



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Executive Committee Summary

Country: Syrian Arab Republic

Planning Year: 2005

Part I Executive Committee Summary

(i) **Context and beneficiary populations**

Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) is not a party to either the 1951 Convention or 1967 Protocol, nor has it adopted any national legislative or administrative provisions on issues related to asylum. During this period, UNHCR made demarches on finalization of the Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and SAR, which it considers as an important step towards institutionalization of relations between UNHCR and SAR. Similarly, discussions were initiated with Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on accession to the 1951 Convention and in encouraging the authorities to adopt an institutional framework in dealing with the issues relating to asylum.

In 2003, the refugee population in Syrian Arab Republic consisted of Iraqis 61.87% (1,499 persons) followed by stateless 11.35% (275), Somalis 11.02% (267), Sudanese 9.07% (235), Iranian 2.35% (57) and 3.71% other nationalities.

In the wake of the war in Iraq in March 2003, Temporary Protection Regime (TPR) was applied for all Iraqi nationals in Syria upon the Syrian authorities' consent. It was estimated that by the end of 2003 over 70,000 to 100,000 Iraqis were living in Syria. Hence this TPR was applicable for all those Iraqis. However, during this period large number of Iraqis initially to register for VolRep approached the office. This number during May-July 2004 reached to about 5700 persons, however with the change of situation in Iraq the number of persons approaching for repatriation dropped. UNHCR Syria did not carry out organized repatriation for Iraqis. This was due to withdrawal of UNHCR and other UN offices from Iraq after the deterioration of security situation in Iraq. During 2003, Syria cooperated on a bilateral basis with the Lebanese authorities to allow the transit of few hundreds of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon to return to their country by land visa Syria.

The overall objective for UNHCR in the country is to provide protection and assistance to persons in need of it, to seek durable solutions for them, to advocate the protection concepts and to gradually build the capacity of the local partners in dealing with asylum issues.

In this context, UNHCR strives to determine the status of asylum applicants, to exercise its mandate for those found to be in need of international protection, to assist the most needy among them and to identify and implement the appropriate durable solutions for them. In parallel, the Office works towards disseminating the asylum concepts among selected audiences and strengthening its relationship with the government and other local partners.

With regard to policy and protection related issues, UNHCR Damascus works in close coordination with the government stakeholders such as the Department of International Organizations (MFA), the Department of Immigration and Passports (MOI) and relevant security branches. With regard to the design and implementation of the assistance program, the main partners of UNHCR are the Syrian Red Crescent (SARC), the Syrian Women Union (SWU) for

urban refugees and, for the rural refugees staying in Hassake, the Office of the Governor of the province.

All the above institutions, along with academia, journalists and other members of the civil society, are UNHCR’s targets for capacity building activities, including training, presentations, information sharing, roundtables, coordination meetings, and regular advocacy interventions and contacts as appropriate.

The office would continue concerted and systematic activities towards promotion of accession to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol. UNHCR Damascus would work on establishing viable and sustained capacity and institutions of asylum in Syria and encourage Syria in burden and responsibility sharing towards asylum seekers and refugees. The Syrian authorities would be encouraged to recognize that there is a need for a humanitarian approach and would be encouraged to adopt an institutional framework for asylum without prejudice to the issue of the Palestinian refugees.

UNHCR Syria recognizes that stateless issue poses an important protection gap that needs to be addressed. In view of this UNHCR should embark on concerted efforts to address this anomaly initially with regard to Bidouns (ex-Kuwait stateless persons) presently residing in Syria and undertake specific activities concerning reduction of statelessness.

A good atmosphere of cooperation and dialogue exists among UN agencies in Syria. Regular inter-agency retreats and meetings offer good opportunities to share information, to coordinate interventions on issues of common interest such as administration and staffing. The ongoing CCA/UNDAF process as well as the annual Report of the Resident Coordinator is being conducted in harmony among all agencies. Joint UN activities have been carried out during 2003. UNHCR has been involved in the common work under the CCA/UNDAF process as well as the preparation of the Annual Report of the Resident Coordinator System.

