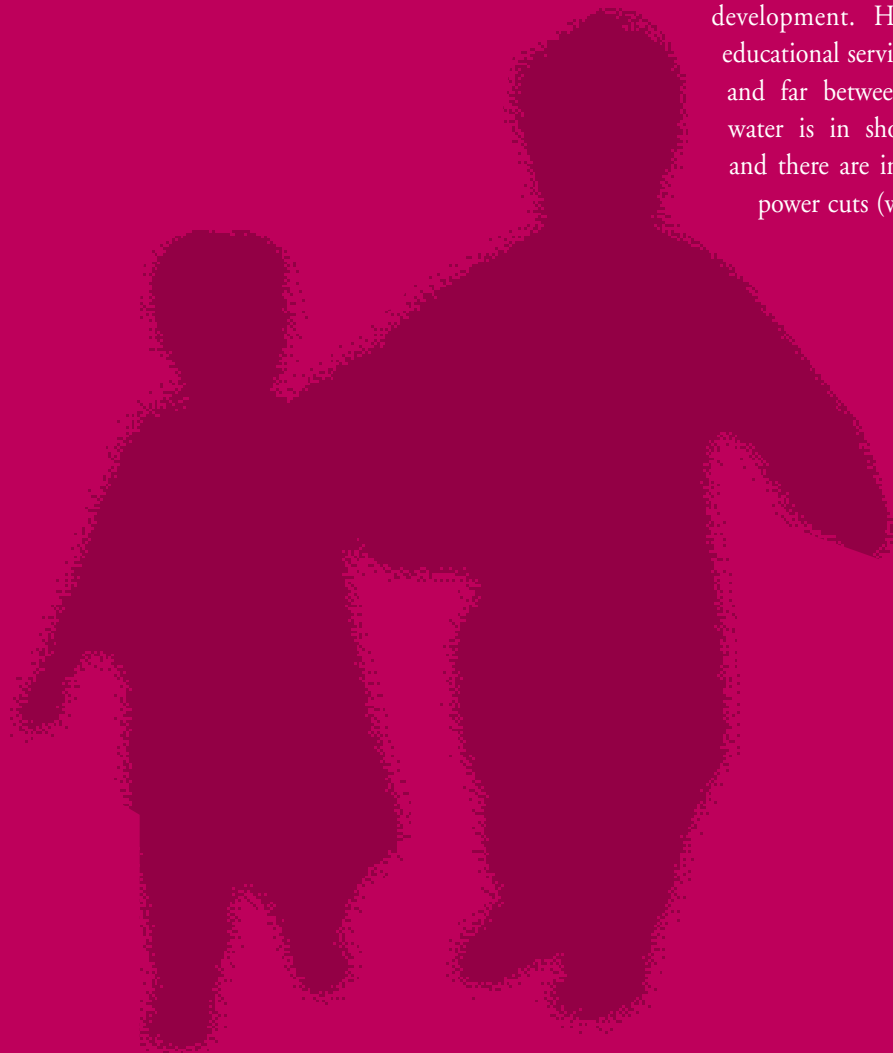


# South - West Asia

## Recent Developments

The civil war in Afghanistan intensified throughout 2000 with the Taliban gaining control of strategically located towns and areas in the north-east, including Tangi, Farkhar, Taloqan and Namakaab in Takhar province and parts of Kunduz province previously under the control of the opposition. The fighting has pushed the opposition deeper into the Farkhar district and Badakhshan province, the last strongholds of the forces led by ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani and former Defence Minister Ahmed Shah Masood. About 60,000 civilians are believed to have been forced into remote and mountainous areas of Takhar and Badakhshan provinces. The UN and NGOs have been distributing food and non-food items to the affected people, who are living out in the open air or in make-shift shelters. Countries in Central Asia have made preparations for a possible influx of up to 100,000 Afghans who are reported to have fled towards the border with Tajikistan. Some 28,000 refugees have recently crossed from north-eastern Afghanistan into Pakistan.

