

PAKISTAN

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Achieve voluntary repatriation of 100,000 Afghan refugees in safety and with dignity.
- Provide limited community-based assistance (including education and primary health care) for Afghan refugees and mobilise greater community participation (particularly of women) with a view to increasing their self-reliance.
- Find solutions to the problems of Afghan refugees with an urban background, including the vulnerable, women and children.
- Protect and assist Afghan refugees facing security problems in certain border regions until a lasting solution is found.
- Ensure protection and find durable solutions for non-Afghan refugees recognised under UNHCR's mandate through humanitarian assistance, repatriation and re-settlement.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Afghan Refugees

The situation of the 1.2 million Afghan refugees who are living in some 203 refugee villages in Pakistan's north-western provinces has continued to deteriorate as the country's general economic downturn has affected their ability to participate in the local economy and earn an income. However, voluntary repatriation – the most realistic solution for the majority of the Afghan refugees – has become increasingly unattractive due to continued insecurity and lack of basic infrastructure and services in Afghanistan. Rising unemployment and economic hardship among the local population have made refugees an easy target for the national media, blaming them for a number of social ills and fuelling growing resentment among nationals, particularly in urban centres such as Karachi and Quetta.

In addition, Pakistan has experienced what is

reported to be the worst drought in 30 years. The water table has receded and many wells are now dry. The Government assisted victims in Baluchistan (nationals and refugees) and UNHCR prepared a plan to merge some refugee villages to reduce the impact of the water shortage (only a limited number of wells were functioning) as refugees were beginning to experience health problems.

UNHCR was concerned about reports of deportations and *refoulement* of Afghan refugees from Baluchistan during the first quarter. To address the situation, it was agreed with the Government that joint screening committees would be established in Quetta, Peshawar and Islamabad during 2000. A sharp increase in the number of Afghan refugees with protection problems seeking UNHCR's assistance prompted the Office to reinforce its protection capacity and enter into an agreement with a new implementing partner for screening and counselling. This accelerated refugee status determination for some 810 Afghan refugees who were registered and resettled between January and June. To better address the legal, economic and social needs of some of the most vulnerable and needy refugees, UNHCR explored the possibility of working with an international NGO for screening and referral of urban Afghan refugees who may be eligible for resettlement. This arrangement would also provide appropriate assistance to vulnerable refugees ineligible for resettlement and strengthen the network of NGOs that assist refugees in Islamabad.

Between January and June, UNHCR assisted 43,662 Afghan refugees to repatriate voluntarily (a 25 per cent decrease over last year). This could be attributed to a number of factors including events in Kandahar where the escape from prison of an opposition leader in April prompted the Taliban to storm the UN compound. All UN activities in southern Afghanistan were suspended for several weeks and when they resumed, the effects of the drought prevented the immediate continuation of repatriation movements from Baluchistan. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict between the Tali-

ban and the Northern Alliance obliged UNHCR to carefully identify areas to which repatriation could safely take place, limiting the possibilities of return for some refugees in Pakistan. Repatriation packages consisting of Pakistani Rupees 5,000 (about USD 100), wheat and a plastic sheet were distributed to returnees inside Afghanistan.

To foster greater community participation in the refugee villages, UNHCR continued to support school management committees, parent-teacher associations, welfare committees and volunteers for children's groups and youth groups. The Office organised training for animators and district co-ordinators on child rights, community awareness and community participation to strengthen the social outreach network. The refugees contributed financially to community-based water and health activities whenever possible, but fewer employment opportunities left little money to pay electric bills for the use of water pumps.

UNHCR provided support for primary health care for all needy refugees, prioritising the very poor and women. More than 2,600 disabled refugees were identified and some 1,200 were referred to two NGO partners for rehabilitation. They will be provided with wheelchairs, crutches or artificial limbs. A standard list of required drugs was introduced in all provinces and procurement of all medical supplies took place during the first quarter. Staff and supervisors of health units participated in training on reproductive health, leading to a marked improvement in obstetrics-related care. The overall monitoring capacity of UNHCR's partners was enhanced thanks to the new Health Information System, which allows for systematic collection and analysis of data for planning purposes. As part of WHO's roll back malaria policy and following a joint UNHCR/WHO assessment of the incidence of malaria in the refugee villages, protective bed nets were distributed in high-risk zones. Discussions continued with local authorities and the Italian Government (which is in the process of reducing its support for a tuberculosis (TB) programme they have been funding bilaterally for many years) to ensure the continuation of TB prevention and care through a national NGO.

