West & Central Africa

21 Countries covered by the Regional Bureau: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

11 December 2020

Since October 2020, the **number of new COVID-19 cases marked a steady increase** across West and Central Africa, triggering concerns over a **second wave of infections** in the region.

As Governments are developing their **COVID-19 vaccination strategies**, UNHCR engages with them to ensure forcibly displaced persons are included in these national plans.

In **Mali**, persistent insecurity and deteriorating economic conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a **steep rise in trafficking of children, forced labour and forced recruitment**.

POPULATION OF CONCERN	COVID-19 CASES*	FUNDING REQUIREMENTS
10,700,000 total PoCs **6,300,000** IDPs **1,400,000** Refugees **1,300,000** Returnees **1,700,000** Stateless	**257,264** confirmed cases **11,074** still active **242,518** recovered **3,672** deaths **source: WHO as of 07 December 2020.*	for COVID-19 Response Globally **US$745 MILLIO** **Funding gap** **32%** **Funding Received** **68%**

As UNHCR's facilitation of voluntary repatriation to the Central Africa Republic resume with the lifting of COVID-19 border closures, temperature checks and other preventive measures are implemented to mitigate the risks of contamination during these returns. ©UNHCR CAR

Operational Context

- **Increase in the number of new COVID-19 cases in West and Central Africa and growing concerns over a second wave.** After a sharp decline in the number of new COVID-19 cases reported daily in the months of July and August in West and Central Africa, this trend reversed during the month of October and many countries have been experiencing a steady increase in the number of new COVID-19 cases since early November. As concerns over a second wave of infections are growing across West and Central Africa, countries are reintroducing or strengthening preventive measures, such as social distancing and mask-wearing, to curb the spread of the virus while minimizing the potential impact on the economy and wellbeing of their populations.

- **Current COVID-19 situation in West and Central Africa**. As of 07 December 2020, **Nigeria** with 69,255 remains with the highest number of confirmed cases, followed by **Ghana** (52,274), **Cameroon** (24,752), **Cote d'Ivoire** (21,485) and **Senegal** (16,477). In terms of active cases, **Nigeria** (3,301) has the highest number, followed by **Mali** (1,602), **Cameroon** (965) and **Ghana** (886), **Guinea** (802) and **Niger** (542). A total of **74 forcibly displaced persons** were **tested positive** to COVID-19 since the beginning of the crisis, including 64 refugees in Chad, Cameroon, Togo, Guinea, Niger, Ghana, Liberia and Gambia, 8 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Central African Republic, Mali and Burkina Faso and 2 Asylum seeker in Niger. Among them 3 refugees died in Cameroon and 01 refugee died in Gambia.

- **COVID-19 Cases and government measures and restrictions in West and Central Africa by Country (as of 07 December 2020):**

MALI	
CONFIRMED	5,135
RECOVERED	3,369
DEATHS	164

KEY DECISIONS
- Ban on public gatherings;
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places;

BURKINA FASO	
CONFIRMED	3,212
RECOVERED	2,711
DEATHS	68

KEY DECISIONS
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places;
- Ban on public gatherings of more than 50 people.

TOGO	
CONFIRMED	3,095
RECOVERED	2,653
DEATHS	65

KEY DECISIONS
- Ban on gatherings of more than 100 people,
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places;
- Land borders remain closed

BENIN	
CONFIRMED	3,055
RECOVERED	2,907
DEATHS	44

KEY DECISIONS
- Limitation of entry and exit at land borders.

NIGERIA	
CONFIRMED	69,255
RECOVERED	64,774
DEATHS	1,180

KEY DECISIONS
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places;
- Curfew from midnight to 4 am.
- Ban on gatherings of more than 50 people;

NIGER	
CONFIRMED	1,856
RECOVERED	1,237
DEATHS	77

KEY DECISIONS
- Land borders remain closed;
- Ban on gatherings of more than 50 people;

CHAD	
CONFIRMED	1,725
RECOVERED	1,564
DEATHS	102

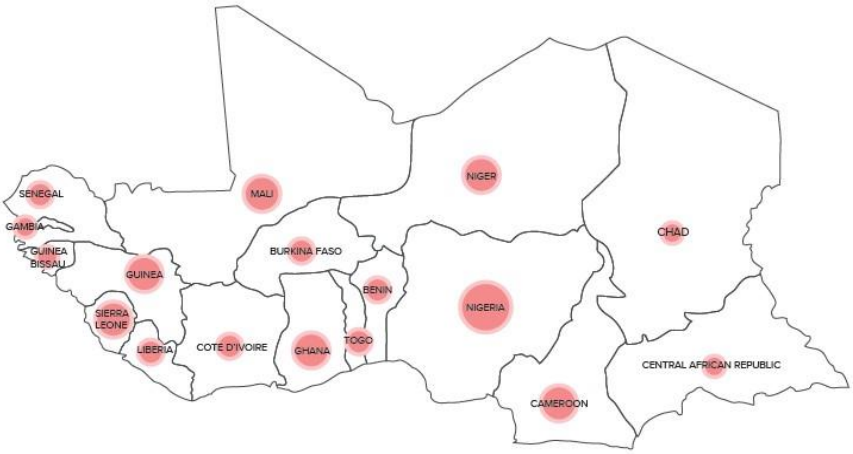
KEY DECISIONS
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places.
- Curfew from 9 pm to 5am.

