



South-West Asia

Working environment

Six years after the signing of the Bonn Agreement, which showed the will of the international community to rebuild Afghanistan, the country faces many challenges to political stability, reconstruction and development. There have been advances in many areas since the Afghanistan Compact of January 2006, in which the international community and the Government of Afghanistan agreed on key targets for State-building, security and economic and social progress. However, the deterioration in the security situation over the last two years, compounded by the increase in poppy cultivation, threatens to overshadow the progress that has been made. This has already had an impact on repatriation trends, which have declined notably since 2005. Maintaining the momentum of the voluntary repatriation programme and ensuring sustainable reintegration will likely pose even greater challenges in the years to come.

Afghanistan

Islamic Republic of Iran

Pakistan



Since March 2002, more than five million Afghans—approximately 20 per cent of the overall population—have returned to their homeland. Of this number, UNHCR assisted some four million. Over the last two years, however, repatriation numbers have dropped. At the same time, deportations from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the return of unregistered Afghans from Pakistan highlighted the need to address population movements outside the refugee framework.

Some three million Afghans still remain in Pakistan (2.1 million) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (915,000). More than 80 per cent of these people have been in exile for more than twenty years, with half of them born outside their homeland. Security has re-emerged as a major concern for potential returnees, especially in the southern and south-eastern provinces adjoining Pakistan. It remains an issue inside Afghanistan as well, where internal displacement persists, particularly in conflict-affected zones. At the same time, an increase in normal population movements has continued, with large numbers of Afghans moving back and forth between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. These movements, together with poverty among registered Afghans in exile and limited absorption capacities inside Afghanistan, present complex challenges for which both policy-makers and practitioners will need to find solutions in the years ahead.

Given these conditions, UNHCR and its partners need to make both short- and mid-term adjustments to operational strategy, programme design and resource

allocation. In Afghanistan, the key objectives will be to monitor the voluntary and gradual character of return to ensure sustainable reintegration. Tripartite Agreements on voluntary repatriation have been renewed with both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, but security constraints increasingly determine repatriation patterns. UNHCR will likely continue operations in areas including shelter, water and sanitation, and returnee protection monitoring. The Office will also pay more attention to how assistance can be delivered through different implementing arrangements, especially national development programmes.

Some 250,000 illegal Afghan migrants were deported last year from the Islamic Republic of Iran. While the majority of deportees were single males, the humanitarian situation of over 4,500 affected families made it a politically sensitive issue in Afghanistan. This raised the profile of refugee, migration and internal-displacement issues for the Government of Afghanistan, and it is likely to remain high on the political agenda for the foreseeable future.

In Pakistan, the registration exercise completed in 2007 resulted in the issuance of Proof of Registration (PoR) documentation valid until 2009 to 2.15 million Afghans. At the request of the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, an opportunity to repatriate with UNHCR's assistance was granted on an exceptional basis to unregistered Afghans who returned before mid-April 2007. During this period, some 206,000 unregistered Afghans returned with a repatriation package that included a greater cash grant.



UNHCR/V. Tan

Afghanistan. Water is scarce and many returnees have only limited access to safe drinking water.

More than half of the registered Afghans in Pakistan live in urban areas, while 45 per cent reside in camps and permanent settlements in rural areas. In an effort to reverse the declining repatriation trend, the Government of Pakistan announced plans to repatriate all remaining Afghans before the end of 2009. A key component of this plan is the closure of the 85 existing refugee camps. After months of preparation, the peaceful closure of Katcha Gari (65,000 people) was completed at the end of July. Half the residents of Jalozei (110,000 people) vacated the camp in 2007, and complete closure of the camp will take place in early 2008.

UNHCR, UNDP and the Government of Pakistan continue to cooperate on a programme that will benefit both refugee and host populations. Pilot projects have been started in the health sector, and needs assessments are being conducted on livelihoods and the environment.