The Taliban now control almost 95 per cent of Afghan territory and the security situation in most areas is relatively calm (apart from the north). However, heavy spending on the war has left very limited resources for the rehabilitation of social infrastructure and economic development. Health and educational services are few and far between, potable water is in short supply, and there are intermittent power cuts (where there

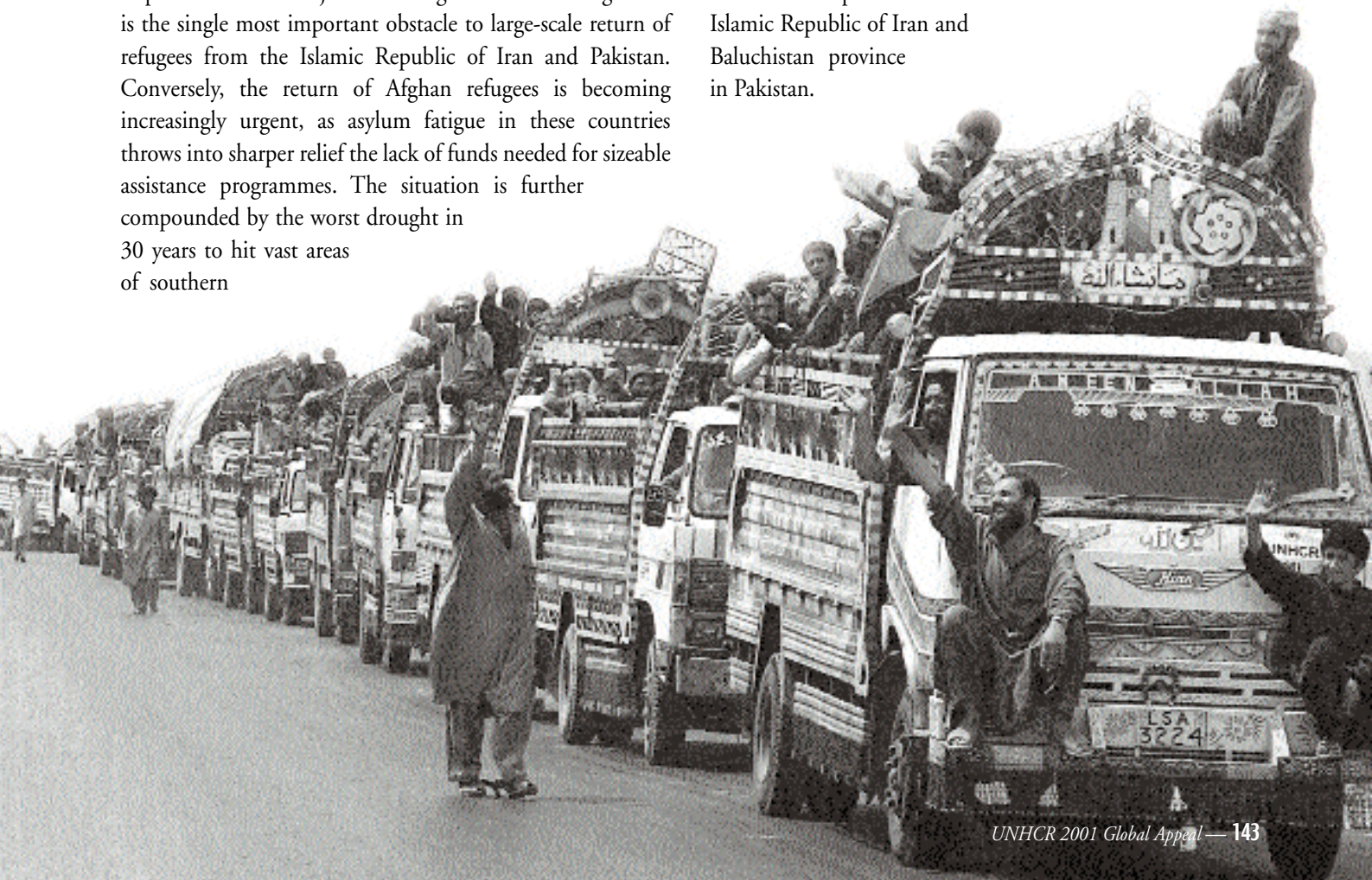


Afghanistan  
Islamic Republic of Iran  
Pakistan



is any electricity at all). The economy shows no sign of improvement and no jobs are being created. This stagnation is the single most important obstacle to large-scale return of refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Conversely, the return of Afghan refugees is becoming increasingly urgent, as asylum fatigue in these countries throws into sharper relief the lack of funds needed for sizeable assistance programmes. The situation is further compounded by the worst drought in 30 years to hit vast areas of southern

and central Afghanistan, the Sistan-Baluchistan province of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Baluchistan province in Pakistan.





UNHCR will continue to deliver basic humanitarian assistance for Afghan, Iraqi and urban refugees in asylum countries, including health services, education, potable water and social services, coupled with activities to encourage self-reliance through income-generating projects and credit schemes. The deteriorating socio-economic situation in the host countries is making it increasingly difficult for refugees to find jobs and become economically independent. However, some refugees are self-sufficient in terms of food and accommodation, at least for the time being. As the long-term local settlement of Afghan refugees is still not a realistic option in the view of host governments, voluntary repatriation continues to be the only solution.

Despite the hardships facing returnees and local residents in Afghanistan, more than 116,000 Afghans have already returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran under the auspices of the Joint UNHCR/Government Programme. Another 68,000 Afghans have repatriated from Pakistan since the beginning of 2000. The Joint Programme was extended for an extra three months to the end of 2000 and an additional 50,000 Afghans are expected to return during that period. The allocation of adequate international resources to return communities in Afghanistan in 2001 will therefore be vital if these returns are to prove sustainable.

