

Afghanistan



Operational highlights

- More than 365,000 Afghans (including both registered and unregistered refugees) were able to return to their homeland with UNHCR assistance in 2007.
- A grant of USD 100 per person enabled returnees to meet immediate basic needs.
- Over 9,700 returnee families benefited from shelter assistance in 2007.
- Legal aid centres covering 21 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces resolved almost half of all the cases

presented to them in 2007. Most cases pertained to property issues.

- Return and reintegration needs were mainstreamed into the Afghan National Development Strategy.
- UNHCR and the authorities began an exercise to map the location and needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country.
- Some 29,500 landless returnees and IDPs became eligible for the Land Allocation Scheme of the Government of Afghanistan. So far, 3,500 families have begun living on their plots.

Persons of concern

Type of population	Origin	Total	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Various	40	-	-	-
Returnees (refugees) ¹	From Pakistan	365,700	357,600	-	-
	From Islam. Rep. of Iran	7,500	7,500	-	-
	Various	700	700	-	-
IDPs		153,700	153,700	48	-
Returnees (IDPs)		8,000	8,000	49	-
Total		535,640	527,500		

¹ All Afghans registered in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran who avail themselves of voluntary repatriation are reflected as returnees because they receive transportation and reintegration assistance. In 2007, at the request of the Government of Pakistan, a grace period was provided to unregistered Afghans in Pakistan who wished to return and they were also assisted. The figures include 206,000 unregistered Afghans, who returned during that period and benefitted from repatriation assistance.

Working environment

Seven years after the replacement of the Taliban by an internationally supported administration, Afghanistan's transition to political, economic and social stability remains uncertain. Making progress towards the goals set by the Afghanistan Compact in January 2006 has proved problematic for both the Government and the international community. Internal political tensions, weak public administration and lack of coordination between international actors have compromised the effectiveness of the aid process. As a consequence, most of the benchmarks established under the Compact have not been met. The process of cooperating on the National Development Strategy has also highlighted the differing priorities of the international community.

The year 2007 saw the highest number of security incidents since the fall of the Taliban in 2002. The danger of attacks increased sharply in the southern, south-eastern and eastern regions and spread to the northern and central regions. The capital, Kabul, replaced Kandahar as the primary target of anti-Government activities. The insurgency relied increasingly on suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices and kidnapping against "soft" targets. International development and humanitarian actors could reach barely half the country; as a result, they had to rely to an increasing extent on national partners for programme delivery and monitoring.

The combination of deteriorating security and slow progress in reconstruction and development made it difficult for a large part of the population to meet essential needs.

Needs assessments conducted by the Office and partners confirmed that shelter remains the greatest priority, followed by employment, health, education and nutrition. With more than 5 million people having returned since 2002, the country's absorption capacity has already been exceeded. Indeed, economic difficulties have become key deterrents to the sustainability of return and reintegration. Emigration for economic reasons outstripped voluntary repatriation in 2007.

The impact of the harsh winter, the large-scale deportation of undocumented Afghans from the Islamic Republic of Iran, continuing conflict-generated displacement and a rising toll of civilian deaths have raised the visibility of the crisis in Afghanistan. A Humanitarian Country Team was established to meet the challenges, and a Humanitarian Affairs Unit was set up in the fall within the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The national response to critical humanitarian needs, such as the influx of returnees from Pakistan and the impact of the winter, has improved, with several government ministries, the

Afghanistan Red Crescent and private charitable foundations playing a strong role. These encouraging developments were at least partly attributable to pressure from a critical Parliament and vocal domestic media.

Achievements and impact

Main objectives

- Facilitate the safe and voluntary return of Afghans from Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other host countries; support the initial reintegration of returnees.
- Support IDPs in Afghanistan and search for solutions for them, including local integration.
- Ensure that the longer-term reintegration needs of returnees are addressed within the framework of national development programmes, including schemes to allocate land for housing or agriculture.
- Support the Government to manage voluntary repatriation; assist it in its dialogue with neighbouring countries on the management of population movements; and develop strategies to address the internal and external displacement of Afghans.
- Guarantee that asylum-seekers and refugees have access to fair and efficient refugee status determination (RSD) procedures.

