,000
PROJECTED
REFUGEE
POPULATION¹



US\$ 69 M
REQUIREMENTS

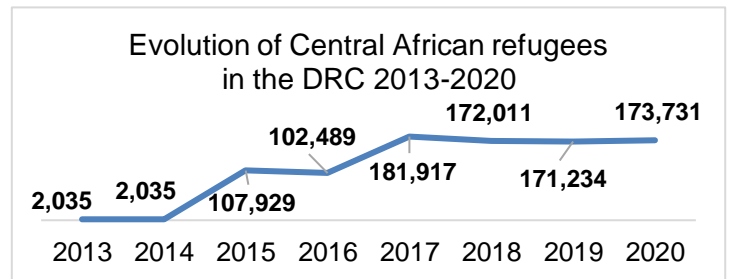
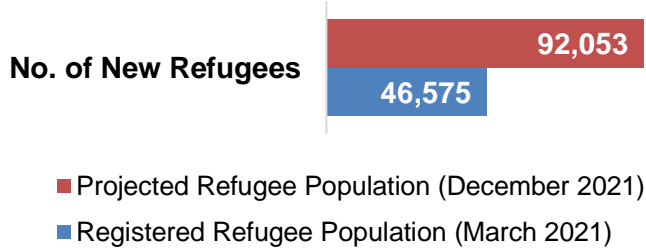


16
PARTNERS
INVOLVED²

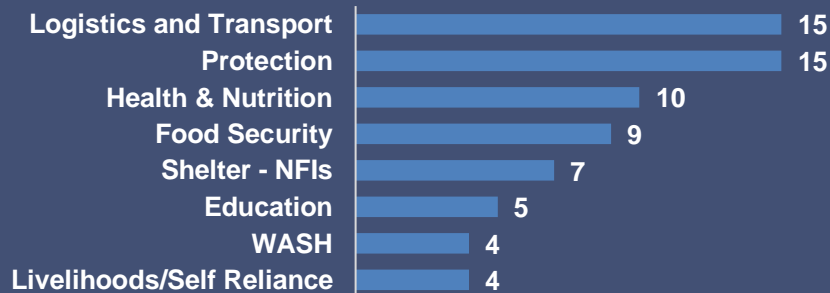


Printing date: 8 March 2021 | Sources: UNHCR, partners and RGC | Author: UNHCR - Kinshasa | Feedback: codfdr@unhcr.org | The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Refugee Population Trends



Requirements by Sector | in millions \$



¹ The figure 92,000 is expected to be the number of new Central African Refugees that will be registered by UNHCR by the end of 2021 based on the estimate of the DRC authorities (totalling 92,053), which is additional to the existing caseload of 173,731 CAR refugees living in the DRC

² This includes the four appealing partners in this RRP, and in addition those implementing partners who are working together for the implementation of the response activities.

Situation Overview

Situation in the Central Africa Republic (Country of Origin)

A resurgence of violence in the southern Central African Republic in December 2020, led to refugee outflows into the northern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The outflows were an addition to the CAR refugees already residing in North Ubangi, South Ubangi and Bas-Uele, that had arrived in 2013 and 2017.

Situation in the DRC (Country of Asylum)

As of 31 December 2021, a total of 173,931 refugees were registered in the North Ubangi, South Ubangi and Bas-Uele provinces of the DRC. By 31 January 2021 however, some 92,053 new CAR refugees had crossed over into the three DRC provinces, according to border authorities' sources. The security situation in parts of Bas Uele province, host to 70,000 refugees (40,000 registered by UNHCR) is challenging due to the presence of armed groups, although their activities are further to the east of the province and are very unlikely to impact the new arrivals.

Operational Context in the DRC

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is plagued by continued instability and is classified as the 8th Least Developed Country (LDC) with 72 per cent of its population living on less than \$1.60 a day in 2018.³ Refugees from the Central African Republic reside in some of the most underserved areas in the DRC with poor road networks and limited access to basic services. Although it is possible to use the waterways for transport purposes, attacks by armed groups along the Ubangi and Mbomou rivers have made such a prospect increasingly difficult. The social infrastructure is also incapable of sustaining large population increases with some areas completely devoid of any social infrastructure. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has weakened coping mechanisms among refugees and host communities, as many people have lost their sources of livelihoods. In addition, the area is prone to flooding during the rainy season (late March to early November), which significantly hampers transport and makes it difficult to access markets.