The situation in Iraq has not permitted UNHCR to revive the voluntary repatriation operation for Iraqi refugees residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which remains stalled since 1998. A declaration of amnesty by the Iraqi authorities for persons having left the country illegally sparked an increase in the return of individuals to some parts of the country in 2000, but many Iraqi refugees are still hesitant to repatriate due to a number of political, social and economic factors. These include the continuation of UN sanctions against Iraq, disrespect for the rights of minorities and severe economic hardship facing many returnees and local residents in areas of origin.

## Strategic Objectives

UNHCR will focus on continued respect for the rights of refugees, returnees and asylum-seekers in the region. This involves guaranteeing the safe entry of new arrivals and, in the absence of national legislation, establishing a mechanism for the determination of their status in co-ordination with host governments. This effectively means protecting refugees from forced return to their country of origin.

It is estimated that up to 200,000 Afghan refugees will return from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in 2001 (these planning assumptions may change, depending on the evolution of the Afghan conflict). Those refugees who make an informed and voluntary decision to return will receive help from UNHCR. The planning figure for the voluntary return of Iraqi refugees (also with limited support from UNHCR) is 5,000. Inside Afghanistan, the focus will remain on rehabilitating infrastructure in areas of return (including shelter) and providing access to clean water, education and health services as widely as permitted by financial and other constraints.

UNHCR will continue to liaise with European Union members and the Afghan Support Group to implement relevant elements of the EU Plan of Action and other recommendations. UNHCR will continue to work closely with other UN agencies operating in Afghanistan, in the spirit of Principled Common Programming, in order to avoid duplication and make more efficient use of available resources.

## Operations

UNHCR's country programmes in **Afghanistan**, the **Islamic Republic of Iran** and **Pakistan** are described in subsequent chapters.

BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Afghanistan	8,584,506
Islamic Republic of Iran	17,619,929
Pakistan	18,377,812
<b>Total</b>	<b>44,582,247</b>