

## WORKING ENVIRONMENT

By the end of 2015, the Asia and Pacific region was home to 9.8 million people of concern to UNHCR, including 3.8 million refugees, 2.9 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and an estimated 1.5 million stateless individuals.

The majority of refugees in the region originate from Afghanistan or Myanmar. Afghan refugees – of whom there were around 2.6 million – remain the largest protracted refugee population of concern to UNHCR. Although they are present in some 70 countries, 95 per cent live in the neighbouring Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. These countries have generously hosted Afghan refugees for more than three decades.

Over two-thirds of the refugee population in Asia and the Pacific in 2015 were hosted in urban and semi-urban areas. UNHCR, together with partners, continued to work with States and other actors to strengthen the protection of those living outside camps. The Office focused its interventions on four main objectives: undertaking community outreach; strengthening relations with urban refugees; ensuring access to essential services such as health care and education; and promoting livelihoods and self-reliance.

# Asia and the Pacific

UNHCR/Diego Ibarra Sánchez

A Nepalese man waiting for assistance in the village of Selang.



## MAJOR OPERATIONS

This overview highlights key aspects of the main situations that required emergency or sustained response from UNHCR and its partners in 2015. More details on individual operations are available in the relevant subregional and country operations pages on the Global Focus website (<http://reporting.unhcr.org>).

Positive political developments in **Afghanistan** in early 2015 generated hope for increased stability and opportunities to find solutions for displaced people. The National Unity Government demonstrated a strong commitment to facilitating voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity, and to including both refugee and IDP returnees in national priority programmes. Another particularly welcome development was the establishment of a ministerial-level High Commission on Migration.

During the year, numerous tripartite and quadripartite meetings were held between the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, together with UNHCR. Each resulted in closer cooperation between the three countries and firm resolve to finding solutions for Afghan refugees. In addition, the high-level segment of the 66<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme focused on the Afghan refugee situation.

Nevertheless, the situation in Afghanistan remained challenging. Deteriorating security and increased levels of violence during the latter part of the year resulted in large-scale internal displacement. Some 190,000 Afghans sought asylum in other parts of the world, the majority in Europe. In 2015, Afghan nationals made up the second largest group of asylum-seekers in industrialized countries worldwide, after Syrians. Approximately one quarter of this population were unaccompanied or separated children.

