

AFGHANISTAN

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Identify and address the needs of Afghan refugees returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan through systematic monitoring in their areas of return, ensuring that the process of repatriation adheres to international standards and that basic human rights are respected.
- Facilitate reintegration by helping returnees meet their basic needs during the initial phase after return; implement multi-sectoral Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) to boost the absorption capacity of the local communities and make return sustainable.
- Work closely with other UN agencies and NGOs to ensure that reintegration projects continue after UNHCR withdraws, and that information on returnees' circumstances is shared with all concerned, including countries of asylum.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Renewed fighting between different factions, drought and continuous economic decline affected UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme as UNHCR did not facilitate return to areas likely to be affected by drought or renewed conflict. The internally displaced population (IDPs) grew from 160,000 at the beginning of 2001 to approximately 600,000 by end of June. Based on projections made by the UN Country Team, the number of IDPs resulting from conflict and drought might increase to one million by mid-2002.

As a result of the growing crisis in Afghanistan and the other humanitarian agencies' focus on the emergency needs of IDPs, UNHCR and its partners agreed to

facilitate voluntary return only to targeted areas of origin with sufficient absorption capacity, where conditions are conducive and gaps in reintegration assistance can be addressed jointly. With this in mind, the Office completed a survey of areas targeted for voluntary repatriation taking into account factors such as; food security, prospects for harvest, presence of IDPs, presence of landmines, availability of water and support from other agencies. This survey was shared with other humanitarian agencies to assist them in their intervention strategies. In addition, under UNDP's Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment Programme, a consensus among the main agencies was reached to provide assistance in areas of refugee return to prevent further displacement. A needs assessment was initiated.

UNHCR has been concentrating on the monitoring of returnees, population movements and borders, and has been assisting vulnerable families who returned in the latter part of 2000. At the same time the Office has been making modest preparations for voluntary repatriation in 2001. With regard to the growing IDP problem in Afghanistan, UNHCR has been actively participating in consultations on the response strategy, and has been providing non-food items to IDPs to fill in gaps in the existing assistance activities.

Monitoring Activities

UNHCR has closely monitored returnees who had been deported from neighbouring countries. This allowed the Office to intervene in several cases of family-separation and to facilitate family-reunification. Monitoring also provided information on the situation of Afghans in the neighbouring countries, on the composition of and reasons for movements in both directions. A total of 82,000 individuals and 8,300 families, were deported from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In addition, around 30,000 returned spontaneously and without UNHCR assistance. Most of them were men without their families. The largest number of returns occurred in June, when drastic measures against illegal employment were announced in the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the same time, UNHCR established new monitoring posts at the Pakistan border in Torkham and Spin-Boldak to observe the unassisted returns from Pakistan. The trend of unassisted returns from Pakistan continues. Over 2,000 families crossed the border at Torkham, and the reasons they cited for their return included destruction of their shelters in refugee villages, economic problems and fear of deportation from Pakistan.

To address the basic needs of returnees and raise awareness of their rights among local authorities, UNHCR continued to monitor the situation of returnees in their areas of return and origin. Until May 2001, UNHCR staff conducted individual interviews with 2,410 heads of households, covering a total of 13,146 returnees across the country. Of the interviewed returnees, 52 per cent had returned from Pakistan and 48 per cent from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some 21 per cent cited improved security conditions at their places of origin as their main reason for return, while another 21 per cent referred to economic hardship in exile, 19 per cent to fear of deportation and ten per cent to the desire to reunite with their families. As in the past, most interviewed returnees had been able to return to their place of origin. Although many returnees were living off agricultural work, a growing number reported that they had no regular source of income. While support in the form of shelter and potable water remained the immediate priority for many returnees, their medium to long-term livelihoods were increasingly jeopardised by more general problems of

drought and decay of the economic infrastructure.

As the IDP movements increased, UNHCR established six new posts to monitor and register population movements to and from Kabul and Herat. The preliminary monitoring results prompted agencies to undertake contingency planning. Jointly with WFP, UNHCR deployed an Emergency Response Officer to identify possible IDP scenarios and put emergency response measures into place. For the same purpose, regional workshops in Afghanistan and an inter-agency country-level workshop in Islamabad were organised.

