



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Country: Pakistan

Planning Year: 2004

Executive Committee Summary

Country Operations Plan 2004 : PAKISTAN

Context and Beneficiary Populations

For well over two decades, Pakistan has hosted one of the world's largest refugee populations, most of whom live in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan. Not a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol, Pakistan regulates the entry, stay and movement of foreigners, including asylum seekers and refugees, via the Foreigners' Act 1946. This means that foreigners without valid documentation risk arrest, detention and deportation. Despite the strict provisions of the law, however, Pakistan has generally respected international standards for the stay and treatment of refugees, particularly in camps where access to protection and humanitarian assistance is assured. Refugee status determination is conducted by UNHCR on the understanding that cases accepted under the Office's Mandate will be provided with an appropriate durable solution (essentially voluntary repatriation and resettlement).

It is now estimated that some 1.5 million Afghan refugees residing in over 200 old refugee villages and in 16 new camps are receiving assistance this year (2003). The Government of Pakistan estimates that a similar number live in towns and villages. In addition, there is a group of 843 individuals of various nationalities, mostly Somalis (387), Iranians (144) and Iraqis (169), for whom UNHCR is actively seeking a durable solution inside or outside Pakistan.

Political context: Through a series of informal tripartite consultations with UNHCR and the Afghan government, Pakistan has come to acknowledge its neighbour's limited absorption capacity and the need for a more gradual return. Both governments have thus agreed to correlate the pace of voluntary repatriation more closely with Afghanistan's reconstruction. Negotiations in 2002 led to the signing of a Tripartite Agreement in 2003, which establishes a three-year timeframe for the voluntary and gradual return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, as well as regular tripartite consultations.

The high number of returns from urban areas in 2002 – which has long been a priority for the Pakistan Government – accounts for much of today's goodwill in support of a more gradual and voluntary return. Recent adjustments in the political landscape in the areas bordering Afghanistan could further enhance the "gradualist" approach to repatriation.

Security considerations have led to tighter border controls, as well as to heightened concerns about the presence of refugees in urban areas, particularly Islamabad. While the current strategy for voluntary repatriation involves a sharper focus on camps, UNHCR will continue to register refugees returning from urban areas, particularly Karachi.

Security situation: Sporadic attacks on foreigners and foreign interests have meant that security for international staff has been an issue in parts of Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan and NWFP's Tribal Agencies.

Drought continues to affect Balochistan as well as southern Afghanistan. Scarce water supplies not only make it difficult and more costly for aid agencies to assist refugees, but have created tensions between refugees and local communities in places like Chaman.

Overview of refugee population: There is now an estimated 1.5 million refugees in new and old camps, and an undetermined number in urban areas.

The Afghan population is of diverse ethnic backgrounds, the majority being Pashtuns, with minority groups including Balochis, Hazaras, Tajiks, and Turkomens. Most Afghan refugees originate from eastern Afghanistan, near the Pakistan border, but there are also significant numbers from Kabul, as well as the northern provinces.

A total of 843 non-Afghan refugees also receive protection and assistance from UNHCR, i.e., Somalis (387), Iranians (144) and Iraqis (169), and others. The majority resides in Islamabad, and a substantial number fall under the “women-at-risk” category.

UNHCR role: In 2004, UNHCR will continue to give priority to facilitating voluntary repatriation and removing obstacles to return. There will be a more pronounced shift to field-oriented protection, enhancing mechanisms for monitoring, prevention and coordinated responses. UNHCR will continue to advocate for a favourable asylum regime that permits admission for new asylum seekers, enjoyment and access to internationally accepted minimum standards and the creation of awareness and promotion of refugee law and rights.

Policy priorities: UNHCR policy priorities – i.e., women/gender equality, children and adolescents, refugees with special needs including individuals with physical and mental handicaps, and environmental concerns – are addressed in the design and implementation as well as the monitoring and evaluation of all protection and assistance activities. A community-based approach is followed, through refugee committees, trainers and volunteers, under the guidance of the Community Services Officers and in close partnership with the government’s Social Welfare Cell and a number of NGOs, particularly in the new sites.

Linkages to other countries within a defined “situation”: The Pakistan programme maintains close coordination and frequent communication and exchange with offices in Afghanistan. Activities, planning and projections are linked to Afghanistan’s return and reintegration programme. The government of Pakistan’s adherence to the concept of gradual and voluntary returns, for example, is the result of regular tripartite consultations, sponsored by both UNHCR offices. A harmonized regional approach to the voluntary return of Afghan refugees is evidenced not only by the signing of a Tripartite Agreement, but also on an operational level through regular cross border meetings, the participation of UNHCR Afghanistan’s repatriation staff in training workshops convened in Peshawar, and the sharing of reports and survey results.