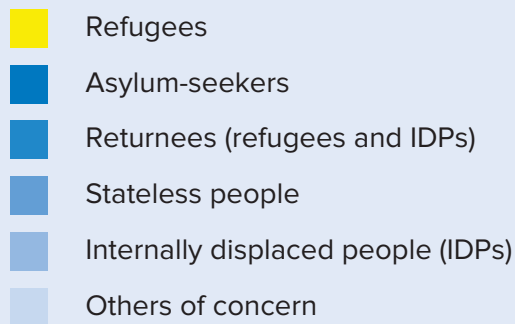
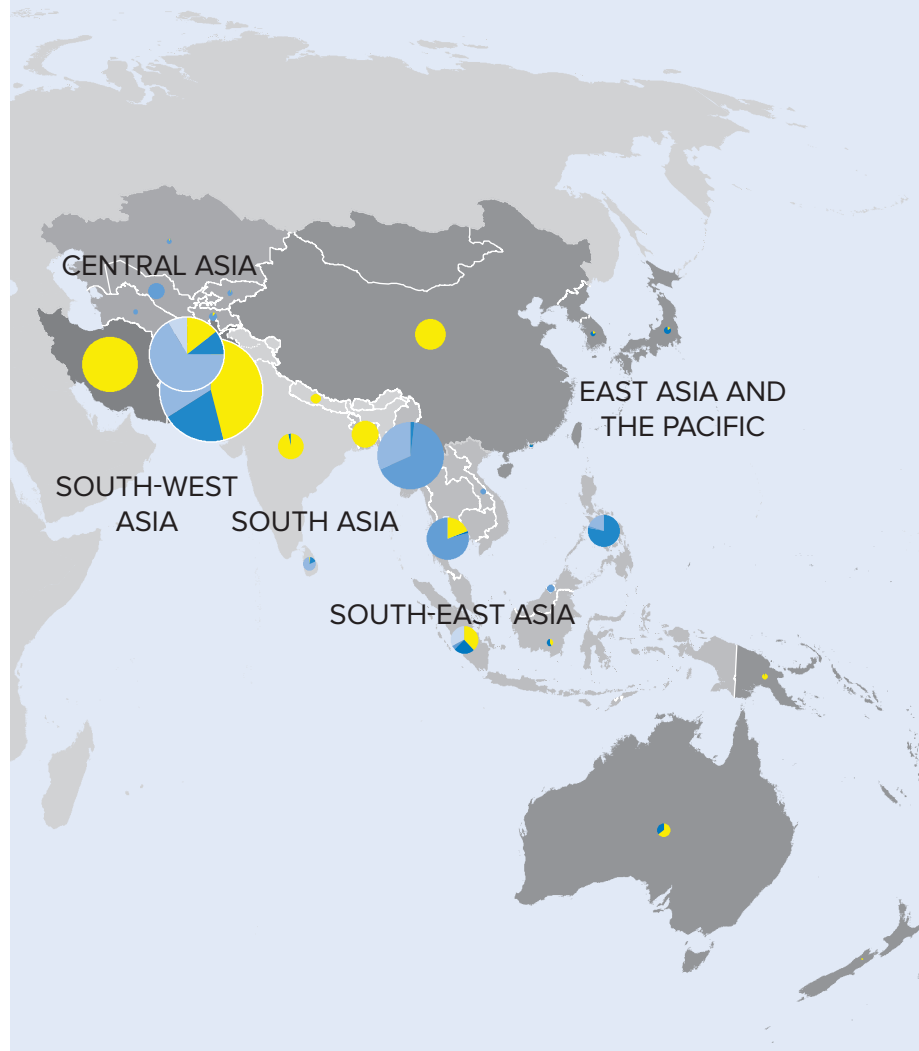
Despite these challenges, UNHCR continued to work with Afghanistan's National Unity Government, humanitarian and development partners, civil society and other actors to facilitate the reintegration of returning refugees and to assist IDPs. The Office also advocated support from the international community to the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, and for the continued protection of Afghan refugees on their territories until lasting solutions were found.

In **Myanmar**, the 2015 elections were a major milestone in the country's history, leading to renewed hope for stability following the establishment of a democratic government. The co-ruling National League for Democracy party made nationwide peace talks the first priority of the new Government and committed to efforts to ensure that all ethnic groups sign the proposed ceasefire agreement.

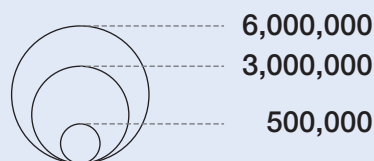
It is hoped that the newly-elected Government of Myanmar will pursue solutions to internal displacement and refugee returns, and collaborate with countries in the region to address the root causes that have prompted large numbers of people to risk their lives on dangerous boat journeys in South-East Asia. Some 33,600 refugees and migrants embarked on such movements in 2015. An estimated 370 people lost their lives during these journeys, mostly from starvation, dehydration, disease and abuse, including at the hands of people smugglers.

Although departures from the Bay of Bengal in the first half of 2015 were 34 per cent higher than in the first half of 2014, the total number of departures during the year was half of the 2014 figure. This decline has been attributed to heightened scrutiny of maritime movements following a serious incident in the subregion in May 2015, when some 5,000 refugees were abandoned in the Andaman Sea by smugglers.

In **Central Asia**, UNHCR supported governments in ensuring that national status determination procedures were consistent with international refugee law, as well as in the development of protection-sensitive migration management systems, including through capacity-building for stakeholders. States in the region have also made great strides towards addressing issues surrounding statelessness and citizenship. In 2015, UNHCR also undertook a major restructuring of its presence in the Central Asia region.