Assistance

Some 5,200 families, who had returned in 2000, received shelter construction materials. In major areas of return, wells were dug, water sources cleaned and gravity-fed water systems installed. Income-generating activities, such as the production of quilts and children's clothes are ongoing. A total of 36 QIPs are presently being carried out, benefiting approximately 29,000 returnees. In addition, plans have been finalised for the construction of 247 wells, 351 bathhouses and 351 latrines, which will be implemented in the latter half of the year. The provision of window/door frames and beams for up to 10,000 vulnerable families, the repair of roads, schools and clinics, as well as the construction of community centres are all underway. Plastic sheets for 2,000 families have been procured as part of shelter assistance to vulnerable returnees. A capacity-building project in computer and English language skills has been initiated in Kabul to benefit local NGO partners, local government and UNHCR project staff. Depending on the success of this project, similar programmes will be undertaken in other areas.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Increased awareness among the host community of the fundamental human rights of returnees.	Given the high turnover of officials at the district level, awareness-raising among authorities continues to be a major challenge. The returnees are generally educated about the set of rights specifically addressing their situation.
Reduced number of violations of amnesty declarations including incidents of military recruitment within one year following return.	While UNHCR, wherever possible, educates local communities, district authorities and returnees on the declaration of amnesties, the ongoing conflict in numerous instances overrode the rights of individuals, including returnees. However, in several instances, attempts of recruitment among returnees could be stalled.
Improved access to returnees to allow increased monitoring coverage.	Due to the streamlined approach to monitoring as well as an increased number of trained staff assigned to this task, some 15 per cent of the returnees were reached.
Returnees are settled and assisted in their areas of origin.	29,000 people benefited from shelter, water and other community projects in their areas of origin. The number of returnees who became IDPs could not be ascertained. However, it is estimated that, in certain areas, up to 40 per cent of the persons who returned during the previous two years may have been displaced in the latter part of 2000 or early 2001.
Returnees have access to income-generating opportunities.	Due to the drought and lack of investment in medium to long-term activities from local authorities and the international community, UNHCR decided to initiate a number of QIPs.
Improved access of girls to education.	In addition to the rehabilitation of community schools, home-run schools where girls can study have benefited from teacher training courses and provision of school materials.
Decrease in mine-related incidents.	Although twenty per cent of the returnees interviewed expressed concerns regarding mines on their agricultural land, there were no reported incidents of casualties among the returnees.
Return is facilitated with appropriate initial assistance.	Assistance focused on provision of shelter and potable water for vulnerable families, and the creation of labour wage opportunities. Returnee packages comprised plastic sheeting and cash grants.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER

The initial objectives for the Afghan returnees remain unchanged. Ongoing QIPs in sectors such as shelter, water and other infrastructure will be completed before the onset of winter, and income-generating activities and local capacity-building will be continued. UNHCR will strengthen its co-operation with other agencies, especially those NGOs who have access to additional funds.

Furthermore, there will be a need to address the problem of internally displaced persons, in order to boost the absorption capacity of the receiving communities and ensure sustainable return. In this context, UNHCR has created a Supplementary Programme for IDPs, and subject to adequate funding UNHCR will:

- Co-operate with other agencies in providing internally displaced persons with shelter materials and other non-food items;
- Provide technical assistance in IDP camp development and operation as well as co-ordination;

- Establish baseline data of IDPs through registration and population surveys;
- Prepare, in co-operation with other agencies, a plan to respond to needs of IDPs and their subsequent return to their areas of origin.

UNHCR will continue to address the needs of returnees, and in addition directly assist around 50,000 IDPs, mainly in Badakhstan, Balk, Baglan, Faryab, Kunduz and Harat. Both returnees and around one million IDPs will benefit from the improved monitoring of population movements.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available¹	Total Funds Obligated
APB	8,584,506	9,509,842	4,322,597	2,841,432

¹Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.