



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: Afghanistan

Planning Year: 2006

2006 Country Operations Plan for Afghanistan

Part I: OVERVIEW

(Drafted March 2005)

1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment

Regional overview

Whilst UNHCR is actively engaged in consultations with the three governments in the region in defining a comprehensive set of solutions and arrangements for managing Afghan displacement and population movements after the expiration of the Tripartite Agreements asylum countries (Pakistan, Iran) expect to see the maximum number of Afghans return in both 2005 and 2006 under the present facilitated repatriation scheme. The measures taken by the Iranian Government during the course of 2004 (non-renewal of identity documents, restriction of access of Afghans to employment, education and health services) are likely to continue and “induce” more returns from Iran in 2006. In Pakistan the closure and consolidation of a number of old camps in 2005 and 2006 are likely to facilitate the return of a significant number of Afghans in 2006. Voluntary returns from Iran and Pakistan in a still significant number in 2005 and 2006 (estimated over 1.3 million in both years) would contribute to foster an environment by March 2006 where new arrangements for the remaining Afghan populations in Pakistan and Iran can be negotiated.

Political environment: It is anticipated that by 2006, the key milestones of Afghanistan’s political transition, as outlined in the Bonn Agreement, will have been completed, with the possible exception of elections for district councils, whose representatives constitute one third of the seats of the *Meshrano Jirga*, the Upper House of Parliament. The completion of the political transition will allow further consolidation of powers of the elected authorities and a further expansion into the provinces of authorities of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The Civil Service sector reform will gradually ensure the introduction of a merit-based system in public administration and a discussed vetting/lustration system for officials, if implemented, might decrease further the power and influence held by local commanders and their associates.

Security: The security situation remains a concern in the south and south-east of the country where anti-government groups are still active. The security situation could also be affected by the large scale poppy eradication programme initiated in 2005. Progress in the DDR programme for Afghan militia forces is expected to continue in 2005. The building of the capacity and deployment of the new Afghan National Army (ANA) and police forces will have reached a stage where these forces can be increasingly counted on to intervene and stabilize the security situation in different parts of the country. Areas of higher insecurity and pockets of “commanderism” are expected to continue to persist, but limited in geographical scope.

Human rights environment: It is expected that there will be a gradual improvement in the overall human rights situation, in particular with regard to abuses by local commanders and their armed men, provided their disarmament and the disbanding of their illegal armed forces takes place, and, their ability to act with impunity is being addressed. Land and property confiscation and occupation as well as disputes over property will remain significant

problems. It requires longer term strategies, including the reform of laws and the strengthening of traditional and formal conflict resolution mechanisms. Access to effective remedies in case of grievances or human rights violations will remain a challenge and priority for UNHCR and other actors.

Socio-economic environment: Despite gradual improvements in the delivery of public services, Afghanistan will remain a country with some of the poorest basic social indicators, including high infant, child and maternal mortality rates and low literacy rates as well as weak structures to absorb extremely vulnerable individuals. Public services, transport infrastructure, electricity and water management will remain poor and unlikely to meet standards known to Afghans while in exile. While the effects of drought might be mitigated in many areas, water-management in rural areas will remain a challenge as will be housing and land for the many Afghans, in particular returnees, who do not own land or property in Afghanistan. Another significant challenge for return and reintegration are the high proportion of returnees without regular sources of income (10%) or dependent on wage-labour (25%) after return.

There are still some 3.9 million Afghans residing in Pakistan and Iran. The positive developments within the country and the policy and measures likely to be pursued vis-a-vis refugees in the neighbouring countries will prompt another significant return movement in 2006. It is planned that some 300,000 persons will return from Pakistan and a similar number from Iran during the year. Meanwhile, discussions will be pursued with the concerned governments in order to promote a bilateral management of population movement across their borders, including migration for labour purposes, and to address the situation of Afghans who for a variety of reasons are not yet expected to return. It is also expected that a durable solution will be found by the end of the year for the remaining IDPs, either through their voluntary return to their places of origin or through local settlement. The improvement of the security situation for minorities in the north of the county and the end of the drought in the southern and western part of the country will allow for a discontinuation of care and maintenance and for a proactive approach towards durable situation in 2005 and 2006.