**Population size**



## ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

### Safeguarding access to protection and asylum

In 2015, UNHCR continued to work with States in the region to improve protection standards, including in the context of mixed movements. In addition to advocating and supporting the establishment of robust national asylum procedures, the Office also promoted protection-sensitive migratory systems that facilitate the mobility of people with international protection needs in the region.

Access to protection and asylum is critical for the large number of Afghan refugees. In Pakistan, authorities extended refugees' proof of registration cards until the end of 2015 and agreed provisionally to move this deadline to June 2016. UNHCR is working with the Government of Pakistan on a further extension.

UNHCR also implemented 62 Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) projects during the year in Pakistan. The projects spanned numerous sectors, such as education, health, water and sanitation and livelihoods, and aimed to improve the living conditions of close to 1 million people, including some 226,000 Afghan refugees; increase tolerance towards Afghans in Pakistan; improve social cohesion to promote coexistence; and provide Afghans with a more predictable means of temporary stay.

In a welcome move, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran included refugees in its Universal Public Health Insurance scheme, which allowed refugees to benefit from insurance for hospitalization that is similar to Iranian nationals. This large-scale initiative was based on an agreement signed last year between UNHCR, the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Health, and the Iran Health Insurance Organization (*Salamat*). Access to the *Salamat* health insurance stood to benefit nearly 1 million Afghan and Iraqi refugees living in the country by addressing the financial challenges related to the high cost of health care and improving the physical, mental, economic and social well-being of refugees.

In addition, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran also allowed Afghan children of school age to access formal education, regardless of their documentation status. Since May 2015, some 50,000 undocumented Afghan children have been enrolled in the national education system for the 2015/2016 academic year.

After some 5,000 refugees and migrants were abandoned in the Andaman Sea by smugglers in May 2015, a series of regional meetings took place to address States' concerns with respect to high-risk mixed movements by sea. Common priorities emerging from these discussions in 2015 included: saving lives; combating people smuggling and trafficking; expanding legal pathways for migration; and addressing the root causes of such movements.

## Seeking durable solutions for protracted refugee situations

In 2015, the search for solutions for different populations of concern to UNHCR remained a priority in Asia and the Pacific, in particular for Afghan refugees. With this in mind, the Office dedicated the high-level segment of the 66th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in October 2015 to the Afghan refugee situation to reinvigorate action and mobilize the international community's support for durable solutions for Afghan refugees.

The Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan renewed their commitment to work towards durable solutions and reiterated the importance of the *Solutions strategy for Afghan refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance for host countries* as a key regional, multi-year framework. The high-level segment also confirmed the need for the international community to strengthen its efforts and advocacy to help remove the fundamental causes of protracted displacement in Afghanistan.

UNHCR continued to facilitate the voluntary return of Afghan refugees in 2015. More than 58,000 Afghan refugees returned to their home country during the year, the vast majority from Pakistan.

A major milestone was reached in 2015 with the resettlement of more

than 100,000 refugees from Bhutan. UNHCR, together with IOM, facilitated their departure from camps in Nepal to third countries. The programme was launched in 2007 and is one of the largest and most successful programmes of its kind.

Following the political developments in Myanmar in 2015, UNHCR stepped up its preparations for the voluntary return of Myanmar refugees from camps in Thailand and other neighbouring countries. Small numbers of spontaneous returns took place during the year, and the Office continues to hold regular consultations and information-sharing on voluntary repatriation with Myanmar refugees, the Governments of Myanmar and Thailand, non-state actors, as well as donor and NGO representatives.

In 2015, UNHCR facilitated the return of some 450 Sri Lankan refugees from India. These refugee returnees benefitted from repatriation and transport grants, non-food items and access to legal advice on housing, land and property issues.

For the large numbers of refugees living in urban and semi-urban areas in the region, UNHCR adopted a pragmatic approach to solutions. This included promoting the self-reliance and empowerment of refugee communities, pending a durable solution; advocating with States, regional entities and other partners; and seeking to ensure the inclusion of refugees in existing services run by national authorities or other UN entities.

