

Afghanistan
Islamic Republic of Iran
Pakistan



Afghan men in Mazar-i-Sharif boarding buses to Iran and Pakistan

South-West Asia



| OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- The year 2008 saw more than 278,000 registered Afghans return to their country with UNHCR assistance. All benefited from a USD 100 return and reintegration cash grant to meet their basic needs during the first months after return.
- The Government of Afghanistan and the international community endorsed the mainstreaming of returnee reintegration needs in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) at the Kabul Conference in November 2008. This is expected to lead to increased support for returnees in national development programmes.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran re-registered some 936,000 Afghans and began to issue work permits to registered refugees towards the end of the year.
- The Government of Pakistan confirmed it would review a three-year plan that foresaw the return of all Afghans by 2009. The authorities were also considering an extension of validity of the proof of residence (PoR) cards up to 2012.
- Additional resources were made available to support host countries addressing the needs of Afghans and hosting communities. For instance, registration data was updated in Pakistan. Under the Refugee-Affected and Hosting Areas programme (RAHA), health projects benefited both Afghans and local communities. In Iran, a contribution was made to the registration and joint programme on education and health.
- UNHCR provided a rapid emergency response to conflict-affected internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP), mobilizing additional staff and launching a special budget. As a result, more than 139,000 IDPs were registered and assisted to meet their basic needs.



Working environment

The South-West Asia region, more specifically Afghanistan and Pakistan, has been affected by a deterioration in security and political instability, leading to displacement and population movements. These conditions constrained the operating environment for humanitarian organizations in Afghanistan and Pakistan at a time when the need for such assistance was increasing.

The intensification of the conflict in NWFP caused hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes in the border regions. In response, the UN system launched a consolidated appeal to address IDP needs in 2008. It was predicted that the initial planning figure of 320,000 IDPs would be surpassed in early 2009.

The deteriorating economic, political and security situation in Pakistan led 278,000 registered Afghans to repatriate, exceeding the planned figure of 220,000.

Challenges to returnee reintegration increased, not only due to worsening security but also because of the rising cost of living and limited employment opportunities. In a worrying trend observed in 2008, approximately 28,000 repatriated Afghans remained displaced in difficult temporary circumstances as they were unable to return to their places of origin due to insecurity, tribal enmity, landlessness or lack of livelihood opportunities.

At the time of writing more than 5.7 million Afghans had returned to their homeland, 4.3 million with the assistance of UNHCR. This has increased Afghanistan's estimated population by 20 per cent, compared to 2002, and placed great strains on the country's absorption capacity. At the Kabul Conference on Returnee Reintegration the Government and the international community decided to integrate returnee reintegration needs into national

development planning to make returns sustainable. Some 2.6 million registered Afghans remained in the South-West Asia region.

While the 2002-2005 period of mass returns was influenced by improving conditions in Afghanistan, this is no longer the case. Since the deterioration in security in 2006, voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan has dropped markedly - even though it remained the largest repatriation operation in the world for the sixth year running. As voluntary repatriation is increasingly influenced by conditions in host countries, it becomes more difficult to predict, and requires emergency preparedness to manage sudden returnee influxes.

Achievements and impact

UNHCR increased its engagement with host countries to support the continued stay of Afghans until conditions allow for their return to Afghanistan. Pakistan hosted the largest refugee population worldwide in 2008, and the Islamic Republic of Iran the third largest.

With Pakistan confronted by a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in 2008, UNHCR helped the authorities to register some 140,000 IDPs living in and outside camps in NWFP. The registration will continue in 2009 as IDP numbers continued to rise. By the end of the year, the majority of the camp population had received non-food items, and the distribution of such items to host families and IDPs in rental accommodation had begun. Despite the security constraints, UNHCR was able to reach some 80 per cent of the population of concern.

Towards the end of the year, in a very welcome move, the Government of Pakistan indicated that the Three-Year Plan, which foresaw all registered Afghans returning in 2009

prior to the expiry of their PoR cards, would be reviewed. The Government also indicated that it is considering a longer-term strategy for the management of Afghans in Pakistan and the extension of the validity of PoR cards beyond 2009.

