



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: Ghana

Planning Year: 2006

2006 COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN FOR GHANA (Rev.1)**Part I: OVERVIEW****1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment**

At the end of 2004, Ghana was host to 48,063 persons of concern to UNHCR, more than 40,000 of whom are Liberian refugees residing in the Buduburam refugee settlement, and some 2,000 refugees of various nationalities, most of whom have special needs, and live in Krisan refugee settlement. The active population size remained stable in 2004 as opposed to increasing for the first time in many years. With generally intensified efforts to find durable solutions for refugees in Ghana and most particularly the acceleration of voluntary repatriation for Liberian refugees as a pivotal component of UNHCR operations in Ghana, this trend will continue toward a sizable decrease in the refugee population in 2006. Virtually all other planned activities related to Liberian refugees are directed at supporting a sustainable repatriation effort and, in a complementary manner, a strategy for local integration.

In pursuit of an effective exit strategy for operations directed at Liberian refugees, UNHCR's proposed activities in Ghana for 2006 are geared toward a phase out or scale down in a number of operational areas. While significant strides have already been made in terms of capacity building of national and non-governmental partners, it is anticipated that the consolidation of the majority of these efforts will take place in 2006. In particular, the Ghana Refugee Board will assume full responsibility for the determination of asylum applications in Ghana and the Ghana Immigration Service will become fully operational in terms of registration of asylum seekers, registration and departure logistics for voluntary repatriation of refugees, and facilitation of local integration through the provision of work permits, long-term residency permits, etc. This will be coupled with conclusive capacity building and fundraising support for indigenous NGOs and refugee associations to ensure that services can continue in a sustainable manner as UNHCR begins to phase down its assistance and involvement. An important part of the exit strategy is the promotion of self-reliance and work with the Government to grant refugees access to the relevant socio-economic rights, wherever possible and regardless of durable solution prospects. In addition, work will continue with donors and other stakeholders to increase development assistance for refugees (DAR). A comprehensive review of Ghana's asylum policies and laws will be undertaken to ensure that there are no areas inconsistent with self-reliance principles and activities. In the same vein, UNHCR will pursue with the Government of Ghana a Development for Local Integration (DLI) process, particularly for those Liberian refugees in Buduburam who are unable or unwilling to voluntarily repatriate. UNHCR continuously encourages relevant partners to take over and implement selected services with their own sources or through other funding arrangements and, in support of these efforts, partner staff will benefit from training, workshops and planning exercises that will enhance their knowledge and skills in running a refugee programme. The wide range of partnerships with other UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, will be enhanced to gradually replace contributions otherwise required from UNHCR. In this context, a collaborative initiative with FAO and UNIDO to provide training and support to refugees and local communities in and around the settlements will be pursued in 2005, with the programme anticipated to reach into 2006. If successfully concluded, refugees will benefit from potentially marketable micro-projects, which will facilitate their local integration and economic empowerment.

It is planned that some 10,000 Liberian refugees will choose to voluntarily repatriate from Ghana in 2005 with UNHCR's assistance and a further 12,500 in 2006, based upon the assumption that the promotion of voluntary repatriation will be declared following the holding of elections scheduled for October 2005. Combined with the resettlement planning figures for 2005 and 2006 – 2,300

persons and 1,250 persons respectively – this will result in a more than 50 per cent decrease in the refugee population in Ghana by end 2006. Combined with local integration efforts, it is anticipated that the operation can be reduced even further.

At the same time and given the volatile political situation in the sub-region and particularly in the neighbouring countries of Cote d'Ivoire and Togo, contingency plans are constantly being updated with partners in order to prepare for the possibility of a mass influx from either of those countries should the political situation deteriorate.

As a signatory to all key international human rights and refugee protection instruments and having enacted its own refugee legislation in 1992, Ghana provides one of the few examples on the African continent of a state that has taken concrete steps to live up to its international legal obligations in terms of human rights and refugee protection. Having held free and fair elections in 2004, Ghana also stands out in a volatile region as a stable constitutionally guaranteed democracy. Ghana thus offers a rare opportunity to exemplify a number of objectives outlined in the Global Consultations and articulated in the Agenda for Protection. In order to do so, however, it will require still for some time support from the international community and particularly with regard to contingency measures for potential conflicts in neighbouring countries or elsewhere in the sub-region. For both preparedness and protection purposes, UNHCR and the Government of Ghana intend to maintain the current transit center in Accra, the larger settlement in Buduburam, and in particular the smaller settlement in Krisan hosting primarily refugees with special needs who would be unable to sustain their livelihoods in an urban center without first having some of their needs addressed or skills upgraded through special programmes. This is essential to ensure that the physical protection needs of refugees continue to be met and do not return to the unfortunate, and avoidable, situation that was found in Ghana from 2000 to 2002.

