



# **COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN**

**Executive Committee Summary**

**Country : Lebanon**

**Planning Year : 2006**

# 2006 Lebanon Country Operations Plan

## Part I: Executive Committee Summary

### (a) Context and Beneficiary Populations

#### Political context

Given the diverse composition of the Lebanese society and the presence of some 400,000 Palestinian refugees for the last five decades, the mandate of UNHCR to advocate the right of non Palestinian refugees in the country has become rather a complicated and a highly sensitive issue.

#### Protection issues

Lebanon is not a party to the 1951 Convention or to the 1967 Protocol, although the authorities have made efforts during the last two decades to accede to most of the major international human rights instruments, such as the Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Undeniably, the presence of up to 400,000 Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate is one of the principal reasons deterring the Lebanese authorities from accession to these refugee law instruments. Lebanon fears the potential local integration would upset the sensitive demographic and socio-economic balance in the country.

Lebanon has legal provisions in its domestic law to deal with refugee issues, yet they remain unimplemented. In the absence of an effective national asylum procedure, UNHCR continues to process asylum applications and to undertake individual refugee status determination.

The legal system in Lebanon does not include a definition of a refugee. A committee, composed of the Directors of the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Justice in addition to the Director of the General Security, has the capacity to adjudicate asylum applications and grant refugee status. In practice, however, UNHCR conducts refugee status determination for non-Palestinian asylum seekers and recognises refugees pursuant to the mandate of the High Commissioner.

The Office has arduously worked with its government counterparts to reach an understanding that helps UNHCR implement its mandate, and at the same time helps the government to put in place the necessary protection infrastructure. In September 2003, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between UNHCR and its counterpart, the Lebanese General Security Office (GS) defining the role of the Lebanese authorities with respect to the rights of asylum seekers and UNHCR's responsibility for Refugee Status Determination and durable solutions. This MOU bears several weaknesses which are presently being reviewed in close cooperation with the Lebanese authorities.

As the overwhelming majority of asylum seekers enter Lebanon illegally through Syria, the authorities consider them to a large extent as illegal aliens who should have submitted their claim

to UNHCR in Syria. Some of them are arrested and, along with the payment of a fine, sentenced to an average of one-month in detention on charges of clandestine entry and illegal residency.

### **UNHCR's role**

UNHCR's primary responsibility in Lebanon is to support the Lebanese Government (GoL) in providing protection and assistance to individual asylum seekers and refugees.

In this respect, UNHCR has initiated talks with the authorities in order to create, develop and maintain an international protection regime through the establishment of an effective structure to deal with refugee issues. It is to be noted that some complications have emerged in the application of the MOU, to the detriment of beneficiaries, and thus the possibility of revisiting and reviewing certain provisions has been raised. UNHCR is pursuing its efforts with the relevant Lebanese authorities in this regard.

During the course of 2006, UNHCR is planning to carry out activities aiming to enhance public awareness and understanding of the basic principles of refugee law and asylum procedures. The activities will mainly target UNHCR's public interlocutors and it will encourage them to reinforce the international protection space in Lebanon. UNHCR will continue to hold seminars and lectures on asylum and refugee law to university students. UNHCR Beirut will also pursue its PI activities and benefit from the wide range of international and regional media based in Beirut.

### **Overview of beneficiary populations**

The majority of UNHCR-Lebanon's caseload of 1,753 persons consists of Iraqi and Sudanese refugees. Most of them passed through other countries before seeking asylum in Lebanon. Typically, they cross into Lebanon with the help of smugglers, after entering Syria, using legal or illegal means. Although not exhaustive, reasons preventing them from seeking asylum in first country of passage include lack of security, nature of political regime, nature of claim, vulnerability of claimant, ignorance to the right of asylum etc.... Once recognized in Lebanon, UNHCR works towards providing them protection from refoulement and arbitrary detention while at the same time seeking durable solutions. In the meantime and due to their status in the country, UNHCR accords special attention to families, vulnerable groups, women and children mostly under its health, education and community services sector until their resettlement to a third country. Moreover, vulnerable refugees are also identified for expedited resettlement.

Most of the Iraqi refugees were recognized before the implementation of the temporary Protection Regime (TPR) in 2003. When possible UNHCR is facilitating their voluntary return or submitting their files for resettlement on case-by-case basis, depending largely on their protection vulnerability. As the situation in Iraq is still not conducive for safe and dignified return of refugees, UNHCR has limited its intervention to "facilitation", as opposed to "promotion," of return for Iraqis. Although, some recognized Iraqi refugees have chosen to repatriate, most Iraqis still opt for resettlement rather than voluntary repatriation.