## Ensuring protection and durable solutions for IDPs

Promising political developments for peace in Myanmar may prove significant for the 416,000 people who remained internally displaced in different parts of the country. Many of these IDPs were forced to flee violence in Rakhine state in 2012, but they also included some 100,000 people who were displaced in Kachin and northern Shan states following the resumption of violence there in 2011. UNHCR led the combined cluster for shelter, camp coordination and camp management, and non-food items, and coordinated the protection sector. The Office also pursued efforts to find durable solutions for IDPs as part of the inter-agency response.

In Pakistan, almost 700,000 IDPs had returned home since March 2015, when the Government of Pakistan began large-scale return operations to Khyber Agency, South Waziristan and North Waziristan. UNHCR supported the Government by providing tents and basic household items to IDP returnees. Throughout the year, the Office also assisted some 230,000 people who had been displaced to Afghanistan's Khost Province from North Waziristan in Pakistan a year earlier. UNHCR distributed tents to 9,300 families and non-food items to 7,250 families. The Office also helped families prepare for winter by providing them with blankets, firewood and winter clothes.

The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan led to the internal displacement of more than 330,000 Afghans in 2015 – a 70 per cent increase compared to 2014. This added to the existing internally displaced population of nearly 1.2 million people, present in 31 out of the country's 34 provinces. UNHCR continued working with the Afghan Government on the implementation of the national IDP policy.

The Office contributed to emergency response operations in the aftermath of Nepal's devastating earthquake in May 2015. Within 72 hours of the quake, UNHCR distributed 11,000 tarpaulins and 4,000 solar lamps to affected families, in coordination with local security forces. In addition, through four cargo flights from Dubai, 42,000 tarpaulins were delivered to provide life-saving shelter for 200,000 people living in the open and 8,000 solar lamps to provide greater security and protection for families living without power. The Office also helped launch a radio programme providing psychosocial support to more than 2 million affected and traumatized Nepalese listeners.

In the Philippines, UNHCR continued to monitor the condition of more than 160,000 displaced people in Mindanao, make referrals to relevant services as needed, and support the provision of immediate birth registration to enable children to access government services.

## Preventing and reducing statelessness

Addressing statelessness remained a key strategic priority in Asia and the Pacific, with at least 1.5 million people in the region falling within UNHCR's statelessness mandate.

In 2015, solutions to protracted statelessness situations continued to progress in South-East Asia. In December 2015, new figures released by the Government of Thailand showed that more than 18,000 stateless people had acquired Thai nationality since the beginning of 2012.

In the southern Philippines, more than 7,000 people of Indonesian descent were registered and provided with legal assistance in a joint project undertaken by the Governments of Indonesia and the Philippines, together with UNHCR. More than 600 people were found to be eligible to have either their Indonesian or Filipino nationality confirmed.

In Malaysia, a UNHCR partner community organization registered more than 11,000 stateless people of Tamil origin since mid-2014; at least 5,600 applications for nationality were made with the assistance of community-based paralegals and some 450 applicants acquired Malaysian nationality.

UNHCR promotes the inclusion of births, marriages and deaths for all populations of concern in Asia and the Pacific in national civil registration systems. Since May 2015, the Office has been a member of the inter-governmental regional steering group, which supported States in implementing their commitments under the 2014 ministerial declaration and the *Regional action framework on civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific*. These instruments were adopted by States at a ministerial conference in Bangkok in November 2014.

The Central Asia subregion made remarkable progress towards resolving existing cases of statelessness, as well as in preventing new cases. In 2015, some 7,800 individuals obtained citizenship or had their nationality confirmed. In Turkmenistan, important strides were made towards resolving statelessness through Government naturalization programmes. Draft amendments to the Law on Citizenship were under review by the Kyrgyz Parliament, while the Law on Citizenship in Tajikistan was amended and signed. The Government of Tajikistan formed an inter-ministerial working group on statelessness and developed a multi-year national action plan for the profiling and registration of, and provision of solutions for, stateless people and those at risk of becoming stateless by no later than 2018.



