



# **COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN**

## **OVERVIEW**

**Country: Sierra Leone**

**Planning Year: 2006**

# UNHCR Sierra Leone 2006 Country Operations Plan

## Part I: OVERVIEW

### I.1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment

Until 2004 the Sierra Leone refugee situation was expected to take longer to resolve, due to the instability that has prevailed in the region during and since this country's own civil war. Now, with the restoration of peace in Liberia, **the prospects for 2006 are for significant progress towards durable solutions.** Many urban and camp refugees will still remain, however, needing a better safety net of self reliance to ensure their basic protection.

By 2006 the conditions for **voluntary repatriation to Liberia** are expected to have greatly improved. Following the elections in Liberia scheduled for October 2005 UNHCR anticipates being able to start the 'promotion' phase of the operation. Improved roads and a steadier flow of returnees will mean that two routes – one north to Lofa County and the other south to Grand Cape Mount and other counties – can both be used for at least the 8 drier months of the year to return a combined total of 2,500 persons each month for an annual organized repatriation total of 20,000, including returnees from urban areas.

The **number of refugees in Sierra Leone** will remain high in 2005 and for much of 2006. In addition to the 51,000 Liberian refugees in camps in Sierra Leone at the beginning of 2005, there were still an estimated 14,500 Liberians living outside the camps (including 6,300 old caseload from the late 1980s and early 1990s, 4,600 who arrived at the same time as the camp refugees from 2001 to 2003, and an estimated 3,600 still in rural areas close to the borders). In 2006, on the basis of the numbers repatriating as summarized above, there will still be close to 39,000 in camps at the beginning of the year and 21,400 at the end of the year, and 12,247 (of whom 8,613 assisted by UNHCR) living mainly in urban areas at the beginning of the year, going down to 8,747 (including 5,113 assisted) by the end of the year..

**Sierra Leone** itself is preparing for the departure of UNAMSIL, now extended from mid year to the end of 2005. Responsibility for security country wide was already handed back by the peacekeeping forces to the national authorities in 2004. Renewed efforts of government and donors are meanwhile going into the strengthening of the armed forces, the police and the civil service, while the progress of an anti-corruption commission is being carefully watched. The Special Court is currently conducting trials of two important groups of accused, in parallel, without major incident.

A brief general strike in January and several days of student riots in February are seen by some as signs of the kinds of unrest that may follow UNAMSIL's draw-down, and by others as tests of the resilience of national security structures and democratic governance. The economy has been slow to take off and government revenues remain far lower than planned, though there has been progress in attracting mining investors and in curbing illegal diamond exports. The main potential source of tension country wide is the high rate of youth unemployment, considered a risk to national and regional stability.

For the 271,991 **Sierra Leonean returnees** who had arrived back from countries in the region by the end of the repatriation operation in December 2004, conditions have stabilized in their previously war-torn and de-populated areas of origin. Local government structures have been re-established and the devolution process of key line ministries has begun. While they still suffer from low capacity, isolation, lack of transport and chronically poor infrastructure, the newly-elected councils and their few line ministry counterparts in the four main returnee districts have recently formulated district plans, for which various sources of development funding are now becoming available. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Sierra Leone was submitted to the World Bank in February 2005 and is currently being refined in advance of the Consultative Group meeting planned for mid-year.

Agricultural yields have steadily increased in the past two years. Community empowerment projects for **reintegration** and initial development programmes have helped restore basic services and boosted skills and collective economic activity, including for women and youth. A modest UN inter-agency Transition Support Team structure is in place, and operates from UNHCR's offices. Most of UNHCR's implementing partners in the reintegration programmes now have plans to continue working in the same geographical areas and sectors with non-UNHCR sources of funding in 2006 and beyond. In these conditions, though with much preparation still to be achieved in the 2005 programme, it seems feasible for UNHCR to discontinue its reintegration assistance to returnee communities as of the end of 2005.