Overall enrolment for the 2000/2001 aca-

demical year increased by five per cent over last year. Approximately 130,000 refugee children are currently enrolled in UNHCR-funded primary schools, of which 39,000 are girls (a 30 per cent increase over the previous year). Growing demand for education for girls reflects a positive change in attitude among the majority of the refugee population. However, the lack of qualified female teachers in traditional and remote areas remains a constraint, especially in Baluchistan. To improve the quality of education, UNHCR introduced teacher training and improved monitoring systems with emphasis on basic learning competencies. Results of end-of-year exams were very satisfactory with pass rates well above 80 per cent. Some 120 post-secondary students (57 women) continued to benefit from DAFI scholarships. UNHCR explored possibilities of expanding tertiary education through the Afghan University in Peshawar, to which the Office recently provided a symbolic contribution for refurbishing. Consultations with the World Bank resulted in the Bank fielding a team in June to study how assistance for refugee education could be strengthened, particularly teacher training and secondary/tertiary education.

UNHCR supported an Afghan NGO that completed skills training in carpet-weaving, tin-smithery, tailoring and embroidery for 100 disabled male refugees, 100 vulnerable refugee women and girls, and 30 adolescent boys, making it possible for these refugees to find employment in the local labour market.

In addition, 60 Afghans in urban areas with protection problems received temporary assistance (food and shelter) pending their relocation within the country or resettlement.

The drought had disastrous consequences for the refugees, particularly in Baluchistan. Shallow wells dried up, reducing the availability of drinking water, leading to the death of livestock and loss of employment on farms irrigated through tubewells. The acute shortage of potable water made refugees resort to using unhygienic and unsafe water collected from polluted sources, which contributed to a reported increase in water-borne diseases (such as diarrhoea, dysentery and skin infections).

A project to preserve the environment has not

yet started due to a number of management-related problems with the implementing partner. UNHCR is currently in the process of identifying a suitable NGO for the project.

Non-Afghan Refugees

This group of refugees, which mainly originate from Somalia, Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran also benefited from the accelerated procedures put in place for Afghan refugee registration and status determination. A total of 200 non-Afghan asylum-seekers were registered and 760 recognised refugees were referred as eligible for assistance to UNHCR's NGO partner during the period under review. By 30 June, UNHCR was assisting more than 2,000 non-Afghan refugees to meet their basic needs (through allowances for food, shelter and education and access to income-generating activities). Some 840 refugees were resettled.

The number of assisted refugees in urban centres is expected to increase (mainly due to an increase in Afghan refugees with security concerns, but also due to new arrivals from other countries). However, the anticipated increase in requirements cannot be met due to lack of funding. Based on trends in expenditure during the first six months of the year, funds are expected to run out by September, making UNHCR unable to assist but a few carefully selected individuals.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

In view of a potential influx of refugees from Afghanistan (due to the summer offensive and drought), UNHCR will ensure that the joint screening committees become operational as soon as possible. The Office will also address drought-related problems in Baluchistan through the consolidation of 48 refugee villages into eight between July and December. Lack of funds and the situation in Afghanistan prompted a revision of the repatriation target from 100,000 to 90,000 persons, a reduction of vocational skills training for vulnerable refu-

gees and a freeze on assistance for non-Afghan refugees. Should the projected funding shortfall be confirmed (prompting a 15 per cent reduction of initial budgets), UNHCR's support for 40 basic health units and 86 primary schools will have to cease. In addition to the objectives described above, UNHCR's activities during the coming months will focus on:

- Preparing a contingency plan to relocate newly arrived Afghan refugees affected by drought to Government centres;
- Continuing to provide special repatriation assistance for refugees returning from Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta;
- Implementing a new project for capacity-building among NGOs as well as a project to assist vulnerable Afghan refugee children;
- Advocating, together with the World Bank, awareness and support among donors to increase funding for refugee education in Pakistan;
- Continuing to work towards increased community participation by involving all actors dealing with refugees;
- Supporting systematic collection of health-related data through the new Health Information System for improved analysis of refugee health and needs;
- Implementing a project to preserve the environment together with a new NGO partner; and
- Reviewing the situation of non-Afghan refugees with a view to reducing their numbers (mainly through resettlement) and enabling the Office to provide limited assistance to the most needy among this group.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	16,030,080	16,909,383	8,317,457	7,531,600

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.