Protection and solutions

The number of registered Afghans who repatriated voluntarily to their homeland in 2007 confirmed the declining trend in voluntary repatriation of 2006 and signalled the end of mass voluntary returns to Afghanistan. Some 167,500 registered Afghans returned in 2007 (160,000 from Pakistan and 7,500 from the Islamic Republic of Iran). An additional 206,000 unregistered Afghans were assisted to return during a one-time grace period between February and mid-April 2007. More than 5 million Afghans (80 per cent of them assisted by UNHCR) have returned to their homeland since 2002.

The capacity of Afghanistan to absorb more returns is limited, and in the absence of appropriate reintegration support, it will not be possible to sustain the pace of returns. The return of 206,000 unregistered Afghans (those not holding Proof of Registration papers) from Pakistan in the spring and 365,000 undocumented Afghans from Iran created additional challenges for the country in terms of absorption capacity.

Monitoring and needs assessments in the eastern region revealed increasing difficulties for returnees. Of a sample



UNHCR/V. Tan

Returnee children in a makeshift school in Sheikh Mesri.

of 1,200 households that returned in 2007, only about half remained in their place of origin. Border monitoring indicated that many returnees from 2007 went back to their former asylum country.

Further, a number of refugees who returned to Afghanistan in 2007 or before have become internally displaced and live in difficult conditions. For example, 160 families who had been living in Katcha Garhi refugee village in Pakistan in 2007 were sheltering under tents and plastic sheets in Afghanistan's Logar province, as it was impossible for them to return to their home district for security reasons. In this case, insecurity also prevented humanitarian agencies from intervening to sustain return. A significant number of returnees affected by the 2005 closure of refugee camps in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan also remain displaced, unable to return to their place of origin.

UNHCR began to create a national profile of IDPs in 2007 in cooperation with UNAMA and the national authorities. Task forces were established to improve coordination and accountability at the national level. The number of IDPs in Afghanistan increased in 2007 to 129,000, including 35,000 people newly displaced from conflict-affected areas in the south, however mapping of the IDP situation in Afghanistan is ongoing.

The land allocation scheme launched by presidential decree in 2005 is intended to find solutions to the problems of landlessness and lack of shelter for returnees and IDPs.

Activities and assistance

Community services: The number of provinces where groups with specific needs were assisted rose from 11 to 16.

Domestic needs and household support: More than 365,000 Afghans received a return and reintegration grant to support them during the initial phase of return. However, the cash grant alone cannot sustain return. Indeed, it does not seem to have played a major role in the decision of registered Afghans to return, judging by the repatriation figures for 2007.

Health and nutrition: Returnees passing through encashment centres were able to benefit from basic and emergency health services. Children received vaccinations and emergency medical support. The large-scale returns of unregistered Afghans in March and April put significant pressure on medical points at the centres, which meant not all needs could be met in a timely manner. IDPs also received primary health care from mobile clinics, access permitting.

Income generation: Interventions in this sector were limited in 2007 due to the reallocation of funds to support the cash grant. Some 28,000 work-day jobs were created under the cash for work scheme, which repaired roads and cleared irrigation canals. In addition, 300 returnee and IDP women with specific needs participated in skills development and income generation projects in the western and southern regions, and 40 returnee youths received skills training in the western region. In 2008, UNHCR will seek to ensure that sufficient resources are available for income generation and livelihood activities.

Legal assistance: UNHCR's implementing partners provided returnees with information on shelter, water, health, nutrition and work. Returnees received legal aid in 21 of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan (in seven through established centres and in another 14 through mobile teams). Some 90 per cent of registered cases related to property rights (compared to 65 per cent the previous year); almost half these cases were resolved in 2007.

Due to security constraints, mobile teams made fewer community visits in 2007. Protection monitoring visits were also reduced. An inter-agency Special Fund for the Elimination of Violence Against Women was established at the end of the year in coordination with the authorities and civil-society partners.

Operational support (to agencies): The Office worked with the Afghan Civil Service Reform Commission to support the restructuring of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR).

Shelter and infrastructure: Some 10,000 families (almost 68,000 individuals) with specific needs benefited from shelter assistance. Of this, 54 per cent went to low-income families, 22 per cent to large families, 10 per cent to households headed by the elderly, 7 per cent to female-headed households, 3 per cent to families with a disabled head of household and 3 per cent to other categories in need. Participatory assessments conducted in 2007 will result in the greater involvement of the community – especially women – in the shelter programme.