Despite additional restrictions imposed on registered Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the voluntary return of refugees in 2007 did not accelerate. The Iranian authorities have indicated that they may reassess the status of registered Afghans to see how they can speed up the repatriation programme. Discussions on the registered Afghan population in the Islamic Republic of Iran are likely to enter a new phase in the years to come.

Strategy

UNHCR anticipates that current repatriation trends will continue in the coming years. The Office also expects that pressure from neighbouring countries to increase repatriation will also persist. The overall response of the Office will therefore be to maintain the voluntary repatriation programme and concentrate reintegration efforts in those parts of the country where security conditions permit regular and safe access. The Office will continue its support to the Government's land-allocation scheme for poor and landless returnees; shelter, water and sanitation programmes; and returnee monitoring. It will also increase cooperation with national programmes supporting community development in rural areas, education, health, employment and micro-credit schemes.

In view of the substantial number of Afghans still residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, UNHCR will take the initiative to provide protection and realize solutions. By refining data from the respective registration exercises, the Office will be able to carry out a more in-depth analysis and establish a detailed profile of the Afghan population, enabling different interventions based on identified needs. UNHCR will continue to focus on voluntary repatriation, especially for those who originate from provinces and districts where

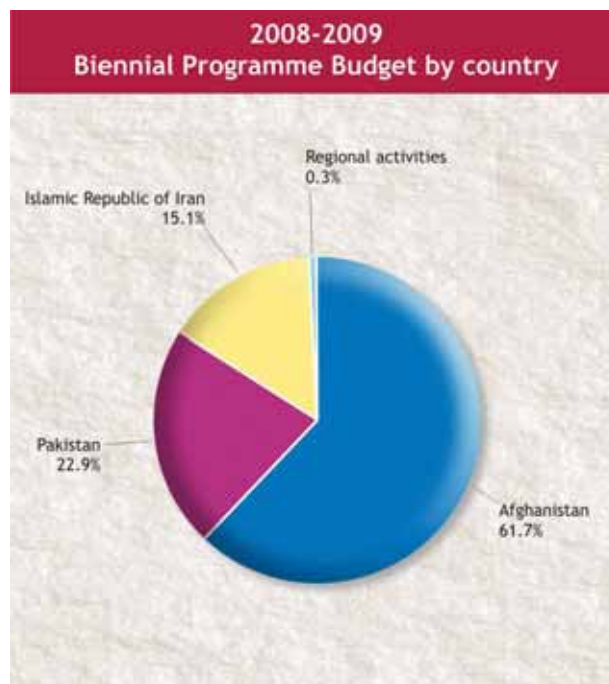
there is potential for further sustainable return. Protection and assistance will be geared towards improving the terms of stay, development interventions for refugee-affected and hosting areas, and support for vulnerable individuals. The Office will continue to provide resettlement opportunities for individual cases where appropriate.

Constraints

Security will be the key determinant of the scope and pace of reconstruction and development in Afghanistan in the coming years. It will thus have an impact on UNHCR's support for voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration. The Government of Afghanistan's ability to negotiate effectively with its neighbours and to assume greater responsibility for managing refugee returns, migration and internal displacement will also be an important factor. The willingness of the Governments of the region to cooperate effectively on managing cross-border movements, and to work according to the principles of voluntary and gradual return, will have an important bearing on protection and the search for durable solutions in South-West Asia.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Afghanistan**, the **Islamic Republic of Iran** and **Pakistan** are described in separate country chapters.



Budget (USD)					
Country	2007			2008	2009
	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Annual Programme Budget
Afghanistan	52,270,958	0	52,270,958	49,871,900	50,595,410
Islamic Republic of Iran	12,849,430	884,782	13,734,212	12,376,669	12,273,117
Pakistan	19,053,563	2,548,598	21,602,161	18,374,173	18,884,942
Regional activities ¹	275,000	0	275,000	120,000	412,962
Total	84,448,951	3,433,380	87,882,331	80,742,742	82,166,431

¹ Includes repatriation of Afghans from various countries.

Note: The Supplementary Programme Budget excludes a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.