(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives:

UNHCR Goals, objectives and activities during 1 January to 31 December 2005 will be directed towards 2 beneficiary populations and one theme:

- Beneficiary population # 1: Asylum-seekers;
- Beneficiary population # 2: Urban refugees;
- Theme # 1: Protection advocacy and capacity building

Name of Beneficiary Population: Asylum-seeker	
Main Goal(s): Providing protection pending final status determination	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring protection against refoulement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The agreement with Government on Temporary protection Regime for Iraqis not to deport Iraqis; • Iraqi asylum seekers are allowed to remain in Syrian pending RSD

	<p>procedures are Commenced or repatriation initiated;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asylum seekers are allowed to remain in Syria pending final decision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventing detention of asylum seekers and refugees on the basis of the illegal presence/entry on the Syrian Territory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less asylum seekers in detention. Cooperation with the authorities is strengthen (exchange of information – access to asylum seekers). Standards of treatment of asylum seekers in detention are known to the authorities and respected.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing basic assistance to asylum seekers in need with priority to persons with special needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals with special needs are identified and treated in accordance with UNHCR standards. Risk of all forms of exploitation is prevented Risk of sexual exploitation for women and children is prevented.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional harmonization for treatment of asylum seekers is achieved. Assistance policy is periodically reviewed and harmonized in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent sub-regional policies on irregular mover are reached. Assistance policy is harmonized in the region. Protection and assistance for persons with special needs is harmonized in the region. Irregular movement is decreased.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender policies are implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant asylum documents are issued to both men and women. RSD procedures are gender sensitive. UNHCR gender polices are known and respected by the authorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach an agreement on issuance of document pending final decision on refugee status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asylum seekers are provided with necessary documents. Authorities respect the documents. Detention and refulement instances are prevented/reduced.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure access to a fair and efficient RSD procedure by UNHCR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All asylum seekers are given access to RSD within a reasonable period of time. Quality and fairness of RSD is maintained and enhanced. UNHCR credibility is preserved and consolidated with Government, IPs and refugees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction of the backlog of cases awaiting RSD and decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waiting period for interviewing asylum seekers does not exceeding 3 months.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing asylum seeker's awareness about UNHCR mandate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RSD backlog is reduced. Crisis and tension is decreased. Asylum seekers become more familiar with UNHCR role and limitations. Decrease in the number of non-bona-fide asylum seekers approaching the office. Asylum seekers are ware about their rights and obligations.
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Name of Beneficiary Population: Urban refugees	
Main Goal(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing protection and assistance Achieving durable solutions 	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring protection against refoulement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The verbal agreement with the government not to deport mandate refugees pending implementation of durable solution. Refugees are allowed to remain until a durable solution is found. The June 2001 decision of Immigration Regulations does not apply to mandate refugees and persons of concern to UNHCR.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventing detention of refugees on the basis of the illegal presence/entry on the SAR Territory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less refugees in detention. Cooperation with the authorities is strengthened. UNHCR has access to all persons of concern in detention. Standards of treatment of refugees in detention are known to the authorities and respected. Authorities respect the refugees certificate and documents issued by UNHCR. Authorities allow refugees departing on resettlement to exit the country, Authorities apply humanitarian standards in granting exit permits to refugees. Authorities do not deport refugees in detention because of their irregular immigration status.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote self-reliance activities through targeted project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less refugees dependent on care and maintenance. Women sewing center is functioning and more women benefiting the project. Refugees are better prepared for future situations. Sexual exploitation towards refugee women is prevented. The image of refugees within the community is improved. Individual financial assistance to refugees is reduced.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing basic assistance to needy refugees especially the vulnerable cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needy refugees will maintain their safety and dignity. Dispensation of assistance is periodically monitored.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional harmonization with regard to refugees is achieved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the previous agreed to policy on irregular movers, consistent regional responses to irregular moves is reached. Assistance policy is harmonized in the region. Protection and assistance for vulnerable groups is harmonized in the region. Irregular movement is decreased.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender policies are implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugee documents are issued to both men and women. UNHCR gender policies are known and respected by the authorities and IPs. Staff is aware about the UNHCR gender policies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve progress towards providing refugees with adequate identification documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection situation is improved. Authorities respect the documents issued to the refugees. Refugees are issued with identification documents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamline Community Services activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community based problems of the refugees are identified. Community services activities are streamlined. IP are sensitized on CS activities. Period monitoring activities are undertaken to identify and find solutions to community based problems of refugees. Delivery capacity of IPs is improved.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline social/legal counseling activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social/legal counseling activities are streamlined. • Coordination on social/legal counseling activities is achieved with the CS and the IPs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate voluntary repatriation whenever feasible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More refugees are aware about UNHCR role with regard to voluntary repatriation. • Each case desirous to return on voluntary repatriation is assisted. • UNHCR credibility is enhanced. • Planed repatriation activities are undertaken. • Coordination between UNHCR and the Government is undertaken in case of organized Voluntary Repatriation activities. • Necessary information is disseminated among Returnees. • Monitoring of return and transit are undertaken, • Transit of returnees via Syria is coordinated and monitored. • Returns take place in safety and dignity. • Government facilitates and cooperates with the UNHCR repatriation activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processing cases for resettlement and furthering resettlement capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resettlement for eligible refugees. • The government sensitized on burden/responsibility sharing.