The Land Allocation Scheme progressed slowly. UNHCR helped coordinate an inter-ministerial Memorandum of Understanding on the scheme and established a Programme Implementation Unit to improve planning and management. By December 2007, the MoRR reported 14 operational sites and 13 planned sites. The scheme had 295,000 registered applications and 61,000 selected beneficiaries. Some 29,500 plots of land were distributed, of which 9,500 were allocated in 2007, and 3,500 beneficiaries were actually living on site by the end of the year.

Transport and logistics: Over 365,000 Afghans benefited from a variable transport grant of up to USD 30 for in-country travel (part of the USD 100 cash grant). Sufficient warehousing and distribution capacity allowed returnees to receive non-food items and shelter materials throughout the country, subject to security constraints.

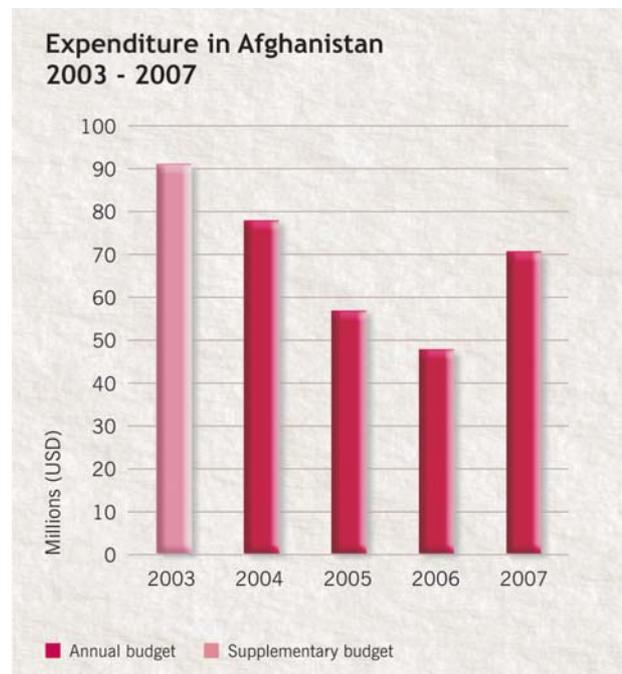
Water: Although water activities were not planned, UNHCR engaged in this sector through regional reallocations to sustain return movements. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development contracted work for 375 water points and 750 latrines. Water projects were implemented through Community Development Councils (CDC) set up under the National Solidarity Programme where there was sufficient capacity.

Constraints

The deteriorating security situation was a major impediment to operations. UNHCR's staff could not travel to more than half the country, forcing them to work through partners where necessary.

Financial information

The scale of the UNHCR's operation has gradually been adjusted since 2002, with reductions in staffing, administrative and operational interventions each year. However, an additional USD 20 million was made available in 2007, in order to fund the increased cash grant and the exceptional support to 206,000 unregistered Afghans returning from Pakistan. Donor support ensured that all returnees eligible for UNHCR cash grant assistance received it.



Management

In 2007 the Office in Afghanistan had more than 450 staff members, comprising 33 international and 400 national staff, three Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and 14 UN Volunteers. The Representation office in Kabul is complemented by five sub-offices in Herat, Jalalabad, Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar, three field offices and three field units.

In 2007, UNHCR consolidated its presence, closing four field units (Pul-i-Khumri, Sheberghan, Nili and Khost) as a consequence of reduced returns to these areas. The overall workforce level remained unchanged, as staff from these units were redeployed elsewhere in the country. To address security threats, the Office in Afghanistan adopted a flexible management approach and increased its fleet of armoured vehicles. Other security measures will be carried out in 2008.

Working with others

UNHCR supports the reform of the MoRR so that it will eventually be able to manage voluntary repatriation and the initial reintegration of returnees on a bilateral basis.

The Office is part of the UN integrated mission led by UNAMA, and cooperates with the latter's Humanitarian Affairs Unit. Inter-agency humanitarian contingency planning in light of the policies of neighbouring countries will continue in 2008. On IDPs issues, UNHCR is working with UNAMA and the Government of Afghanistan on a mapping and needs assessment exercise. UNHCR is involved in the Special Fund for the Elimination of Violence against Women and cooperates in this regard with UN and bilateral agencies and the Ministry for Women's Affairs.

Bilateral partnerships were developed in 2007 to help returnees. For example, after UNHCR's assessments at the end of year indicated many unmet shelter needs among vulnerable returnees, the Office shared this data with key bilateral and multilateral agencies to support the targeting of their interventions.

