

“Returnees and Refugees” Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries

Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Recent Developments

The Bonn Agreement of December 2001 and the establishment of the internationally recognised Afghanistan Interim Administration have set a new context within the UN which will promote solutions for the estimated five million Afghans uprooted from their homes. As of February 2002, there are over one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan. The Afghan refugee caseload now includes over two million in Pakistan, 1.5 million in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 200,000 in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and several hundred thousand in other locations.

UNHCR has launched a multi-year regional return and re-integration plan to contribute to the finding of lasting solutions to displacement. This plan is being organised within the humanitarian and reconstruction framework led by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, in co-ordination with the Interim Administration, other UN agencies and non-governmental actors. In addition, UNHCR is concluding tripartite agreements with neighbouring countries and the Afghanistan government, based on universally accepted repatriation principles.

Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan from 1988 to 1989, UNHCR and its partners have actively pursued repatriation in accordance with the Geneva Accords. Repatriation activities have not, however, so far been sustainable due to the frequently changing political

and security environment. Nevertheless, UNHCR and its partners continue to support the return of millions of uprooted Afghans back to their country of origin. These people have the potential to contribute significantly to the reconstruction of the country and the rebuilding of civil society. Sustainable progress will depend upon increased law and order, improved security, a successful outcome of efforts towards establishing a broad-based and inclusive government, and greater community re-integration. It also requires that countries of asylum respect internationally recognised legal frameworks and agreements which promote an orderly and safe voluntary repatriation. For 2002, the humanitarian agencies are planning on the basis of 1.2 million returns, including up to 400,000 IDPs.

UNHCR will pursue its mandate to provide assistance and international protection in Afghanistan as well as in neighbouring countries of asylum. In Pakistan, 1.5 million Afghans living in more than 200 refugee villages and camps receive assistance from UNHCR and its partners for water, sanitation, education and community services. The Government of Pakistan estimates that over 800,000 Afghans reside in urban areas. UNHCR will continue its protection and assistance activities for the refugee villages and camps and is exploring targeted community-based assistance for urban refugees. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghan refugees accommodated in camps will continue to receive similar types of assistance as refugees in camps in

Pakistan. In Central Asia, more than 15,000 Afghan refugees will be assisted and capacity-building activities will be continued with local authorities, as well as measures to strengthen asylum mechanisms.

Strategic Objectives

Under the overall co-ordination and framework of UN agencies, UNHCR will promote a multi-year, regional repatriation and return plan, while promoting initial community re-integration and ensuring asylum to those in continued need of international protection. The plan will be based on the following objectives:

- Ensure co-ordinated preparedness for assisted voluntary repatriation of refugees and the return of IDPs with all the actors involved. UNHCR will seek to conclude tripartite agreements with Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries to ensure a safe and orderly voluntary repatriation.
- Facilitate the voluntary return of 400,000 Afghan refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 400,000 refugees from Pakistan.
- Establish to the extent possible, reliable information and profiles of refugee and IDP groups, in order to develop and diversify strategies for voluntary repatriation, return and re-integration.
- Ensure participation and inclusion of extremely vulnerable individuals and their families in the return and re-integration process, safeguarding their special needs.
- Facilitate and – whenever necessary – assist the voluntary repatriation of refugees and voluntary return of IDPs in safety and dignity, and in accordance with recognised international standards.
- Identify Afghans in need of protection and ensure that they continue to be given asylum in host countries in the region.
- Through systematic monitoring, share information with the international community about the situation of

returnees, their needs and those of their communities -with a view to ensuring sustained returns.

- Help returnees meet their immediate needs during the initial period of re-integration. Ensure that medium and longer-term assistance to returnees and communities is addressed through multi-sectoral and integrated programmes, in close co-ordination with all other actors and activities, including development activities.
- Contribute to the realisation of the basic human rights of refugees, returnees including returning IDPs through the international legal framework for repatriation;
- Support the rebuilding of Afghan institutions (especially those responsible for the return and re-integration of uprooted populations), and promote the reconciliation of divided communities.

Operations

The Supplementary Programmes in **Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran** and in **Pakistan** are described in separate chapters.

Recent developments in Afghanistan have allowed the Office to resume its protection monitoring and assistance functions in the country, in support of internally displaced persons and returnee populations. UNHCR continues to work towards providing protection and solution-oriented assistance to newly arrived Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, as well as to existing refugees in those countries.

It is anticipated that for the immediate future, and in view of prevailing insecurity in some areas, Afghans are likely to return to relatively stable areas either spontaneously or with UNHCR assistance. Over 2,000 people a day have already started to return spontaneously from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. In January, despite the ongoing insecurities, the total number of returnees from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran exceeded 150,000. As the situation becomes more

stabilised, the Office will progressively expand the areas for facilitated return. Furthermore, as the political and security situation stabilises across wider areas of the country, UNHCR will move towards promoting voluntary repatriation, placing emphasis on a regional approach. In the best case scenario, up to some 1.2 million people will return. However, given the present circumstances, UNHCR has initially budgeted for the needs of some 1.2 million people and will seek further funding should this number be exceeded.

Given the magnitude of the Afghan refugee population (almost 20 per cent of the entire Afghan population are refugees), there is no doubt that repatriation will considerably influence the political and economic environment in Afghanistan. The demographic profile of the population, as well as economic opportunities have changed during the long conflict. Many Afghans from rural areas have become urbanised. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's physical infrastructure has been shattered. Packages for return without initial rehabilitation assistance will not be sufficient and rehabilitation assistance will be required for some time to come. In this context, the Office advocates a multi-track approach – humanitarian assistance coupled with support to the initial rehabilitation of the areas of return, including measures to encourage the early involvement of all actors concerned. To further support the re-integration of returnees, UNHCR will co-ordinate closely with those agencies involved in rehabilitation and reconstruction activities.