Beneficiary Population/Theme: Protection advocacy and capacity building	
Main Goal(s):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Further involve the authorities and other partners in the process of protecting refugees and develop their capacity in dealing with refugee issues ○ Create awareness about asylum issues among decision makers and selected groups ○ Undertake activities concerning developing framework of institution of asylum 	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining the Govt. approval for local integration for specific cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some refugees are able to locally settle. • Reducing dependency on UNHCR • Government responds positively to the fundamental principle of burden/responsibility sharing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International standards/UNHCR mandate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government, NGOs, academics and

<p>relating to treatment of refugees are well known by the Government, NGOs, academics and media.</p>	<p>media are sensitized on international standards and UNHCR mandate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relation between UNHCR and Government is strengthened on adoption of a right-based approach.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclude and ensure an effective implementation of the MOU with the Government. Initiate concerted discussions with the Government to adopt a framework of Asylum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOU is concluded. • Relations between UNHCR/ Government are further strengthened. • Instances of refoulement/deportation cases are reduced. • Documents issued to refugees are respected. • Government involves in issuance /co-sign the documents issued to asylum seekers and refugees. • Government adopts a framework of treatment of asylum seekers and refugees on its territory.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government officials, NGO community, academics and media are provided with training on asylum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government officials, NGO community, academics and media are sensitized on principles, standards and refugee protection. • Better understanding of the asylum principles and UNHCR mandate. • Qualitatively improved protection delivery/activity. • UNHCR mandate/decisions respected by the authorities. • General awareness on the difference between UNHCR and UNRWA mandate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government officials/NGOs are provided with training on UNHCR policies on gender equality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government /NGOs community is mainstreamed on gender equality.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the guidelines recommended in the Agenda for protection, UNHCR is engaged in meaningful dialogue with the Syrian officials in order to encourage them to adopt an institutional approach towards Asylum and Refugee protection. • The office would continue concerted and systematic activities towards promotion of accession to the 1951 Geneva Convention and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activities undertake to adopt systematic capacity building programs. • Activities initiated on building strong partnership with civil societies, activists in judiciary, human rights and academics. • Discussions are initiated with the government modeled and pursued at bilateral level in Damascus as well as through the HQ.

<p>the 1967 Protocol as well as the Arab Convention on Refugee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Syrian authorities be encouraged to recognize that there is a need for a humanitarian approach and would be encouraged to adopt an institutional framework for asylum without prejudice to the issue of the Palestinian refugees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize joint workshops and seminars both at governmental and Non-governmental levels. • Coordinate actions within the framework of the sub-region i.e. between UNHCR Syria- Lebanon-Jordan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote strategy that would seek complementarily with other multilateral political and economic forums such as EU, economic cooperation forum for the European-Mediterranean countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate work on establishing viable and sustained capacity and institutions of asylum in Syria and encourage Syria in burden sharing and responsibility sharing towards asylum seekers and refugees. • Encourage partners to felicitate UNHCR activities in these regards. • UNHCR Damascus undertakes specific demarches both at a bilateral as well as multilateral to address the issue and maintain the asylum space in the countries of the region. •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the problems of the statelessness especially that of the Bedouns (ex-Kuwait statelesspersons) presently in Syria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The statelessness issue is addressed at the appropriate forum. • concerted efforts are made to address this anomaly initially with regard to Bedouns (ex-Kuwait stateless persons) presently residing in Syria and undertake specific activities concerning reduction of statelessness.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maitain the ability to respond to any eventuality that may entail displacement and towards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the situation in the countries of the region especially the political, demographic and territorial problems that may be a source of possible tension and result in human displacement in the region. • Ensure that structures and framework of international protection and necessary capacity building activities are undertaken.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitize the Government concerning the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government is sensitized about the

<p>nexus between illegal migration and asylum is considered to be an on-going issue in Syria and the sub-region at large.</p>	<p>nexus between illegal migration and asylum,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions are undertaken with the diplomatic representation of major EU donors of UNHCR at the local level. • Discussions on this issue and exchange of information takes place between UNHCR and IOM offices in Damascus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNHCR Damascus would engagement in filling the protection gap for Palestinian refugees not registered with UNRWA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Towards this end it would expand its discussions with UNRWA office in Syria and would sensitize the Syrian government on this issue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance and promote sub-regional set-up to harmonize the protection related policies and address situational specific problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate exchange of information between the countries in the sub-region and collectively with the HQ.