Overall assessment

The level of voluntary returns of registered Afghans was significantly lower than expected. After two years of comparatively low returns, it is evident that the previous emphasis on voluntary repatriation as the primary durable solution has to be adapted to emerging regional and national circumstances. Large numbers of voluntary returns are unlikely in the years to come. The focus in

2008 will be to work with the Government of Afghanistan, neighbouring and third country governments to prevent unsustainable returns.

In 2007, the needs of returnees were often beyond what UNHCR by itself could meet; increased interventions beyond the cash grant are crucial to sustain returnee reintegration. The Office shared information gained from needs assessments with other agencies, stressing the crucial importance of areas of high return, and worked with the Government to incorporate returnee needs into Afghanistan's National Development Strategy (ANDS).

UNHCR will persist with efforts to ensure that return and reintegration remain high on the Government's agenda. It will also encourage the allocation of national resources to reintegration needs – including those of urban returnees. Practical solutions need to be developed to allow UNHCR to implement its mandate in an environment of deteriorating security.

Partners

Implementing partners

Government agencies: Department of Public Health, Reconstruction and Employment Unit for Afghanistan, Department of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation

NGOs: InterSoS (Italy), Peace Winds (Japan), Maltezer Hilfeinst (Germany), NRC, Medica Mondiale Germany, Watan Social and Technical Services Association, Afghan General Help Coordination Office, Afghan Planning Agency, National Consultancy and Relief Association, Reconstruction and Deployment Unit for Afghan Refugees, Afghan Public Welfare Organization, Afghan Health Development Services, Humanitarian Action for the People of Afghanistan, Afghan Civil Society, Khahan Improvement Organization, Agency for Technical Co-operation and Development, Child Fund Afghanistan, Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan, Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan, Shams Women's Needs and Help Organization, Afghan Bureau for Reconstruction, Sina Association Rehabilitation Services, Afghan Health Development Services, Voluntary Association for the Rehabilitation of Afghanistan, Civil Affairs Organization, Ansari Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan, Coordination of Rehabilitation and Development Services for Afghanistan, Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, Engineering and Rehabilitation Services for Afghanistan, Afghan General Help Coordination Office, Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children, Afghan Women Skills Development Centre, Afghan Women Education Center, Abu Muslim Khorasany Rehabilitation Unit, Horizon Rehabilitation of Afghanistan

UN agencies: UNV

Others: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*, Emam Saheb Construction and Rehabilitation Organization, ILO, IOM, Masood-Akbar Construction Agency, Shafaq Reconstruction Organization

Operational partners

Government: MoRR, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NGOs: PRT, CARE, UMCOR, IRC, AGEF, MOLSA, DACAAR, CHA, GPFA GAAA BRAC, CORDAID/VARA

UN Agencies: UNAMA, UNAMAC, UN Habitat, UNOPS, UNESCO, UNDP, ILO, WHO, FAO, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNMACA

Others: BPRM, USAID, Japan International Cooperation Agency, IOM, ECHO, DFID, Asian Development Bank, World Bank

Budget, income and expenditure (USD)

	Final budget	Income from contributions	Other funds available	Total funds available	Total expenditure
Annual budget	70,641,122	49,276,387	21,064,544	70,340,931	70,329,927

Note: Income from contributions includes contributions earmarked at the country level. Other funds available include transfers from unearmarked and broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects	Previous years' projects
	Annual budget	Annual and supplementary budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	11,547,838	0
Community services	577,356	94,059
Domestic needs and household support	30,465,249	6,546
Health and nutrition	186,287	81,407
Income generation	519,923	996,098
Legal assistance	2,382,129	1,196,574
Operational support (to agencies)	2,540,664	507,734
Shelter and infrastructure	7,386,618	806,294
Transport and logistics	7,054,710	446,591
Water	50,899	4,200
Instalments with implementing partners	2,543,944	(4,139,503)
Sub-total operational activities	65,255,618	0
Programme support	5,074,309	0
Total expenditure	70,329,927	0
Cancellation on previous years' expenditure		(178,213)
Instalments with implementing partners		
Payments made	10,585,499	
Reporting received	(8,041,555)	
Balance	2,543,944	
Previous years' report		
Instalments with implementing partners		
Outstanding 1st January		5,925,249
Reporting received		(4,139,503)
Refunded to UNHCR		(295,702)
Adjustments		65,015
Balance		1,555,059