

Support for host communities and refugees in Eastern Cameroon and for returnees in selected communities in the Central African Republic

Special Initiative on Displaced Persons and Host Countries

The challenge

Despite several peace processes, the crisis in the Central African Republic remains unresolved. Cameroon has taken in almost 347,000 refugees from the country. Most of them live in the country's border regions in Eastern Cameroon (Façade Est). The refugee population is often far greater than that of the host communities. Most stay for at least six years, partly because other permanent solutions (resettlement, voluntary return) are only available to a minority. For this reason, the pressure on already severely underfunded state services is high.

The refugee crisis is one of three major national crises. However, it barely gets a mention in (inter)national discourse (the 'forgotten crisis'). International support for Façade Est has thus been declining for many years now. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) budget has fallen by 78% since 2016, for example, while the number of refugees has risen by 83% over the same period.

Even before the arrival of the refugees, Eastern Cameroon was marked by extreme poverty and was highly marginalised by national standards. There are few jobs and insufficient education opportunities. As a result, self-help capacities remain limited and the high dependency on (inter)national assistance persists. This has a severe impact on women in particular. The absence of birth certificates and identity documents makes it especially difficult for refugees to access education, employment and financial products. Moreover, if births are not registered, people are at risk of statelessness.

The Yaoundé Declaration, signed in 2022, offers political solutions to deal with the crisis. However, there is a significant need to improve coordination between short-term and long-term measures as part of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus.

Our objective

Refugees and the local population in the Est region, especially women, are more empowered to shape their own social and economic lives.

Project title	Support for host communities and refugees in Eastern Cameroon and for returnees in selected communities in the Central African Republic
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project area	The municipalities of Batouri, Kentzou, Kette and Ouli in Eastern Cameroon
Implemented by	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINNDEVEL)
National and international partners	United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), municipalities, interest groups, non-governmental organisations
Overall term	October 2022 to April 2026

Our approach

The project targets host communities and refugees alike. With its gender-transformative approach, the principal focus is on the needs of women. On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and in cooperation with Cameroon's Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINNDEVEL), the project seeks to strengthen their economic and social independence. It is aligned with key elements of the Global Compact for Refugees and the Yaoundé



Declaration, reduces pressure on Cameroon as a host country and contributes to self-sufficiency. The approach comprises four interlinked fields of action:

1. Earnings are increased in the short term through **fast-acting income-generating measures** such as Cash for Work. Participants receive training in financial literacy, are advised on setting up cooperatives or similar undertakings and are supported in dealing with the relevant administrative formalities.
2. Successful economic participation is improved by **strengthening cooperatives and savings groups**, for example by providing management skills, advice on business models and organisational advice. Advisory services are based on a labour market analysis.
3. Dialogue is promoted on gender roles and norms, positive masculinity and responsible fatherhood, sexual violence and child marriages by **raising awareness about social self-determination**. The focus is on empowering women. Participants are also supported in obtaining birth certificates for their children.
4. Information regarding the situation in areas of origin is collected and communicated, based on a study of the level of interest and needs of voluntary returnees. Legal assistance is also offered where there are disputes over land or property in the Central African Republic. This improves the **basis for decision-making for those returning to their areas of origin**.

Project areas

The project is being implemented in Eastern Cameroon in the four municipalities of Batouri, Kentzou, Kette and Ouli.



Our strategy

The project strengthens the municipalities in managing the refugee crisis and supports their inclusion in local development plans. It is committed to the principles of 'do no harm' and 'leave no one behind' and takes into account the specific needs of women, people with disabilities and members of other disadvantaged groups. The project supports local civil society organisations. Where appropriate, it strengthens private sector involvement.

The module implements structure-building measures to boost the self-help capacities of refugees and host communities. This contributes to the peaceful integration of refugees and reduces dependence on (inter)national assistance.

The project cooperates closely with UNHCR. It also coordinates its activities with all relevant stakeholders as part of the HDP nexus. It mobilises the expertise of specialised projects, e.g. on the civil status system, and in so doing increases the effectiveness of the measures implemented.



Results achieved so far

- 1,000 participants of Cash for Work measures (72% women, 52% refugees, 11% people with disabilities) have prepared 15,000 m² of municipal land for the cultivation of maize, peanuts and beans, produced 6,000 clay bricks for the construction of municipal rooms, repaired 88 km of roads, cleaned four public squares and reforested the green areas of two schools.
- 257 people, including 203 women (66%) and 173 refugees (55%), have been made aware of the importance of birth certificates, with 39 single mothers subsequently receiving support in registering the births of their children.
- 817 participants (76% women, 55% refugees) have been trained in basic financial literacy.
- 15 cooperatives with 325 members (76% women, 55% refugees) have received training in administration and finance.
- 215 vulnerable refugees (48% women, 10% people with disabilities) have received advice and legal assistance with land and property disputes in the Central African Republic.
- Gender action plans have been developed at municipal level with 85 participants (44% women, 55% refugees), on the basis of which 723 people (62% women, 51% refugees) in nine villages have been made aware of gender equality, child marriage and empowerment.

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