Protection Analysis

Two main trends can be observed in the influx of Central African refugees: some claim to have fled as a preventive measure, while a large majority have been forced to flee after being subjected to exactions and looting of their property by rebels. Today, these new arrivals are settled along the border rivers with CAR, exposing themselves to serious security risks, including physical attacks and retaliation that could be perpetrated in the very likely event of incursions by CAR rebels into these spontaneous sites. Other refugees live with host families who are themselves already facing severe poverty, but who make the sacrifice of sharing extremely scarce resources.

The refugee community is predominantly consisting of women and children. The population also includes many persons with specific needs, such as persons with serious medical conditions, unaccompanied or separated children, women at-risk, elderly at-risk, and survivors of SGBV. The participatory assessments conducted with focus groups of refugee men, women, and children, revealed that some of these new arrivals are still very traumatized by the events they experienced before and during their flight to the DRC: some of them still have physical after-effects. Nevertheless, the new arrivals face the lack of basic services in the sites where they found shelter. In general, children do not have access to education and the majority of refugees have very difficult access to various resources (material, financial). The deprivation they face can be a contributing factor to harmful coping mechanisms, including survival sex.

Although the newly arrived refugees were welcomed by the host community, the fact that there are more refugees in some reception sites than members of the host communities is potentially a conflict-generating factor that requires effective protection monitoring, as well as the establishment of efficient programmes for peaceful coexistence in the short term. New arrivals are considered by the government as asylum seekers and therefore the documentation they receive upon registration is the "*Attestation de Demandeur d'Asile*", which is valid for only three months. UNHCR has advocated to the Government of the DRC that all new arrivals be granted prima facie refugee status.

³ Source: World Bank

Risk Analysis

The arrival of the ex-president Francois Bozize, and his intention to participate in the 27 December 2020 elections in CAR led to an escalation of tensions immediately before and following the elections. This resulted in the prevalent insurgency which is expected to continue in the future. The capital Bangui remains relatively stable although this could change and result in the forced displacement of more than 100,000 persons in the DRC.

Since their arrival, refugees have spontaneously settled on the riverbanks along the border with CAR, until a more permanent relocation can be arranged further away from the border in keeping with Government policy. Despite the current numbers of new arrivals (of 92,053 as per the Government of the DRC), local authorities do not favour prima facie recognition and prefer individual refugee status determination. This could negatively impact the right to freedom of movement of the refugees and given the very short duration of the identification documentation they hold, in particular the "asylum seekers' certificates, valid for 3 months".

Other risks with a high probability of occurrence include:

- Exposure to and high prevalence of water-borne, endemic, and epidemic diseases, including COVID-19
- Abuse and exploitation including cases of GBV
- Loss of the civilian character of refugee camps/areas/villages
- Conflict between refugees and host communities
- Lack of biometric registration could lead to some host community members included in assistance

RRP partners will prioritise mitigation of these risks through advocacy, capacity support to the CNR and legal institutions, and ensuring that refugees have documentation. In addition, border surveillance- and protection monitoring will be reinforced

Entry Points into the DRC

CAR refugees and asylum seekers are spread along the borders and clustered around both official border crossings and at least 30 unofficial entry points between the DRC and the CAR.

In **North Ubangi Province**, the entry points for CAR refugees and asylum seekers from the prefectures of Basse-Kotto, Ouaka and Kemo in the Central African Republic are:

- Pandu, Gboko, Dokove, Gboduna, Sidi, Gbangi and Dula in Bosobolo
- Bangaloko, Lembo, Mobayi-Mbongo, Nzakara, Gbiaka, Yomba and Satema in Mobayi-Mbongo
- Kpetene, Mogoro, and Kambo in Gbadolite council area
- Limassa, Legon, and Yakoma

In **South Ubangi Province**, the entry points are:

- Zongo (Congo River, Port REGIDESO, Mbayi, Maba, Ngele and the surrounding areas) due to its proximity to Bangui
- Libenge and Worobe
- Batanga (for refugees coming from an influx from the prefecture of Lobaye)

In **Bas-Uele Province**, the entry points are:

- Kanzawi, Nzeret, Ndu, Bakpolo, Dengu, Adama, Bulumasi in Bondo
- Zapay in Ango

Central African refugees prepare breakfast early morning in Ndu, DRC. © UNHCR/Hélène Caux



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