## CONSTRAINTS

The lack of a legal and institutional framework to anchor protection and solutions in many of the situations in Asia and the Pacific continued to pose a major challenge to UNHCR. Of the 45 countries in the region, only 20 had acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Detention and other restrictive treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees continued to be of concern to the Office, including the policy responses of some States to mixed movements by sea.

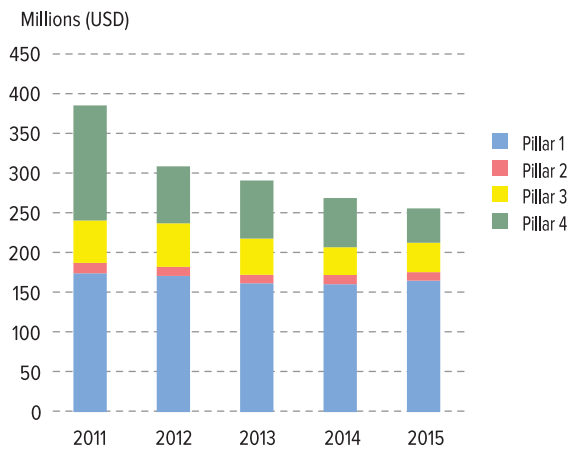
Given the increasing need for protection and solutions for those affected by conflict worldwide, third-country resettlement was deemed unrealistic for most refugees in the Asia and Pacific region. Therefore, regional

priorities for UNHCR included identifying alternatives to detention of asylum-seekers; alternatives to individual status determination; and mechanisms to provide protection to people of concern in the region beyond third-country resettlement, including bilateral labour migration agreements.

In parts of South-West Asia, insecurity combined with deteriorating political and socio-economic conditions affected UNHCR's operations. Humanitarian access was severely limited, and staff security remained a concern.

Meanwhile, in parts of South-East Asia, the ability of humanitarian organizations to work independently and impartially was a challenge, seriously hampering programme implementation throughout 2015. ■

## Expenditure in Asia and the Pacific | 2011-2015



## Financial information

UNHCR's requirements in Asia and the Pacific remained constant, at around USD 550-600 million, for the previous five years.

The 2015 budget for the region, approved by the Executive Committee in 2014, initially amounted to approximately USD 565 million.

At the end of the year, the revised budget for 2015 rose to some USD 596 million, mainly because of additional requirements in the amount of USD 28 million, as presented in the supplementary appeals for the refugee influx from Pakistan's North Waziristan Agency to Afghanistan (USD 16 million) and the Bay of Bengal and Andaman sea initiative (USD 12 million).

Despite this, total voluntary contributions received for the region amounted to USD 207.1 million, leaving almost 65 per cent of the region's needs unmet. In this financial context, UNHCR scaled back operations and made difficult decisions to decrease the level of activity in some operations and close some field offices, particularly affecting Central Asia. More importantly, protection-related activities – including registration, monitoring and refugee status determination – were scaled down, causing some delays and backlogs. The overall situation hampered UNHCR's ability to adequately respond to the protection and assistance needs of populations of concern in Asia and the Pacific.

## BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE IN ASIA AND PACIFIC | USD

<i>Operation</i>		Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	<b>Total</b>
<b>SOUTH-WEST ASIA</b>						
Afghanistan	Budget	66,838,574	0	56,925,099	26,880,214	150,643,886
	Expenditure	42,224,188	0	17,783,147	10,347,436	70,354,771
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Budget	72,823,782	0	0	0	72,823,782
	Expenditure	21,931,324	0	0	0	21,931,324
Pakistan	Budget	58,402,599	304,241	49,613,617	28,382,173	136,702,630
	Expenditure	27,959,279	206,098	18,788,611	17,310,394	64,264,381
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>198,064,955</b>	<b>304,241</b>	<b>106,538,716</b>	<b>55,262,387</b>	<b>360,170,298</b>
	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>92,114,790</b>	<b>206,098</b>	<b>36,571,757</b>	<b>27,657,830</b>	<b>156,550,476</b>
<b>CENTRAL ASIA</b>						
Kazakhstan Regional Office <sup>1</sup>	Budget	4,742,400	2,251,919	0	0	6,994,319
	Expenditure	2,588,094	1,766,785	0	0	4,354,879
Kyrgyzstan	Budget	1,824,681	780,157	0	1,657,546	4,262,384
	Expenditure	1,240,019	641,912	0	1,263,532	3,145,462
Tajikistan	Budget	2,180,013	538,265	0	0	2,718,279
	Expenditure	1,255,147	474,879	0	0	1,730,026
Turkmenistan	Budget	272,335	422,289	0	0	694,624
	Expenditure	180,228	254,533	0	0	434,761
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>9,019,429</b>	<b>3,992,630</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,657,546</b>	<b>14,669,605</b>
	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>5,263,488</b>	<b>3,138,109</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,263,532</b>	<b>9,665,129</b>
<b>SOUTH ASIA</b>						
India	Budget	14,612,301	101,898	0	0	14,714,199
	Expenditure	6,058,437	80,624	0	0	6,139,060
Nepal	Budget	9,528,129	1,794,026	2,523,477	3,933,464	17,779,095
	Expenditure	5,723,655	351,813	493,324	3,689,704	10,258,497
Sri Lanka	Budget	6,274,273	119,799	0	1,268,390	7,662,461
	Expenditure	3,878,635	46,040	0	1,202,580	5,127,254
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>30,414,703</b>	<b>2,015,723</b>	<b>2,523,477</b>	<b>5,201,854</b>	<b>40,155,756</b>
	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>15,660,726</b>	<b>478,477</b>	<b>493,324</b>	<b>4,892,284</b>	<b>21,524,812</b>

Operation		Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	Total
<b>SOUTH-EAST ASIA</b>						
Bangladesh	Budget	15,175,575	8,731	0	0	15,184,305
	Expenditure	7,569,132	7,651	0	0	7,576,783
Indonesia	Budget	8,430,233	89,942	0	0	8,520,175
	Expenditure	4,107,127	61,184	0	0	4,168,311
Malaysia	Budget	17,462,795	1,237,815	0	0	18,700,610
	Expenditure	8,409,193	813,173	0	0	9,222,366
Myanmar	Budget	25,313,692	15,998,084	0	31,460,944	72,772,720
	Expenditure	5,557,635	3,864,469	0	8,193,585	17,615,690
Philippines	Budget	934,787	1,077,090	0	3,465,894	5,477,770
	Expenditure	687,007	858,615	0	1,108,430	2,654,052
Thailand	Budget	37,165,542	1,197,917	0	0	38,363,459
	Expenditure	13,515,991	517,851	0	0	14,033,842
Thailand Regional Office <sup>2</sup>	Budget	9,531,580	797,647	0	0	10,329,227
	Expenditure	3,818,123	453,297	0	0	4,271,420
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>114,014,204</b>	<b>20,407,225</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>34,926,838</b>	<b>169,348,267</b>
	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>43,664,209</b>	<b>6,576,240</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9,302,015</b>	<b>59,542,464</b>
<b>EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC</b>						
Australia Regional Office <sup>3</sup>	Budget	1,976,522	0	0	0	1,976,522
	Expenditure	1,574,036	0	0	0	1,574,036
China	Budget	3,951,597	188,448	0	0	4,140,045
	Expenditure	3,275,575	126,110	0	0	3,401,685
Japan	Budget	3,401,262	68,584	0	0	3,469,847
	Expenditure	2,624,294	54,686	0	0	2,678,980
Republic of Korea	Budget	1,993,552	168,714	0	0	2,162,266
	Expenditure	1,167,971	100,006	0	0	1,267,977
Regional activities	Budget	629,062	0	0	0	629,062
	Expenditure	223,625	0	0	0	223,625
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>11,951,996</b>	<b>425,746</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12,377,742</b>
	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>8,865,501</b>	<b>280,801</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9,146,302</b>
<b>Total Asia and the Pacific</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>363,465,287</b>	<b>27,145,565</b>	<b>109,062,193</b>	<b>97,048,624</b>	<b>596,721,669</b>
	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>165,568,715</b>	<b>10,679,724</b>	<b>37,065,082</b>	<b>43,115,661</b>	<b>256,429,182</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes activities in Uzbekistan