Given the negative impact on both the Government of Ghana and implementing partners following UNHCR's abrupt withdrawal of support in 2000, the phase-down of UNHCR activities needs to be very carefully managed and jointly designed and agreed with the Government and other partners. Significant strides have been made to rebuild UNHCR's reputation in Ghana as a credible and reliable partner, but this can only be maintained through continued transparency with regard to UNHCR's plans and, most significantly, financial commitment to the Ghana Refugee Programme. A continued commitment will need to be shown throughout 2006 to both the Government of Ghana and implementing partners to ensure that on-going capacity building efforts for refugee protection and assistance are solidified.

The skills training and micro-credit projects that UNHCR will continue to support in 2006 are all solutions-oriented in that they will provide refugees with the tools to rebuild their lives and improve their livelihoods, whether through local integration in Ghana, repatriation to their home countries, or resettlement to third countries. Services to be phase over to indigenous NGOs and refugee associations are geared towards meeting the physical protection of refugees by ensuring that they have the means to maintain at least accepted minimum standards of living and are able to contribute as active members of the host community. The positive contributions that refugees make to Ghana will continue to be emphasized to the general public and government officials through advocacy and public information activities to ensure that Ghana remains a welcoming and hospitable country of asylum for refugees.

It is anticipated then that in 2006, those refugees that have chosen not to repatriate and do not meet resettlement criteria, will find their integration prospects enhanced through the support of local NGOs and the competent national and local authorities. The Government, with some continued support from the international community, will be prepared to fully meet its international refugee

protection obligations and also in a position to address emergency situations resulting in mass influxes from neighbouring countries that may arise.

2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions

The objectives of the Ghana Refugee Programme in 2004-2005 were defined through a participatory consultation process with Government counterparts, implementing and operational partners, donors and the refugee population. They have been incorporated into a comprehensive framework, the 'Strategic Directions for Ghana Refugee Programme 2004-2005', which has again been reviewed and amended in a participatory manner to include 2006. Within this framework, emphasis will be placed on intensifying the search for durable solutions for refugees, in particular voluntary repatriation for Liberian refugees, improving protection and assistance standards across the board and working towards sustainability of initiatives, self-reliance, empowerment of refugee communities, gender and age mainstreaming in all of UNHCR's activities.

Derived from the High Commissioner's Strategic Objectives, the Agenda for Protection, the UNHCR Regional Objectives for the Africa Region, the High Commissioner's Commitments to Refugee Women and the Millennium Development Goals, the following are the strategic goals for the Ghana Refugee Programme in 2006:

Seek durable solutions for refugees through the coordinated and complementary use of voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement

- Continue to facilitate actively and, where conditions permit, promote voluntary repatriation in conditions of safety and dignity for all refugees and in particular for refugees from Liberia; support return of refugees with appropriate gender and age considerations taken into account and assist in the attainment of sustainable reintegration of returnees into their country of origin.
- Enhance the role and status of women in leadership, reconciliation and peace-building, by working with others as part of normal activities, but also with a view to repatriation. Also important is the empowerment of potential returnee populations for their full reintegration and reconciliation with their communities.
- Promote local integration, also in view of the limited prospects for voluntary repatriation for some groups of refugees.
- Promote self-reliance and work with the Government to grant refugees access to the relevant socio-economic rights, wherever possible and regardless of durable solution prospects. Work with donors and other stakeholders to increase development assistance for refugees (DAR).
- Undertake a comprehensive review of Ghana's asylum policies and laws to ensure that there are no areas where they are inconsistent with self-reliance principles and activities.
- Continue with resettlement as a central part of UNHCR's comprehensive strategy for protection and durable solutions, thus strengthening international solidarity and responsibility sharing, and using resettlement as an effective complement to the other durable solutions. Address all legitimate resettlement needs and do so with quality, credibility, transparency and predictability.
- Incorporate exit strategies in the planning for specific populations, in consultation with all partners and as durable solutions are realised.
- Develop with the Government of Ghana a Development for Local Integration (DLI) process, particularly for Liberian refugees in Buduburam who are unable or unwilling to voluntarily repatriate.

Support the Government in the creation and maintenance of an international protection regime and ensure the safety and security of refugees through the building of the national protection capacities of the Government

- UNHCR, the Government and the refugee community will, in addition to legal protection, continue and further enhance current efforts to promote better physical protection of refugees to

enhance their security and material wellbeing, including through enhanced protection monitoring by UNHCR and its partners.