The second largest refugee caseload is Sudanese who are mostly of minority ethnic groups such as Dinka, Nuba and Fur. Reasons of flight among Sudanese refugees are for fear of political, religious and ethnic based persecution. In light of the precarious political and security situation

in Sudan and the difficult living conditions for them in Lebanon, resettlement remains the main solution for majority of refugees at the moment. However, as the peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Southern People's Liberation Movement takes root, repatriation might become more of an option.

Somali refugees in Lebanon are originating from minority ethnic groups (e.g. Murosade, Rare Hamar, Sheikhal etc.) and from areas located outside Puntland and Somaliland where the situation is still unstable for repatriation. At the same time, Somali refugees are relatively the most vulnerable due to the conditions in Lebanon and their difficulty in adapting/assimilating in society. Delays in resettlement and consequently, prolonged stay in the country have further aggravated their situation.

### **Policy issues**

Much of UNHCR's protection activities are in line with the goals and objectives set by the Agenda for Protection. The work with the Lebanese authorities will focus on legalizing the status of refugees in Lebanon and prevention of their deportation/refoulement.

Concurrently, UNHCR Beirut will continue to exert all efforts with HQ, resettlement countries and field offices in countries of origin to find the most appropriate solution for the refugees.

The GSO also requires that UNHCR provide refugees with assistance during their stay in the country, where they are denied access to work. The limited material assistance delivered by UNHCR through its implementing partner is therefore of vital importance, not only for the refugees' social and economic survival but also for their physical and legal protection.

### **Linkages to other country operations**

As explained, the second largest refugee caseload is Sudanese and as the peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Southern People's Liberation Movement takes root, repatriation might become more of an option.

### **Capacity and presence of partners**

Since refugees are not allowed to work in Lebanon, UNHCR partners will continue assisting refugees under Care and Maintenance projects along the following lines: distributing monthly assistance to needy families, bachelors, women at risk, female heads of household, disabled, elderly and detained refugees, ensuring that all refugees, depending on situation, have a 85% to 100% coverage on medical care- providing counseling and support to refugees - ensuring that refugee children are enrolled in public, semi-private or private schools at primary and lower secondary levels – and ensuring that out-of-school adolescents receive vocational training.

MECC, in close coordination with the Community Services unit, will also continue to run the courses and activities for the refugee men, women, children and adolescents in the Community Development Center; building their capacities and enhancing their skills through nonformal education and training. The Community Center also aims at strengthening refugee participation in the decision-making process regarding issues governing their lives. In relation to refugee children, the Center will continue to design activities based on their needs and in consultation with them and their families.

Additionally, UNHCR, which developed in 2004 a new partnership with a local NGO, the Lebanese Association for Human Rights (LAHR) will require the association to engage in 2006 in several promotional and informational activities. These include:

- Organizing workshops and seminars to disseminate information on UNHCR and refugees in Lebanon and the world. This will assist lawyers, journalists and NGOs to become better informed about UNHCR's role. They also aim at sensitizing them to the cause of refugees.
- Providing UNHCR with reports on the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in detention, especially outside Beirut. This will allow UNHCR to provide them with better protection.
- Dedicating a page on the NGO's website to enhance public awareness of UNHCR's role, mandate and activities.

International Catholic Migrants Commission (ICMC); has been working very closely with UNHCR since the beginning of the resettlement program. ICMC is responsible for processing of UNHCR referrals to USA / DHS (Department of Homeland Security). They provide support to UNHCR staffing and cover the cost of medical exams and orientation sessions for refugees accepted for resettlement.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM), assists UNHCR in logistics at the point of departure of refugees for resettlement. IOM is responsible for booking and accompanying refugees at the airport facilitating their travel. IOM has also played a role in the voluntary repatriation of Iraqis from Lebanon. In conjunction with the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut, the General Security Office, and UNHCR, several convoys were facilitated, and the cost of transportation was covered by the IOM Baghdad office, currently based in Amman, Jordan.

Danish Refugee Council (DRC); with whom UNHCR signed an agreement to carry out a profiling project for the Iraqi population in Lebanon. This will allow for a better understanding of the needs of those Iraqis under the Temporary Protection Regime (TPR) who have not approached the office, and to better plan for their assistance, and potential voluntary repatriation.

### **Presence and roles of other UN and international organisations**

UNHCR will continue to coordinate and strengthen collaboration with other UN specialized agencies under the umbrella of the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) to promote refugee issues in line with its mandate. Coordination has already been established with WHO, ILO, UNICEF, UNAIDS and UNDP. Partnerships with intergovernmental, national and international NGOs will continue to increase with the aim of promoting refugee rights.

