

COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN 2002: ZIMBABWE

Part 1: Country level

Executive Summary

The primacy of asylum and refugee protection underpins UNHCR activities in Zimbabwe. The following parameters define LO Harare's core activities that focus on our international protection and assistance mandate: unhindered admission of refugees into the country, speed of intervention, prevention of forcible return, treatment of refugees according to basic human rights, refugee eligibility regime, persons excluded from refugee status and achievement of durable solution in the shortest possible time.

The Operations Plan for 2002 is essentially a local integration operation that the Government has agreed to for the assimilation of refugees into the national community. UNHCR is active in the individual refugee status determination (RSD). The treatment and activities of both the urban caseload and the camp-based refugees are protection focused and solution oriented.

Zimbabwe is presently facing a deep political and economic crisis. The major disruptions in social services have brought the humanitarian imperative to the fore. The UNHCR Regional Office in Pretoria and the UN Zimbabwe Country team are continually reviewing the Emergency Preparedness Plan for any population movements out of Zimbabwe, should there be a need.

By the end of 2000, there were 4,217 refugees assisted both directly and indirectly in Zimbabwe, with 98 pending asylum applicants. This number has increased significantly since the beginning of 2001 with inflows of refugees and asylum seekers of various nationalities, mainly from DRC, Angola, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burundi and Somalia. The uncertain political and military conflicts in the Great Lakes Region of Africa have continued to cause refugees to flee into Zimbabwe.

From the beginning of 2002, the Office's protection and assistance would be targeted to a beneficiary population of 8,500, with some 2,000 refugees becoming self-reliant. Those who are studying would have completed their schooling and would have found employment. The major locations for refugees are the principal cities of Harare, Mutare and Bulawayo for urban refugees and the sole Tongogara camp in the eastern province for the rural-based caseload.

During 2000 and 2001 UNHCR in Zimbabwe maintained the procedural capacity of the eligibility and status determination under the principles based on international refugee law standards. The two separate occasions of sit-ins by refugees at the Liaison Office in Harare, in January and March 2000, show that Zimbabwe features a volatile caseload, which necessitates a UNHCR protection presence to serve as the focal point for regular casework and interaction with Government authorities.

Between 01 January – 31 December 2000, and the first quarter of 2001, the policy shift of Zimbabwe government's new rural refugee encampment was implemented. The majority of the refugees were relocated to the Tongogara Refugee settlement, in the eastern part of Zimbabwe. Various exemptions to remain in Harare were made for the disabled, infirm and for parents who have children in city schools. New arrivals were assisted in the Waterfalls Transit Centre in Harare, until their status was determined.

A re-orientation of UNHCR local settlement activities in Zimbabwe has equally shown that programming interventions continued to be required through the year 2002 and beyond, thus necessitating a continuous monitoring presence. During the year, Liaison Office Harare will continue to strengthen refugee self-sufficiency activities through the provision of funds, technical advice and training for running small-scale businesses. Furthermore, assistance will be provided to needy refugees in the areas of language training, job attachments, employment, education and vocational skills training. Special emphasis will be placed on counselling services and economic self-sufficiency by promoting income-generating activities thereby enhancing local integration prospects.

Fresh initiatives will back current activities to mainstream programme priorities of women/gender equality, children, adolescence, the aged and the environment. The protection of refugee women will be emphasised in all programming activities and implementing partner reporting.

Protection activities will continue to be focused on individual status determination, conducted before a refugee eligibility body, the Zimbabwe Refugees Committee.

LO Harare will continue to promote refugee law through training. Refugee status determination and interviewing techniques training courses for government and implementing partners will be held.

Overview: UNHCR's role and operational environment

In order to cope with the growing influx of refugees and asylum seekers into the country, the Zimbabwe Refugee Committee will soon have to conduct the eligibility procedures and the refugee status determination on a weekly basis. The Tongogara refugee-camp and at the Harare Transit Centre in Waterfalls would also have to be expanded and/or additional refugee sites would have to be developed to accommodate new arrivals.

The international refugee protection mandate will continue to be extended to all asylum seekers and refugees who seek protection and asylum in Zimbabwe. Programme Management training for implementing partners will be conducted in order to expose them to UNHCR programming and reporting requirements.

A seminar on Refugee Law will be held for Government officials, such as the Civil Police and Immigration Officers, who may not be familiar with international principles. A seminar on the use of the "Status of the World Refugees" by relevant groups, such as the media, NGOs and government representatives, in order to raise public awareness on root causes of refugee movements and the protection of refugees is being planned. An additional seminar on the proper treatment of refugees; non-detention of asylum-seekers, freedom of movement and provision of travel documents, would also be given. Finally, a workshop on status determination procedure needs to be conducted for the Zimbabwe Refugee Committee.

Inter-agency co-operation

UNHCR will continue to collaborate with the UN Country Team within the UNDAF. Joint programming initiatives in vulnerability studies, land distribution, emergency response and preparedness will be updated throughout 2002.

Emergency preparedness/contingency planning

Emergency preparedness became a critical issue during 2000-2001 as a result of prevailing political uncertainties. The rising number of new arrivals as a result of the turbulent developments in neighbouring countries and the growing dissatisfaction among the local population due to the dwindling of living standards became apparent towards the end of the previous year. The LO plans, therefore, to update its contingency plans for possible inflow and/or outflows.