The preparatory phase of the RAHA proposal under the UN Delivering as One initiative was finalized and is expected to be launched in 2009. UNHCR's implementation of a health and education start-up component of RAHA continued in the provinces of Balochistan and NWFP. Additional support was given for a Registration Information Project for Afghan Citizens (RIPAC) to update and modify PoR cards. The analysis of the registration data will be used to better target assistance to extremely vulnerable groups.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the authorities completed the on-line Amayesh III re-registration project. Some 936,000 Afghans were registered, providing some level of continued protection for registered Afghans in Iran. However, the re-registration did not include the 80,000 previously registered Afghans in Sistan-Balochistan province, a no-go-area where special provisions were made for Afghans to relocate or repatriate. Approximately 50,000 Afghans did not re-register, while 30,000 opted to relocate and their current status has to be verified. None received Amayesh III registration cards, but all remained refugees under international law. In a welcome development, the issuance of work permits to registered Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran has commenced.

UNHCR increased its engagement in Iran, identifying an additional USD 3 million above the ExCom initial budget to support the Amayesh re-registration process and a joint programme on education and health targeting refugees. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has agreed to share the database with UNHCR. This will enable the Office to make a better analysis of the population and better plan to advocate for support to address the needs of the urban refugee population and identify those most in need of resettlement.

In Afghanistan, the Kabul Conference secured the support of the Government and the international community for the integration of returnee needs into the planning and implementation of national development programmes, as foreseen in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) for 2008-2013. It is hoped that additional investment in the areas of highest return will address the sectoral gaps identified in the costed Refugee Return and IDP (RRI) strategy of the ANDS presented at the Kabul Conference.

The Office continues to work with donors to enhance the strategic use of resettlement for this protracted refugee situation.

Constraints

Deteriorating security conditions and shrinking humanitarian space were the key constraints in the region.

Operations

Details of operations in **Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran** and **Pakistan** can be found in the respective country chapters.

Financial information

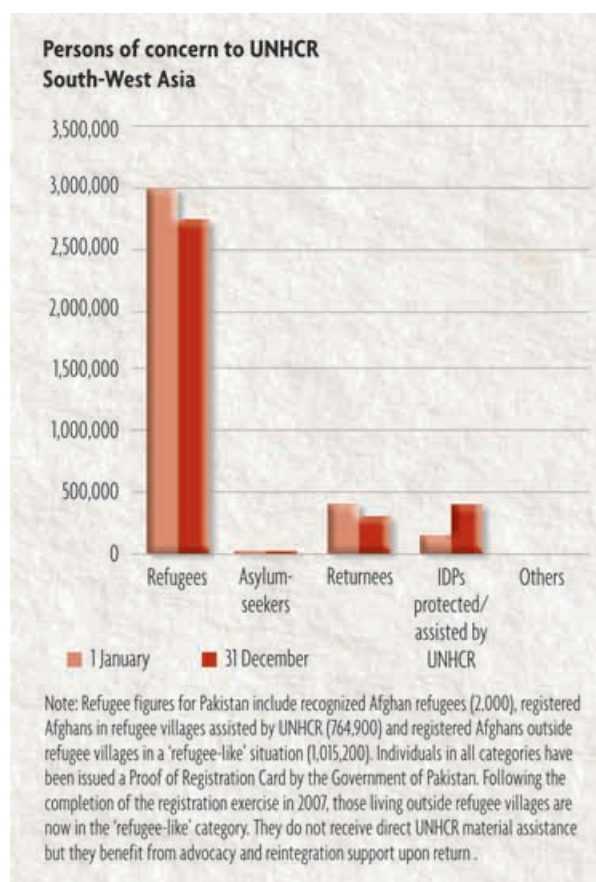
Substantial additional resources were provided for South-West Asia in 2008, with an additional USD 34.1 million allocated to the region above the original budget of USD 80.7 million. This brought the end-of-year total to USD 114.8 million, excluding the supplementary budget for Pakistan.