### **(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives**

Derived from UNHCR's global strategic objectives, the following are the overall strategic goals of the 2006 Lebanon refugee program, which fit within framework of the Agenda for Protection and the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women:

- Providing international protection to refugees recognized under UNHCR's mandate, including for those refugees recognized before the signing of the MOU.
- Registration of new applicants and undertaking RSD activities in accordance with the provisions of the MOU with a view to register the cases that do not comply with the 2 months time limit under article 11 of the said instrument.
- Focusing on the provision of protection to persons in detention through the reinforcement of the human resources structure in the Protection Unit.
- Monitoring the security and general welfare of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR through counseling and intervention with the competent authorities.
- Reviewing of the MOU in light of the gaps noted during its implementation period and agreeing with the authorities on more flexible implementation modalities to ensure the maximum scope for international protection.
- Undertake increased public awareness activities in order to achieve better dissemination of the scope of UNHCR's mandate and Refugee Law principles among the public at large.
- Fostering working relations with other official counterparts such as the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs in order to enlarge UNHCR's margin of intervention for the benefit of the refugee population.
- Preventing sexual and gender based violence through focus on the protection of women and children and mainstreaming age and gender consideration all throughout UNHCR's programs.
- Preparing resources in terms of personnel, training and COI to face the possibility of the resumption of RSD for Iraqis.
- Continuing the search for viable durable solutions for persons of concern
- Monitoring the nexus between migration and asylum in Lebanon and reporting on developments therein.

All Iraqis currently in Lebanon fall within UNHCR's mandate under the Temporary Protection Regime (TPR), and thus all would be eligible to benefit from UNHCR's counseling and facilitation. UNHCR's involvement has guaranteed that internationally agreed upon standards are upheld and that return takes place under conditions of safety and dignity. Contacts with the Iraqi refugee community and leadership are expected to take place, as well as profiling exercise for the Iraqi population in Lebanon, in order to obtain a clearer picture of the needs and expectations of those wishing to return. Ideally, monitoring and reintegration activities would be an integral part of the return process, yet this will not be possible, due to the absence of international staff in Iraq. It is hoped that with the eventual return of the UN to Iraq, the full cycle of return activities can be implemented. The focus will thus be on solid assessments of the current needs of the Iraqi population in Lebanon, and how to support the Lebanese authorities in addressing them, as well as assessing their prospects for repatriation. In conjunction with the Danish Refugee Council, UNHCR plans to conduct a profiling project for the Iraqi population in 2005 which will assist in developing the planning figures for 2006.

As of 1 January 2005, UNHCR Beirut was declared a resettlement hub as per HQ's decision of devolution of certain resettlement submissions. Fourteen countries (Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, Western Sahara and Yemen) are channeling all their routine as well as urgent resettlement

submissions to the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and the UK through Beirut. The total number of projected submissions to the Nordic and other countries is 250. An ICMC deployee will be assisting RO Beirut in the accomplishment of this task. UNHCR Beirut will continue submission of emergency cases (medical and security) through HQ.

The office is also continuously striving to streamline resettlement procedures and improve the quality of submissions in order to increase acceptance rates and minimize delays. Efforts were exerted to streamline the procedures with other offices in the region, which is expected to continue.

The nature of UNHCR's caseload in Lebanon is urban, and most refugees thus face difficulties in enjoying freedom of movement and employment. Hence, the justification of a defined assistance programme to support refugees and their families during their temporary stay in Lebanon, pending a durable solution. The above-mentioned fact renders the majority of refugees in Lebanon dependent on assistance provided by UNHCR and other NGOs active in the humanitarian fields. The beneficiaries are supported mainly under Household Support (C), Health (F), Education (I), Legal/Protection (O) and Community Services (H) sectors. As the integration of non-Palestinian refugees is not authorized by the government due to internal considerations, UNHCR does not operate in construction and infrastructure fields such as building hospitals, schools, houses, and roads.

In 2006, and in parallel to the Resettlement of Refugees from Lebanon, The UNHCR programme will continue to provide Care and Maintenance for all needy refugees including financial assistance (subsistence allowance), primary health care and education. Overall objectives of the respective sectors are to alleviate the financial burdens of refugees living in Lebanon, to deliver safe and effective health services, to ensure that children and adolescents of concern are enrolled in schools and have attained full attendance in primary education and secondary level and/or benefit from the vocational training courses that take place at the community center.