In 2004, due attention will be given to the information flow, exchange of visits, including go-and-see refugee visits to areas of return. For this, it is hoped that representatives from the Afghan Ministry for Refugees and Rehabilitation (MORR) will assume a more pro-active role, negotiating solutions and facilitating group returns.

Capacity and presence of implementing partners: UNHCR’s Pakistan programme is implemented through governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Ministry of State and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) and the Office of the Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees are UNHCR’s government counterparts, responsible for refugee policy making, refugee security and camp management. With the scaling down of the operation in 2004, UNHCR’s top priority will be to further build the capacity of local implementing partners through training and organizational development.

Presence and role of other UN agencies and international organizations: In conjunction with World Food Programme (WFP), a pilot food distribution scheme was launched in the new camps. In 2004, WFP, will, subject to the joint UNHCR/WFP food aid assessment, continue to be responsible for food distribution in its entirety.

In 2004, UNICEF will be engaged in water quality testing as well as technical and operational support in the areas of child protection and girls' education. UNFPA will assist in the implementation of Reproductive Health and awareness-raising in family planning and child spacing.

UNHCR signed a MoU with UNESCO in 2003, and will continue to support this partnership in 2004. UNHCR has also worked closely to generate donor interest in the UNDP project for the rehabilitation of refugee-affected areas. UNHCR is nevertheless hopeful that donors will come forward with funds in 2004.

Selected Programme Goals and Objectives for Afghan Refugees

Beneficiary Population/Theme: Afghan refugees in Pakistan	
Main Goal (s):	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide international protection and to assist camp-based Afghan refugees as well as Afghan asylum seekers; 2. To facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees and eventually promote return in the last quarter of 2004; 3. To deliver essential life-sustaining and basic services, while intensifying strategic partnerships with the government, relevant UN agencies and implementing partners; and 4. To devise a coherent public communication strategy linked with the gradual phase out. 	
Principal Objectives	Related Output
To provide legal assistance and protection to Afghan refugees to ensure international refugee protection standards are maintained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deportations and arbitrary arrests contained. • Increased awareness and knowledge of refugee protection and international obligations amongst government officials. • Advice and Legal Aid Centers arbitrate in legal cases and provide adequate advice and counselling to refugee needs.
To facilitate voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan in safety, dignity and orderly manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced awareness amongst refugee communities through targeted mass information campaigns. • Repatriation staff provided with training and skills to maximize quality of work. • Optimized access of refugees to registration and repatriation mobile teams in camps and other places. • Minimized incidents of double registration due to the effective use of iris recognition technology at validation centers.

<p>To provide basic health care, potable water and quality primary education to Afghan refugees in camps pending their return.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to basic humanitarian assistance is provided by UNHCR. • Health, water and education facilities remain operational in refugee settlements. • A higher level of assistance is maintained at the new camps. • Maintain mortality and morbidity rates amongst refugee population at internationally acceptable level.
<p>To communicate to the government and implementing partners and the refugees on UNHCR intentions to scale down the operation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual scaling down of refugee services with more emphasis on vulnerable refugees in camps. • To avert a polarization debate and to preserve a productive relationship with these partners throughout the process. • To ensure all parties concerned assume ownership of the process. • To ensure partners assume more responsibility for activities that UNHCR can no longer fund.

<p>Beneficiary Population/Theme: Non-Afghan refugees</p>	
<p>Main Goal: To provide international protection pending identification of durable solutions.</p>	
<p>Principal Objectives</p>	<p>Related Outputs</p>
<p>Refugees and asylum seekers are allowed to remain in Pakistan pending the identification of a durable solution.</p>	<p>Number of asylum applications processed and Refugee Status Determination (RSD) conducted.</p>
<p>Assisting refugees wishing to repatriate.</p>	<p>Counselling and repatriation assistance provided.</p>
<p>Refugees unable to repatriate for protection related reasons are considered and their cases submitted for resettlement.</p>	<p>Cases in need of third country resettlement processed and submitted to resettlement countries.</p>
<p>Recognized or identified vulnerable non-Afghan refugees are assisted.</p>	<p>Monthly subsistence allowances paid to recognized or identified vulnerable non-Afghan refugees.</p>