- Consolidate the implementation of national asylum legislation, in conformity with international refugee law and human rights standards.
- Improve and enhance individual asylum procedures, including the application of gender and age guidelines, and ensuring the individual registration and documentation of all asylum seekers.
- Facilitate inter-state dialogue on the formulation and implementation of refugee protection policies and principles, in line with UNHCR global policy, where possible in collaboration with the AU and other regional organizations.

Assess the needs of refugees and other persons of concern for protection and assistance

- Enhance registration data and the provision of documentation for refugees to improve protection and assistance programmes as well as to support voluntary repatriation efforts.
- Assess protection and assistance needs of refugees according to a specific situation analysis and from a gender and age perspective against established standards and quantifiable indicators.
- Ensure that needs assessments and programming activities maintain a focus on priority categories of beneficiaries, namely women, children, adolescents, the elderly and people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Improve the quality and use of registration data through continuous registration of asylum seekers and the continued upgrading of Project Profile registration standards, procedures and tools.

Work with the Government in the provision of protection and assistance

- Improve the quality of life of refugees. This includes empowerment activities, implementation of the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women and promoting sound environmental management practices among refugees, in particular also in anticipation of voluntary repatriation opportunities and with a view to the transfer of competencies to the country of origin.
- Ensure that similar minimum standards are maintained for refugees and nationals to promote sustainable integration opportunities and harmonious communal relations.
- Prioritize and increase access to primary education for all refugee children, with special emphasis on female education and girls' retention in schools as a key strategy for protection and for meeting psycho-social needs of children.
- Seek to provide secondary education and vocational training as a key strategy for the promotion of self-reliance, social and economic development.
- Increase prevention and response capacity to the spread of HIV/AIDS in refugee settings.
- Implement relevant guidelines, especially those related to the protection of refugee women and children, prevention of and response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV).
- Continue to maintain the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee settings.
- Ensure that dissemination and training on the Code of Conduct for staff, NGO partners, government officials and refugee groups form an integral part of the fight against SGBV.

Maintain and improve UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity to assist the Government to respond to newly arriving groups of refugees

- Ensure adequate levels of emergency preparedness and contingency planning, in view of the rapidly evolving political, security and humanitarian situations in West Africa.
- Include in planning activities the building of local and regional capacities to ensure asylum systems and protection performance conform to international standards and that adequate reception arrangements are in place.
- Strengthen protection, emergency and security partnerships with key stakeholders.
- Frequently update and validate joint UN-Government of Ghana contingency plans.

Use advocacy and related initiatives to safeguard the rights of refugees and other persons of concern

- Continue with and enhance public information and advocacy campaigns to increase public respect for, and understanding of, the plight of refugees, their contributions to society and their right to seek asylum, awareness of the work of UNHCR as well as to safeguard the voluntary character of the voluntary repatriation effort.
- Continue to support the contribution of non-governmental organizations and other partners to the well-being of asylum-seekers, refugees and candidates for repatriation, notably through advocacy as well as public awareness activities.

Build effective partnerships to better protect people of concern and ensure delivery of quality programmes

- Increase UNHCR's engagement of operational partners in the assessment and planning processes with a view to improving co-ordination, avoiding duplication of efforts and better targeting humanitarian assistance and protection, including in the context of voluntary repatriation. Continued attention will be paid to ensuring stakeholder concerns are known and properly taken into account when setting priorities and planning operations.
- Enhance further the participation of refugees, non-governmental organizations, host governments, UN agencies, donors and other partners in planning, implementation and evaluation is an essential part of ensuring that the needs and concerns of beneficiaries, implementing partners and other partners are taken into account.
- Continue to build the capacity of and support the increased institutionalization of refugee associations to ensure that they are properly run in an accountable manner and with representative leadership to be able to determine own needs and develop appropriate programmes.
- Broaden donor support in order to ensure that funding matches the needs and pursue new sources of funding to support the Ghana refugee programme, in addition to traditional bilateral and multilateral donors.
- Develop partnerships and work to engage development actors in integrating planning, implementation, and resource mobilization efforts to narrow the relief to development gap.
- Continue an active dialogue with WFP towards the continued implementation of a targeted feeding programme.
- Support overall efforts to enhance UNHCR's collaboration with selected regional organisations, as appropriate.
- Support the increased efforts by the Africa Bureau to develop strategies and to enhance capacity building for African national and regional non-governmental organizations.

Help prevent and mitigate conditions that provoke refugee movements

- Support, where appropriate, the development of mechanisms based on timely country of origin information to identify potential mass outflows or emerging situations of statelessness and encourage appropriate action to address root causes.
- Support, as appropriate, the Africa Bureau to continue to strengthen relations with DPA, DPKO, Humanitarian Coordinators, SRSGs, other UN agencies, AU, other Regional Organisations, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, and civil society in order to develop mutually supportive activities in the field of prevention.