<sup>2</sup> Includes activities in Cambodia, Mongolia and Viet Nam

<sup>3</sup> Includes activities in New Zealand, the Pacific Island Countries and Papua New Guinea

## VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO ASIA AND THE PACIFIC | USD

<i>Donor</i>	Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	All pillars	<b>Total</b>
Australia	3,018,419				3,051,106	6,069,525
Bangladesh		12,000				12,000
Canada					6,294,256	6,294,256
Central Emergency Response Fund	2,206,515	160,501		4,411,340		6,778,356
China					141,841	141,841
Common Humanitarian Fund for Afghanistan	700,117					700,117
Denmark	50,000				9,095,000	9,145,000
European Union	10,706,170	289,816	949,348	1,709,665	465,872	14,120,872
Finland					1,625,135	1,625,135
France					200,000	200,000
Germany	6,425,787		3,192,848			9,618,635
Indonesia		2,256				2,256
Italy	203,804					203,804
Japan	6,566,000	503,010	1,121,304	3,294,137	3,327,557	14,812,008
Kazakhstan					187,873	187,873
Kyrgyzstan					71,154	71,154
Luxembourg	250,313				1,001,252	1,251,564
Norway				445,803	4,041,527	4,487,330
Private donors in Australia	250,000			448,639		698,639
Private donors in Canada	31,238			200,687		231,925
Private donors in China (Hong Kong SAR)				463,370		463,370
Private donors in France				66		66
Private donors in Germany	224,972	224,972				449,944
Private donors in Greece				332		332
Private donors in Italy	27,534			630,657	167	658,359
Private donors in Japan	85,926			487,116	102,071	675,113
Private donors in Kazakhstan				30,000		30,000
Private donors in Kuwait				993		993
Private donors in Norway				311,850		311,850
Private donors in Philippines				6,250		6,250
Private donors in Portugal				66,372		66,372
Private donors in Qatar	762,099					762,099
Private donors in Republic of Korea	22,505			151,922		174,427
Private donors in Romania	2,765					2,765
Private donors in Saudi Arabia				200,000		200,000
Private donors in Singapore				100,000		100,000
Private donors in Spain	43,739			685,292		729,030
Private donors in Sweden	26			163,318		163,344
Private donors in Switzerland				67,529		67,529
Private donors in Thailand	3,738,364			46,542		3,784,906
Private donors in the Netherlands	2,065,034					2,065,034
Private donors in the United Arab Emirates	272,193			6,853		279,046
Private donors in the United Kingdom	6,252			1,838		8,090
Private donors in the United States of America	33,148			480,629	5,790	519,567

<i>Donor</i>	Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	All pillars	<b>Total</b>
Republic of Korea	2,000,000		3,200,000	1,800,000	100,000	7,100,000
Russian Federation	100,000					100,000
Sweden					834,824	834,824
Switzerland	650,364			910,510		1,560,874
Turkmenistan					94,090	94,090
United Nations Development Programme		114,130	717,752			831,882
United Nations Peacebuilding Fund				1,699,090		1,699,090
United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS	549,361					549,361
United States of America	5,650,000			14,100,000	86,450,000	106,200,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>46,642,645</b>	<b>1,306,685</b>	<b>9,181,252</b>	<b>32,920,801</b>	<b>117,089,516</b>	<b>207,140,899</b>

Note: Includes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions to Pillars 3 and 4, supplementary budgets and the "New or additional activities – mandate-related" (NAM) Reserve