SENEGAL	
CONFIRMED	16,477
RECOVERED	15,776
DEATHS	338

KEY DECISIONS
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places;
- Ban on public gatherings.

GAMBIA	
CONFIRMED	3,770
RECOVERED	3,615
DEATHS	123

KEY DECISIONS
- Reopening of all borders;
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places;



CAMEROON	
CONFIRMED	24,752
RECOVERED	23,344
DEATHS	443

KEY DECISIONS
- Ban on public gatherings of more than 50 people;
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places.

CAR	
CONFIRMED	4,922
RECOVERED	4,848
DEATHS	63

KEY DECISIONS
- Mandatory self quarantine of air travelers
- Ban on large gatherings
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places.

GUINEA-BISSAU	
CONFIRMED	2,441
RECOVERED	2,327
DEATHS	44

KEY DECISIONS
- Ban on gatherings of more than 25 people.
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places.

SIERRA LEONE	
CONFIRMED	2,426
RECOVERED	1,846
DEATHS	74

KEY DECISIONS
- Land borders remain closed ;
- Ban on gatherings of more than 100 people.
- Curfew from 11pm to 4 am.

GUINEA	
CONFIRMED	13,233
RECOVERED	12,355
DEATHS	76

KEY DECISIONS
- Ban on gatherings of more than 20 people
- Curfew from midnight to 4 am.
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places.

LIBERIA	
CONFIRMED	1,676
RECOVERED	1,358
DEATHS	83

KEY DECISIONS
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places.

COTE D'IVOIRE	
CONFIRMED	21,485
RECOVERED	21,109
DEATHS	132

KEY DECISIONS
- Ban on public gatherings of more than 50 people.
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places.

GHANA	
CONFIRMED	52,274
RECOVERED	51,063
DEATHS	325

KEY DECISIONS
- Ban on all public gatherings;
- Mandatory wearing of mask in public places.

CAPE VERDE
11,063 confirmed, 10,596 recovered, 109 deaths.

EQUATORAL GUINEA
5,159 confirmed, 5,023 recovered, 85 death.

GABON
9,254 confirmed, 9,106 recovered, 60 deaths.

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE
999 confirmed, 937 recovered, 17 deaths

Sources: WHO, worldometers.info, Governments and local media reports.

UNHCR Response

- **Mainstreaming COVID-19 into UNHCR's humanitarian response.** Across West and Central Africa, UNHCR operations continue to ensure continuity of assistance and mainstream COVID-19 prevention into their humanitarian response to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on forcibly displaced populations. UNHCR supports governments in the implementation of their COVID-19 response plans while directly implementing activities to support forcibly displaced populations. These include advocating for preserving access to asylum and international protection, supporting inclusive national health responses, strengthening shelter interventions to improve living conditions in hosting areas, strengthening community-based protection mechanism, livelihoods interventions to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic, and seeking durable solutions, including local integration, resettlement opportunities, complementary pathways and voluntary repatriation. Already jeopardized by insecurity in the region, education is further disrupted by the pandemic.

HIGHLIGHT: Protection impact of COVID-19 pandemic in Mali

The significant economic impact of the pandemic in West and Central Africa has caused a major disruption in the livelihoods of fragile communities, particularly displaced population, increasing the risk of resorting to negative coping mechanisms, including child labour.

In **Mali**, persistent insecurity and deteriorating economic conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a steep rise in trafficking of children, forced labour and forced recruitment by armed groups across the country. According to the latest report of the UNHCR-led Global Protection Cluster, 220 cases of child recruitment were documented in the first half of 2020, compared to 215 cases in all of 2019. The victims are disproportionately boys working at eight mining sites but also Malians, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Women and girls are also victims of abduction, sexual assault and rape, and in the Mopti region alone more than 1,000 cases have been recorded in 2020.

