

UK Resettlement Scheme – Country information

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Liberia

In 2003, positive political developments in Liberia raised hopes of a return to long-term stability. The departure of President Charles Taylor in August was quickly followed by the signing of a peace agreement between the Government and rebel movements. Thereafter, consensus was reached by all political parties over the formation of a National Government of Transition in October 2003.

Years of low-level warfare have ripped apart the social, political and economic fabric of Liberia and provoked mass population displacements within and across the country's borders. Currently there are more than 320,000 Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries and beyond. Another 500,000 IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) have been scattered throughout the country during the conflict and now subsist in extreme poverty and insecurity. In addition, Liberia continues to host some 14,000 Sierra Leonean and, 38,000 Ivorian refugees and large numbers of third country nationals who fled the war in Côte d'Ivoire.

In spite of the comprehensive peace agreement signed on 18 August 2003, the inauguration of the power-sharing National Transitional Government of Liberia and deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission, the government is still not able to offer protection of fundamental human rights in Liberia.

Monrovia has seen recent rioting by former government militia, whilst tenuous peace in other areas of Liberia has seen intermittent armed activities of rebel groups. There is still targeting of specific ethnic groups by non-state agents of persecution, and continuing incidents of serious human rights abuses throughout Liberia. Financial constraints have meant that new administrative and judicial institutions are not functioning, resulting in little to no redress for continued human rights violations.

Thus although recent initiatives have had some impact on the security situation on the ground and contributed to a more positive outlook for lasting peace and security on Liberia, a judgement regarding the durable nature of such changes is at present premature.

In the light of these developments, UNHCR recommends careful screening of Liberian refugees and asylum seekers, with a view to determining their international protection needs. The continuing violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law and the targeting of civilians by all parties to the conflict – partly on ethnic grounds, partly on political grounds – means that many Liberians may qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Guinea

Throughout 2003 events in neighbouring countries had a great impact on Guinea. The political climate in the sub region was tense, with deteriorating security conditions in many parts. On the positive side, favourable conditions in Sierra Leone enabled UNHCR to

continue the full-scale voluntary repatriation operation after concluding a Tripartite Agreement with the Governments of Sierra Leone and Guinea.

The outflow of Sierra Leonean refugees was offset by the arrival of many more Liberian refugees fleeing the resurgence of conflict between LURD rebels and Charles Taylor's Government. An upsurge in fighting in late March 2003, produced a fresh influx of refugees, putting a huge strain on existing facilities. The outbreak of the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 had already precipitated an influx of more than 90,000 people into Guinea, including 6,500 Ivorian refugees and 17,200 Liberian refugees, many of whom had been taking refuge in Côte d'Ivoire from continuing conflict in their own country.

Guinea is plagued by complex political tensions and poor socio-economic conditions, which engender a backlash against refugees with growing concerns about security impinging on asylum policy. Increasingly, the authorities are inclined to close Guinea's borders with refugee producing neighbours. In the present political environment, maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of the camps amounts to a considerable challenge.