The COVID-19 pandemic represents an extraordinary and unprecedented emergency for States in West and Central Africa. In response, Governments are taking necessary and legitimate measures to prevent the spread of the virus and to protect populations. These measures are not specific to persons of concern to UNHCR, meaning refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless people and refugee returnees, and bear a general scope. However, some of these measures may have a disproportionate impact on displaced population due to their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

UNHCR is committed to working in close concert with national authorities and other relevant actors to ensure that all COVID-19 related prevention and response initiatives at the national level include persons of concern, while at the same time closely monitoring the application of these measures to ensure that people are not exposed to specific protection risks.

For more information, you may consult UNHCR’s Note on the Impact of COVID-19 on the protection of displaced and stateless populations in West and Central Africa.

Risk of refoulement due to restrictions imposed by governments. So far, no case of refoulement by West and Central African States has been reported or documented. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation.
Freedom of movement reduced or suspended for all, including persons of concern to UNHCR in camps/camp-like settings and urban areas.

Development of avenues to ensure forcibly-displaced children and youth have access to national distance education programmes.

Legal access to under pressure national health services ensured for persons of concern to UNHCR.

National education systems, in which persons of concern to UNHCR are included throughout the region, are directly impacted by government measures, leading to the closure of all schools.

Facilitated voluntary repatriation of refugees suspended throughout the region.

Communication channels with forcibly-displaced communities in place in almost all countries in the region.