Malian children in an settlement for internally displaced persons in Bamako Mali (May 2020) @UNHCR CAR

The victims are disproportionately boys working at eight mining sites but also Malians, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Women and girls are also victims of abduction, sexual assault and rape, and in the Mopti region alone more than 1,000 cases have been recorded in 2020. Many refugees and migrants heading to northern Africa and Europe through Mali are also at high risk of being trafficked and forced into labour. Some people on the move are trafficked for forced labour in the agricultural sector, others, particularly women are trafficked en route to promised jobs in North Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Others are diverted to Bamako or to mining or agricultural areas where they are forced to engage in survival sex.

As the Sahel conflict shows no signs of abating, UNHCR and its partners continue to cooperate with the national government in order to support the most vulnerable populations, particularly people who have been forced to flee, to address the dire socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and mitigate the risk of negative coping-mechanism, exploitation and trafficking.

Strengthen risk communication and community engagement, and critical protection case management, including protection monitoring and registration

Key achievements:
- ✓ **3,9 million** displaced persons who accessed protection services
- ✓ **91%** of targeted areas where GBV services are maintained or expanded

- UNHCR Operations continue to work to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on persons of concern by increasing communication with communities and introducing innovative approaches to address access limitations including social distancing in protection activities and remote case management.

- In **Central African Republic**, an estimated 60,000 persons including refugees, IDPs and hosts have been reached in the past four weeks through public information events and radio broadcasts on prevention measures against Covid-19.

- In **Ghana**, undergraduate refugee students in the Urban setting have been trained and equipped to support the aged and psychically challenged in their neighborhoods with COVID 19 Public health safety protocols prevention information to reduce their vulnerability to the diseases.

- In **Mali**, UNHCR and its partners sustain their sensitization and information sharing efforts on COVID-19. Awareness-raising sessions were organized in Timbuktu, Mopti and Segou, reaching over 200 persons from displaced and host communities. UNHCR also proceeded to the distribution of 12,500 masks, including 7,500 masks to Nigerien refugees and 5,000 masks to regional authorities, including 4,000 in educational facilities (CAP), for students, and 1,000 for a health centre in Menaka.

Strengthen and support primary and secondary health care and selected WASH services

Key achievements:
- ✓ **Over 600,000** persons received essential healthcare services
- ✓ **3 million** medical masks ordered

- UNHCR Operations are sustaining their support to national health systems to strengthen their infection prevention and healthcare responses, including through the provision of medical equipment and supplies and training of health personnel. In camps or settlements this includes identification and training of outbreak response teams, referral systems for laboratory specimens and prepositioning laboratory supplies such as transport media, swabs, specimen containers, training of staff in early identification, notification, case management and contact tracing, data collection and analysis and interpretation. Operations are also reinforcing the WASH systems and services in the main refugee and IDP hosting areas, including by distributing soap and increasing access to water to allow for the implementation of basic preventive hygiene measures such as frequent handwashing.

- In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR continues to support the national and local authorities in addressing the crisis. On 8 December, UNHCR has supported the Minister of Health with the donation of a car, 12 motorbikes and sanitary material while the rehabilitation and construction of health infrastructures is ongoing in the Sahel region. Distribution of material to facilitate the respect of preventive measures for COVID-19 and of awareness sessions continue across the country, including in the Centre Nord where 120 hand-washing devices were distributed this past week. In the Centre Nord, 300 bars of soap were distributed in the locality of Barsalogho, UNHCR and partners also continued their sensitization and awareness raising on the pandemic in Pissila, Kaya and Barsalogho.

HIGHLIGHT: UNHCR's facilitation of voluntary repatriation to the Central Africa Republic resume as COVID-19 border closures are lifted

On hold since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR's facilitation of voluntary repatriation to the Central Africa Republic on 10 November following the re-opening of the borders with neighboring DRC.

To facilitate this operation in the context of COVID-19, the UNHCR has implemented barrier measures including the compulsory wearing of masks during the journey, respect for physical distance throughout the travel, temperature checks and hand washing.

To allow for such distancing, the number of refugees per convoy was also reduced to a maximum of 65 individuals. Finally, the return pack include a COVID kit which includes masks, bucket, soap and the cash equivalent to a one-month food ration per person to cope with the quarantine period that each returnee will have to observe. When conditions allow, UNHCR also supports testing ahead of the return date. In Cameroon, UNHCR supported the testing of 200 refugees from Gado site considered for voluntary repatriation.

UNHCR has facilitated the repatriation of a total of 2,873 refugees to CAR in 2020, bringing to 19,357 the total number of voluntary returns facilitated by the organization since 2017. This comes in addition to an estimated 95,000 spontaneous returns which took place during the same period without the direct assistance of the UNHCR.

There are still more than 600,000 refugees from CAR in neighboring countries, as well as almost 650,000 IDPs within CAR. Despite significant improvements, the situation in the country remains volatile, and continued protection of displaced populations is needed for those who do not feel it is safe to return home.