2. Operational Goals and potential for durable solutions

The Regional strategy for the Afghan operation for the period 2005-2006 was defined in a series of strategic consultations. The process was initiated by an internal strategic planning exercise held in October 2004 in Geneva and culminated in a consultation held in Brussels in February 2005. The conference was co-chaired by the European Commission and UNHCR and involved donors, other international organisations, as well as the three governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. The 2005-2006 regional strategy foresees a continuous support by UNHCR of the facilitated repatriation scheme in 2006 for the fifth year. UNHCR is discussing with the three governments in the region the establishment, of new arrangements that may replace the current UNHCR assisted voluntary repatriation programme. The same discussions are also likely to bring some results in relation to the continuous stay of Afghans in both Pakistan and Iran.

In accordance with the overall strategy of the Bureau, and as an integral part of the regional operation covering Afghan refugees in Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian states, the operational goals and objectives are the following:

Goal 1: Facilitate and selectively promote the voluntary, safe and gradual return of Afghans returning from Pakistan (300,000), from Iran (300,000) and other host countries and assist their reintegration during an initial period of return, while addressing obstacles to physical, legal and material safety and advocating for their longer term reintegration.

Goal 2: By end 2006, IDPs in Afghanistan have found durable solutions through voluntary repatriation to their areas of origin or through local settlement in conditions of self-sufficiency.

- Refugees, returnees and IDPs have access to information to make informed decisions on return, through bulletins, Q&As, radio-programmes as well as Go and See and Come and Talk visits.
- Refugees, returnees and IDPs have increased access to information and legal services to enable them to resolve obstacles to reintegration, particularly concerning land and property restitution through traditional or formal conflict-resolution and justice mechanisms.
- Obstacles to safe and dignified return and reintegration continue being identified and the national capacity to monitor, document and intervene to address these is enhanced, through the partnership between the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and UNHCR, in co-operation with other human rights and rule of law actors.
- National mechanisms, both governmental and non-governmental to assist and facilitate solutions for extremely vulnerable persons of concern to UNHCR, including women exposed to risk, are functioning and able to absorb a growing number of medical, social and other vulnerable categories of Afghans.
- Each returning refugee receives cash grant of 12 US Dollars and transportation assistance to his/her place of origin/destination. However, in view of the recent increase in oil prices both the offices in Pakistan and Afghanistan are reviewing the cash grant. IDPs returning to their places of origin receive a repatriation package.
- Identified 18,000 vulnerable returnees will have access to shelters; communities of return will be supported with some 400 water points; and other community development projects. A small number of returnees will be provided with short-term employment opportunities through cash-for-work, income generation, or access to skills development programs.
- Specific projects will be undertaken in the field of income generating, vocational training to facilitate the local integration and self sufficiency of IDPs who are unable to return yet to their places of origin.
- Identified communities in conflict will build trust and confidence through the Peaceful Co-existence projects to facilitate the return of refugees and IDPs.

Goal 3: The Afghan authorities will be better capacitated to fulfil their responsibilities in the management of refugees and IDPs issues.

- Two advisers will continue to be placed in the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation along with the Capacity Development Advisors both in the central Ministry and the key regions, to support the capacity building of the ministry.
- The MoRR will assume increasing responsibilities in the management of the encashment centres, and the management of IDPs settlements. The ministry will be more directly involved in the identification of and assistance to EVIs. The ministry will play a more active advocacy role within and outside the government to enlist the support of others in the longer term reintegration of returnees.
- UNHCR will actively support the land distribution scheme undertaken by MoRR.
- Government's advocacy role in the areas of reintegration will be further enhanced through the support to MRRD's Reintegration Unit and Water/Sanitation Programs.

Goal 4: Other actors will include the longer term reintegration of returnees in their development programme.

- UNHCR will continue in a more structured manner its advocacy role with donor government financial institutions and development actors to enlist their support in facilitating the reintegration of returnees. The need for job creation and social housing in urban areas will be particularly highlighted.

Goal 5: The Afghan government increases its responsibilities in managing Afghan displacement from and to Afghanistan

- UNHCR will also encourage the Afghan government to undertake bilateral discussions with its neighbours on issues related to migration and population movement. The capacity of the government will be enhanced in a joint collaboration with IOM and ILO. Meanwhile consultation with donor governments, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan will continue to be held in order to address the problem of Afghans who cannot yet return to their country of origin.

Goal 6: Asylum-seekers and refugees have access to fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures in Afghanistan, their needs are addressed and solutions facilitated, increasingly through governmental mechanisms.

- The Government of Afghanistan will accede to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, develop national refugee legislations, and effectively manage the refugee protection in accordance with international standards.
- Needy asylum-seekers and refugees are assisted while opportunities for self-sufficiency are explored and provided.
- Refugees and other persons of concern will have access to different means of durable solutions, through voluntary repatriation, resettlement or local settlement.