Given the fluid situation inside Afghanistan, it will be important for UNHCR to maintain a minimum level of preparedness across the region. A minimum level of 465,000 non-food items are stocked in the neighbouring countries (both in South West Asia and in Central Asia) and will be adjusted in accordance with projected needs. Stockpiles in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran are maintained at 300,000 and 80,000 respectively, with the understanding that

they can be utilised both for refugees and for assistance in Afghanistan. The use of stocks from the regional contingency stockpiles will be determined based on the prioritisation of needs in the countries of asylum and inside Afghanistan. It is foreseen that this minimum level of preparedness should be maintained until the end of June 2002, and to ensure this, all items taken out of the stockpiles will be replaced.

A refugee influx into **Central Asia** is considered unlikely, but cannot be ruled out entirely.

In-country stockpiles have also been established in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for possible influxes of minorities. Recent political and military changes have reduced the risk of such refugee movements, but internal divisions in Afghanistan could lead once again to displacement both within and outside the country. The offices in Central Asia continue to monitor the situation closely.

The Central Asian Republics serve as valuable entry points for operations into Afghanistan, in particular, Termez in Uzbekistan, which is a logistics and administrative hub. In order to respond to the enormous needs in northern and central Afghanistan, the preparedness stockpile in Central Asia has been increased to a total of 85,000 non-food item rations (15,000 in Tajikistan, 5,000 in Turkmenistan and 65,000 in Uzbekistan).

Involvement with IDPs

Under the leadership of the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and in support of a more co-ordinated inter-agency approach to internal displacement in Afghanistan, UNHCR involved itself with IDPs in order to strengthen the "Afghanistan" prong of UNHCR's two-pronged approach in the region; 1) to maintain the asylum regimes in the neighbouring countries; and 2) to provide the needed humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan. The decision was made as

UNHCR's expertise could be particularly relevant to meet the protection needs of those affected and because the IDP situation in Afghanistan meets the criteria outlined in the "Operational Guidelines for UNHCR's Involvement with IDPs." UNHCR's involvement with IDPs subscribes to the following criteria:

- The IDP situation is relevant to UNHCR's mandate and expertise;
- Formal requirements established by General Assembly Resolutions have been met;
- Adequate additional resources are available;
- Policy considerations warrant UNHCR's involvement;
- Operational considerations are conducive.

The events of 11 September 2001 and their consequences have greatly affected the ongoing inter-Afghan conflict in an environment already devastated by economic collapse and drought. This has caused new waves of internal displacement, mainly from urban to rural areas and towards the borders, with large segments of the urban population leaving the main cities of Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad and (to a lesser extent) Herat. Monitoring of population movements will be vital to identify numbers, composition and intentions of displaced persons; to provide the baseline data for the identification of vulnerable groups; and to support a sustainable return.

Budget

UNHCR has appealed for USD 271,068,213 in the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People 2002 (ITAP). Of this amount, USD 178, 772,775 represents the 2002 Supplementary Programme Budget, USD 39,837,695 represents the Supplementary Programme Budget / Expenditure for October to December 2001, and the balance of USD 52,457,743 represents the 2002 Annual Programme Budget for the Afghan Operation.

The following table reflects only the funds needed for the UNHCR Supplementary Programme budget of the Afghan Operation.

BUDGET (USD)

Countries / Activities	Afghanistan	The Islamic Republic of Iran	Pakistan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Other Countries	Headquarters	TOTAL
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	11,004,913	1,107,397	7,919,687	545,138	594,777	520,646	6,246	0	21,698,804
Community Services	612,000	10,000	669,698	0	58,700	5,270	0	0	1,355,668
Crop Production	4,610,000	0	0	10,000	0	0	0	0	4,620,000
Domestic Needs	7,707,100	1,291,080	2,172,498	214,200	47,450	477,578	301,610	0	12,211,516
Education	1,166,000	0	0	28,000	5,300	45,000	0	0	1,244,300
Food	162,000	907,495	517,056	0	0	0	0	0	1,586,551
Forestry	320,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	320,000
Health / Nutrition	2,617,500	232,554		30,000	87,000	48,849	0	0	3,015,903
Income Generation	879,000	0	0	12,000	0	0	0	0	891,000
Legal Assistance / Protection	1,348,000	1,912,686	2,962,803	24,500	76,050	3,000	3,000,000	0	9,327,039
Operational Support (to Agencies)	3,767,700	650,000	4,392,051	33,349	27,368	39,902	3,709,648	0	12,620,018
Sanitation	0	143,000	471,542	30,000	18,000	0	0	0	662,542
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	38,513,800	196,901	1,828,495	100,000	40,000	0	11,834	0	40,691,030
Transport / Logistics	25,560,785	3,133,502	2,425,295	177,980	155,382	251,495	2,993,756	0	34,698,195
Water	5,851,350	223,780	2,910,677	72,000	80,000	0	0	0	9,137,807
Total Operations	104,120,148	9,808,395	26,269,802	1,277,167	1,190,027	1,391,740	10,023,094	0	154,080,373
Programme Support	15,071,772	1,023,500	802,135	267,241	287,937	657,890	0	6,581,927	24,692,402
TOTAL	119,191,920	10,831,895	27,071,937	1,544,408	1,477,964	2,049,630	10,023,094	6,581,927	178,772,775