Under the facilitated voluntary repatriation programme only 2,700 persons had repatriated with UNHCR's assistance by the beginning of March 2005. This is less than half of the number anticipated for this period in UNHCR's original repatriation planning. Instead of the 24,000 returning in 2005 according to those plans, just 12,000 are now expected to opt for organized voluntary repatriation this year (including 1,000 from urban areas) with perhaps another 1,000 choosing to go back by their own means of transport. This means that there will still be close to 39,000 **refugees in camps** at the end of 2005. If 20,000 do then repatriate in 2006 (including 2,500 from urban areas), this will still mean a population of nearly 21,400 in the camps at the end of the year. An average of 30,000 persons in camps will therefore need continued protection, care and supply of food rations by UNHCR, WFP and other partners throughout 2006.

During 2004 many camp residents farmed land in and around the camps or negotiated poorly-paid casual work with the host population while, in spite of continuing insecurity, many also returned for sometimes prolonged visits to their areas of origin and re-started their farms in preparation for return. The **registration** and **food** distribution systems in Sierra Leone were tolerant of this, with absentees being deactivated from the food lists but then reinstated when they returned to the camps. In 2005, though full rations have so far been maintained for Sierra Leone in contrast to Guinea, the food pipeline is drying up for the countries of asylum and a major joint effort of UNHCR, WFP and the government is getting underway in the Sierra Leone camps to ensure that more limited food supplies are targeted to those who are physically present and, among them, those most in need.

Two riots have occurred at food distribution time in the refugee camps in early 2005. Stones were thrown and on the second occasion road blocks were erected and staff of UNHCR, WFP, NGOs and the government were prevented from leaving the camp for several hours. These incidents, seriously compromising **staff security and safety**, arose from minor misunderstandings over ration entitlements at a time when refugees are still

receiving regular, full rations, but WFP is warning of impending shortfalls of commodities in the food pipeline that may result in reduced rations and potentially lead to heightened tensions of this nature in the camps.

Only a minority of the camp population, however, has so far been reached by **self-reliance** programmes and for most refugees surviving on a ration and keeping the family clothed and supplied with other basic needs remains extremely hard. A significantly larger self-reliance safety net will be needed in these circumstances in order to ensure basic protection.

With a remaining camp population of 21,400 in 2007 it will no longer be economical to maintain services in 8 camps for average populations of 2,700 per location. **Camp closures** are therefore inevitable. The operations plan anticipates that 4 camps will need to be closed in 2006 in order to have a manageable programme in 2007. To achieve this, 12,000 persons will have to be moved and re-housed during the last quarter of 2006.

For the **urban population**, while the majority receives assistance for health care and education, limited skill training and occasional one-off cash assistance for those with special and emergency needs, many do not have even this level of support. Their lack of legal recourse and bargaining power and their limited access to regular income opportunities places them at high risk of sexual and other forms of exploitation and abuse. They are urgently in need of a genuine durable solution.

This non-camp population included 6,337 individuals who had arrived in the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s and who, until this time, had been unwilling to consider repatriation, pursuing local integration as an interim option but hoping for resettlement. A further 4,592 persons, most of whom had arrived with the camp populations in the period 2001 to 2003, had opted to live in urban areas without assistance rather than moving to the camps, and have had less contact with UNHCR.

Within this population, **resettlement** offers a solution for up to an estimated 1,550 persons between now and the end of 2006. An initial 1,300 individuals were submitted to resettlement countries in 2004. A further 750 persons will be submitted in 2005 and 450 in 2006. Of these submissions, 542 persons departed in 2004, a further 1,000 are expected to depart in 2005 and a further 750 departures are expected in 2006. In addition, the 450 submitted in 2006 are expected to depart in 2007. These submissions will not result from proactive group resettlement identification exercises, but rather from case by case referrals by protection staff. The proportion of new cases relative to old cases is expected to steadily increase during this period.

Detailed resettlement identification having been completed in late 2004 for all those who had earlier been considered eligible among the 'old' group, a renewed process of **dialogue, profiling and counseling** is being initiated with the urban populations during 2005 to reorient them towards the most likely solution for the majority, namely voluntary repatriation. This 'DPC' process will also be one of the main ways in which cases meeting criteria for resettlement and more formalized support for local integration are identified.