UNHCR received generous donor support for the Afghanistan situation. An additional USD 27.6 million was made available to provide cash grants for the higher than anticipated number of returnees and to pay for the rising cost of the shelter programme, more expensive fuel and additional investments in security. The budget rose from an initial ExCom-approved USD 49.8 million to USD 77.4 million.

Resources were also made available to expand UNHCR's operations in host countries. In Pakistan, an additional USD 3.6 million was allocated to support the RIPAC and to meet security needs. In Iran, USD 3 million more was made available to support the Amayesh III registration and a joint project with the authorities on education and health.

Since 2002, UNHCR has invested USD 500,000,000 in the Afghanistan situation. At the time of writing more than 4.3 million Afghans had been assisted to return home in the largest such operation in the history of UNHCR.

A supplementary IDP budget of USD 16.5 million for Pakistan was 82 per cent funded.



Budget and expenditure in South-West Asia (USD)

South-West Asia	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Afghanistan	75,686,250	0	75,686,250	74,514,400	0	74,514,400
Islamic Republic of Iran	15,051,830	1,300,000	16,351,830	14,857,756	705,461	15,563,217
Pakistan	21,993,276	15,526,561	37,519,837	20,644,536	10,011,574	30,656,110
Regional activities ¹	1,490,225	0	1,490,225	1,331,976	0	1,331,976
Total	114,221,581	16,826,561	131,048,142	111,348,668	10,717,036	122,065,704

Note: Excludes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities - mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.

¹ Includes capacity development programme for cross-border Afghan refugees students and repatriation of Afghans from various countries

Voluntary contributions to South-West Asia (USD)

Earmarking	Donor	Annual Budget	Supplementary Budget	Total
Afghanistan	Australia	4,871,324		4,871,324
	Belgium	1,572,327		1,572,327
	Canada	1,949,318		1,949,318
	CERF	1,095,590		1,095,590
	China	401,906		401,906
	Denmark	1,174,168		1,174,168
	European Commission	11,572,778		11,572,778
	France	892,528		892,528
	Germany	8,209,601		8,209,601
	Italy	6,342,403		6,342,403
	Japan	13,500,000		13,500,000
	Netherlands	2,703,000		2,703,000
	Norway	2,340,683		2,340,683
	Australia for UNHCR	41,791		41,791
	Private donors in Italy	2,577		2,577
	Japan Association for UNHCR	313,340		313,340
	Private donors in Japan	6,101		6,101
	<i>España con ACNUR</i>	1,077,824		1,077,824
	Private donors in the United Kingdom	2,010		2,010
	USA for UNHCR	89,514		89,514
	Switzerland	744,695		744,695
United Kingdom	1,948,676		1,948,676	
United States of America	131,216		131,216	
Afghanistan Subtotal		60,983,368		60,983,368
Islamic Republic of Iran	European Commission	2,188,632		2,188,632
	Japan	1,500,000		1,500,000
	Netherlands	59,468		59,468
	Statoil Iran	37,134		37,134
	The Mexican Charity Bazar (Iran)	11,994		11,994
	Spain	323,834		323,834
	United States of America	88,799		88,799
Islamic Republic of Iran Subtotal		4,209,862		4,209,862
Pakistan	Australia	502,805		502,805
	Canada		899,420	899,420
	CERF	1,100,000	1,950,648	3,050,648
	European Commission	1,630,101		1,630,101
	France		135,569	135,569
	Germany	79,983		79,983
	Italy	2,300,970		2,300,970
	Japan	2,700,000	3,800,821	6,500,821
	Netherlands		1,256,756	1,256,756
	Spain	323,834		323,834
	Sweden		351,208	351,208
	United Kingdom	367,647		367,647
	United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)		265,737	265,737
United States of America	251,199	3,999,000	4,250,199	
Pakistan Subtotal		9,256,539	12,659,159	21,915,698
South-West Asia Subregion	Sweden	7,858,243		7,858,243
	United States of America	24,156,000		24,156,000
South-West Asia Subtotal		32,014,243		32,014,243
Grand Total		106,464,012	12,659,159	119,123,171

Note: Contributions shown exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities - mandate related" (NAM) Reserve.