Whaling ships of Central African repatriates off the Oubangui River in the Central African Republic @UNHCR CAR

Ramp up cash assistance, reinforce shelters, and provide core relief items in congested urban and camps settings

Key achievement:

✓ **Over 80,000** individuals in households most vulnerable to/affected by COVID-19 received livelihood support

- **Shelter, NFI and Cash-Based Interventions remain a priority in UNHCR's COVID-19 response in West and Central Africa**. Often residing in overcrowded sites, or among host communities in historically underserved areas, refugees and IDPs are deprived of privacy and exposed to heightened risks of contamination as COVID-19 continues to spread in the region. To address this issue, UNHCR operations are implementing targeted shelter interventions and the distributions of core relief items and exploring ways to decongest the most affected hosting areas in coordination with the national and local authorities. UNHCR is also working to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 on displaced populations and foster their economic inclusion through direct livelihoods support and targeted cash-interventions.

- In **Cameroon**, a total of 2,281 urban refugee households in Douala received MPCA (multi-purpose cash assistance/ 75,000 CAF per family) as well as 19,439 pieces of soap, 1,000 buckets and 538 jerrycans in the past month. UNHCR is planning to support another 2,000 households by the end of the year.

- In **Ghana**, UNHCR's Mask for Refugees by Refugees Project is ongoing and achieving its two-pronged objective of being a COVID-19 prevention and income-generating venture. The refugees involved in the project have so far produced over 15,000 face masks which are being distributed among refugee and host communities.

A refugee in Ampain receiving a set of masks for his family produced by UNHCR's Mask for Refugees by Refugees Project. @UNHCR Ghana

Support education systems

Key achievements:

✓ **Over 35,000** children and youth supported with distance/home-based learning

- **Supporting the progressive reopening of schools across West and Central Africa.** Across the region, schools have gradually reopened in most countries in the region, to either complete the 2019/2020 academic year disrupted by the COVID pandemic, or to start the new 2020/2021 academic year despite delays met. UNHCR and partners supported national efforts throughout this process.

Financial Requirements

US$745 million requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally.
US$454.2 million: received by UNHCR against its **global COVID-19 appeal**.
USD US$34.2 million: received for **COVID-19 activities in West and Central Africa**

Special thanks to the following donors for:

EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COVID-19 APPEAL | USD
United States of America 186.3 million **| Germany** 62.7 million **| European Union** 46.3 million **| United Kingdom** 25.3 million **| African Development Bank Group** 23.9 million **| Denmark** 14.6 **| UN Foundation** 10 million **| CERF** 6.9 million | **Canada** 6.4 million | **Unilever (UK)** 5.9 million |**Education Cannot Wait** 4.7 million **| Qatar Charity** 3.5 million **| Spain** 3.5 million | **France** 3.4 million | **Ireland** 3.3 million | **Sweden** 3 million | **Sony Corporation** 2.9 million **| Austria** 2.5 million | **Finland** 2.3 million **| UNO – Fluechlighshilfe** 1.7 million | **Private donors UK** 1.7 million | **Latter Day Saints Charities** 1.6 million | **Norway** 1.5 million | **Australia for UNHCR** 1.4 million **| USA for UNHCR** 1 million **| Espana con Acnur** 0.9 million **| Australia** 0.9 million **| Japan for UNHCR 0.9 million | Sawiris Foundation for Social Development** 0.9 million **| Switzerland** 0.8 million **| Country Based Pooled Funds** 0.5 million **| Badr Jafar** 0.5 million **| Private donors Canada** 0.5 million | and other donors

OTHER SOFTLY EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD
United States of America 679.8 million | **Canada** 47 million | **Norway** 16.8 million | **Switzerland** 12.8 million | **Sweden** 8.1 million | **France** 7.6 million | **Private donors Australia** 7.1 million | **United Kingdom** 6.9 million | **Denmark** 5 million | **Netherlands** 4.1 million | **Private donors Thailand** 3.5 million | **Republic of Korea** 3.2 million | **Luxembourg** 2.6 million | **Finland** 2.2 million

UNEARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD
Sweden 76.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 52.9 million | **Norway** 41.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **United Kingdom** 31.7 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 27.2 million | **Germany** 25.9 million | **Private donors Japan** 21 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **France** 14 million | **Private donors Italy** 12.4 million | **Italy** 10.6 million | **Private donors Sweden** 10.5 million

Notwithstanding UNHCR's COVID-19 appeal, the continuation of regular programmes in West and Central Africa remains critical. Many of these activities will also help people of concern to cope with COVID-19 and its subsequent protection and economic impact, even if not included in the prioritized appeal.

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