

CASH & ECONOMIC INCLUSION UPDATE

NIGERIA

9,300 refugees became bank customers

Breakthrough for partnership with Standard Chartered Bank and First Bank of Nigeria

Highlights

■ In 2020, **38,000 refugees received cash** assistance from UNHCR, including to mitigate the economic hit following Covid-19.

■ **UNHCR negotiated for Cameroonian refugees to get bank accounts** in Nigeria. 9,300 people (pre)opened accounts by December 2020.

■ UNHCR transforms its cash programmes into a **cash plus livelihoods programme** for more **sustainable economic inclusion**.

Different forms of cash-based interventions by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, reached more refugees in 2020 than in previous years. 38,000 individuals, including Cameroonians in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, but also refugees of different nationalities in the country's **urban centres** received cash for **food**, cash for **shelter** and cash to buffer the **economic hardship** of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This is an increase compared to 29,000 beneficiaries in 2019 and just under 10,000 in 2018. The total amount UNHCR spent on cash in Nigeria from 2018 to 2020 was **9 million US-Dollars**.



Fish farming is one of UNHCR's livelihood initiatives for Cameroonian refugees in Adagom, Cross River. © UNHCR/Roland Schönbauer

Cash for saving lives

Post distribution monitoring found that food was the top-ranking expenditure of cash for food recipients. This illustrates that food needs are high, and cash saved lives. 58 per cent of registered refugees were reached with food for cash. The rest who is not residing in the settlements established by UNHCR or in their vicinity, i.e. refugee men and women living in urban centres and within host communities did not benefit from this support.

In October 2019, in the absence of donor support, UNHCR started to gradually reduce the amount of cash for food given per family from 7,200 Naira (some 18 USD) to 5,700 Naira, subsequently to 4,600 Naira in December 2019 and to 3,700 Naira in September 2020. At the same time and in order to respond to the food and other basic needs in a more sustainable way, UNHCR continued to roll out **livelihood** activities aiming at sustainable self-reliance of refugees.

However, opportunities to make a living became more difficult to find the longer the Covid-19 pandemic affected the economy. Overall, to address the food and other basic needs in a more sustainable way, UNHCR will continue to **transform its approach** and avoid hardships for the most vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households.

In 2020, UNHCR also supported refugees in need of shelter. Cash grants of up to some 8 million Naira (some 20,000 USD) were provided in three phases so that **200 families** could protect themselves against the elements. Completion of defined milestones was required for a next phase to kick in.

Break-through for refugee banking

Based on its global experience with economic inclusion of refugees, UNHCR advocated for bank accounts for those refugees that were interested. In early 2020 came the break-through. In partnership with Standard Chartered Bank and First Bank of Nigeria, 4,400 refugees could be biometrically registered for banking, a prerequisite for an account in Nigeria. Nearly 5,000 additional refugee women and men went through the pre-opening phase of an account. A total of some 9,300 refugees have become bank customers in Nigeria by December, some for receiving their cash assistance, others for daily transactions. For most of them, this meant a bit more dignity and a step to some degree of normalcy after months or even years without an account. For UNHCR, refugee banking is an important tool for their inclusion into the economy.

Challenges

Explaining the transformation of UNHCR's strategy of reduced cash for food assistance and increased livelihoods to refugees, remained difficult not least as food prices continued to rise in the middle of an economically challenging pandemic. In the absence of sufficient donor support, UNHCR plans to reduce the amount given to refugees further to match the minimum amount paid by the government to extremely vulnerable Nigerians as part of its social safety net programmes.

WHAT WE WANT WITH CASH

UNHCR believes harmonious relationships between refugees and Nigerians are possible if the contribution to economic development is visible.

Therefore, the Agency launched its cash for food programme in Nigeria which injected over 150 million Naira (some 375,000 USD) into the local economy. This gave a boost to the development of markets and exchange of goods in refugee-hosting areas.

Now, UNHCR is gradually replacing the cash for food programme by multi-purpose cash grants for basic needs (with an equal amount as the national social safety net standards foresee for most vulnerable Nigerians).

This strategic transformation aims at laying the foundation for the self-reliance of refugee men and women.

Impact

Knowledge to survive in the future

Sylvester Abang, father of four, fled Cameroon with his family in 2018. “We ran away to protect our families. After five long days of trekking through “thick forest”, they arrived in Nigeria.

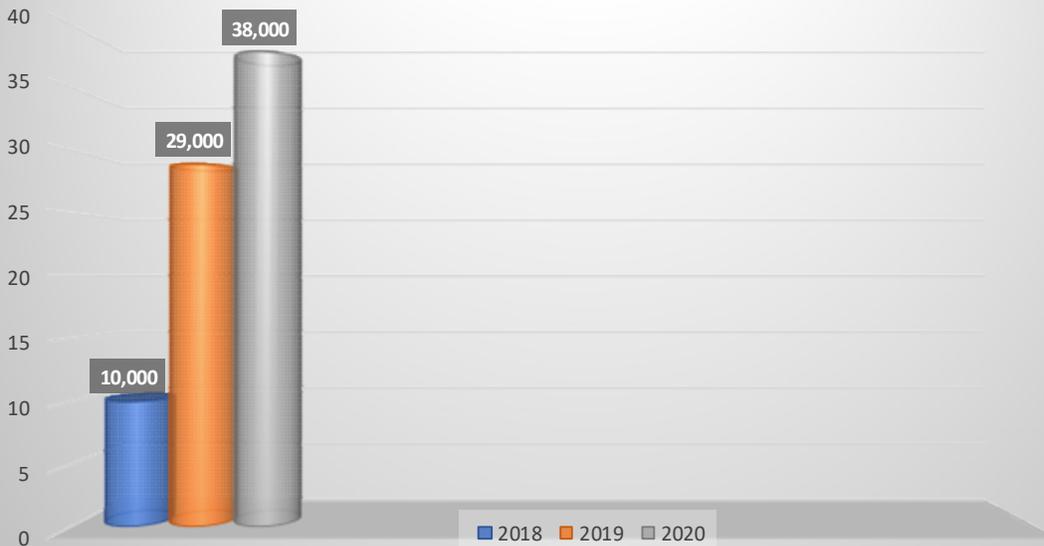
“We put our clothes on the ground at night to sleep on them. It’s only by the grace of God that we are living”, the Cameroonian refugee is convinced.

After being trained in poultry farming by CUSO International, UNHCR’s implementing partner, Sylvester feels he has additional skills to survive. “With this knowledge,” he says at his pen, one of dozens of the farm in Adagom, Cross River State, “I will not face difficulties in the future. But others were not empowered.”



His skilful hand with chicken is his hope for self-reliance. © UNHCR/Roland Schönbauer

Beneficiaries of cash in Nigeria



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