The need for **local integration** solutions both for urban and camp populations is expected to be significantly reduced in both 2005 and 2006 as compared with the assumptions of 2003-4, due to the improved prospects for voluntary repatriation. The identification of

residual cases will not be undertaken until 2007, but the identification of local integration solutions will need to be undertaken jointly with the government in 2005-6 in anticipation of groups of both camp and non-camp refugees wishing to remain. In addition, a small number of urban refugees meeting the criteria of the citizenship law will already be assisted in 2006 to seek more formal legal status through naturalization. This is not expected to apply to more than 350 persons at this point.

Further progress has been made towards the adoption by Sierra Leone of a **refugee law**. The draft legislation, which had already been approved by the Cabinet in March 2004, has recently been forwarded to the Law Officer's Department in the Attorney General's Office to be prepared for Parliament. A further opportunity for UNHCR comment on the draft is anticipated.

Already in 2005 and more so in 2006, UNHCR's seasoned **partners** in the operation, like UNHCR itself, find it increasingly difficult to obtain the levels of funding they have received in the past from other sources to meet the continuing needs of refugees, given the priority being accorded to Liberia as the country of origin and the competing needs of major humanitarian operations elsewhere in the world. This exerts additional pressure on the operation: while UNHCR itself has fewer funds at its disposal, the proportion of the overall needs that will have to be met from UNHCR funds in 2006 is higher than in previous years, while the number of refugees will still not have fallen to a level where this becomes more manageable.

**2006** will therefore be a year of intensive promotion of voluntary repatriation, both for the camp and the non-camp populations, but calls for continuing protection and care, together with greater efforts towards self reliance as a protection measure, for the many refugees who remain. This has to be combined with the additional cost of investing in the consolidation of camps, the improvement of the registration systems that support these processes, as well as renewed emphasis on the strengthening of national protection capacities – and this all needs to be achieved with more limited resources from UNHCR and with fewer contributions from partners than in previous years.

## **I.2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions**

UNHCR's operational goals for 2006 in Sierra Leone may be summarized as follows:

1. Promote and accelerate the sustainable voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees
2. Promote durable solutions for urban cases whilst improving their access to rights
3. Provide continuing care, and protection through self reliance, for those still in camps
4. Identify future local integration prospects for potential residual populations
5. Support development of national protection capacity of government and civil society
6. Ensure that the operation is driven by accurate and up to date registration data
7. Rationalize and consolidate services, camps and offices towards a lighter operation

### Overall goal:

- Accelerate the achievement of solutions while upholding the quality of asylum.

The goals of the country operation are intended to contribute to regional stability by striking a balance. There is a need on the one hand to seize the opportunity of improving conditions in Liberia to help people return home rather than staying in camps, bring a

protracted situation to an end and transfer resources from care and maintenance to return, reintegration and renewal. On the other hand it is important to ensure that the gains of the operation to date are not forfeited in the process. These include continuing to maintain the standards of protection and care for refugees and the goodwill of host communities that are the hallmarks of the operation in Sierra Leone; adhering to the principle that solutions should be sustainable; and taking a best practice approach to the establishment of Sierra Leone's new refugee legislation and resulting national protection system.

The goals address most of UNHCR's eight regional objectives for the Africa region:

- building national protection capacities on the basis of a sound refugee law;
- enjoyment of basic rights - especially for urban refugees who may otherwise live for years without adequate assistance or access to decent work;
- strengthening the legal status of refugees through the establishment of an effective regime of national protection;
- ensuring all persons of concern are properly registered and provided with appropriate identification;
- promoting self reliance, especially in protracted refugee situations; active pursuit of voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration;
- planning ahead for local integration for potential residual cases;
- making full strategic use of resettlement, especially for the protracted urban cases;
- building effective partnerships – in the programmes for continuing care of camp refugees, the rehabilitation of the sites and the new national protection regime, as has already been achieved in the reintegration programme;
- maintaining indicator data in relation to standards as the basis of rationalized, prioritized and results-oriented operations management;
- greater efficiency in the use of resources through the consolidation and streamlining of the operation