

AFGHANISTAN

IN SHORT



Main Objectives

- Monitor systematically the protection situation of refugees returning from neighbouring countries along the routes of return through house-visits and confidential interviews; establish the voluntary nature of return and assess protection and material needs during the initial phase of reintegration.
- Facilitate sustainable reintegration by supporting and boosting the absorption capacity of communities receiving large numbers of returnees through Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in the sectors prioritised by the returnees themselves; encourage the active participation of both returnees and the local receiving population in the planning and implementation of these projects.
- Share information gathered through protection monitoring with other UN agencies and NGOs with a view to directing the international community's aid effort towards areas with large concentrations of returnees and creating the foundation for a future scaling-down of UNHCR's material assistance; share protection information with UNHCR's offices in countries of asylum for use in the assessment of prospects for voluntary repatriation.

Planning Figures		
Population	Jan. 2000*	Dec. 2000**
Returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran	1,355,000	1,455,000
Returnees from Pakistan	2,268,000	2,368,000
Total	3,623,000	3,823,000

* Approximately 35,000 returnees from previous years will still require initial reintegration assistance in 2000.
 ** UNHCR estimates that 200,000 Afghan refugees will repatriate in 2000, half of them from the Islamic Republic of Iran and half from Pakistan.

Total Requirements
USD 7,813,802





WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

The ethnic, religious and regional dimensions of the ongoing conflict between the Taliban and the United Front in the north of Afghanistan have worsened throughout 1999. Peace is remote, as ever, and serious human rights violations are still reported with alarming frequency.

The collapse of the latest UN-sponsored peace talks in July 1999 led to renewed fighting and the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians into Kabul, the Panjsher Valley, Kunduz and Takhar. More than 140,000 Afghans were displaced from the Shomali plains north of Kabul since August 1999.

A political settlement and peaceful conditions in Afghanistan remain a precondition for large-scale return of the 2.6 million refugees remaining in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan and the thousands of others who have sought refuge in other countries. In the absence of a peaceful settlement, UNHCR cannot advocate repatriation. UNHCR will however continue to help refugees who make an informed decision to go back. Refugees in the main countries of asylum are generally well-informed about the situation in Afghanistan and when deciding to repatriate take into consideration the ever-worsening political, social and economic problems in their host countries. Many refugees originating from rural districts in Afghanistan consider voluntary repatriation preferable to life in the camps.

Many areas in Afghanistan are sufficiently peaceful for reintegration work to be both feasible and successful. These include the places of origin of the majority of the refugees, particularly those in Pakistan. The gradual return of UN international staff to Afghanistan in March 1999, and the continued relaxation of UN security measures have greatly increased the international community's capacity to provide assistance to those in need in Afghanistan.

Constraints

The ongoing civil war in Afghanistan continues to cause large-scale displacement of the civilian population, widespread loss of life, serious human rights violations and the destruction of social and economic infrastructure. Environmental degradation, food insecurity, lack of economic opportunities, high unemployment and poverty and an

increase in illicit drug production are enduring legacies of 20 years of conflict. An estimated 870 square kilometres are infested by landmines and unexploded ordnance, posing significant hazards to life and property. Most state institutions have collapsed and the aid community is, by default, increasingly assuming many of the functions of the state, particularly in the social sectors.

Whenever the refugees go back, resumption of normal life in a devastated and greatly changed country continues to pose enormous challenges. The renewed fighting in some parts of Afghanistan, increased polarisation of the conflict along ethnic lines, and security restrictions for international UN staff are only some of the issues that reduce the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance programmes.

Life expectancy for women, children and other vulnerable groups is low. Infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world (257 for every 1,000 live births) and access to health care, particularly for women, is extremely limited. Education of girls is generally prohibited and female literacy rate is only 12.7 per cent. Various other limitations on women (including a travel ban on female Muslim international UN staff) dog efforts to help Afghan women reintegrate.



STRATEGY

Protection and Solutions

The information generated through monitoring of returnees will be used to plan assistance and provide information to potential returnees and host governments. It will also inform dialogue with the authorities on returnees' problems and guide UNHCR policy on future repatriation.

UNHCR will also monitor respect shown by the authorities in Afghanistan for the rights of returnees, as enshrined in the declarations of amnesties. These include non-discrimination on account of religion, ethnic origin and gender; access to immovable property and land; and exemption from recruitment for one year following return. Monitoring will also focus on cases of involuntary return from the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to guide appropriate intervention both in the country of asylum and in Afghanistan.





The safety of returnee women is sometimes more difficult to assess since they tend to be discouraged, often by male family members, from talking to outsiders. Returnee children suffer, not only because basic social services are lacking, but also because of the almost nationwide absence of universal norms of law. They also run a high risk of being injured by landmines.

UNHCR will liaise with other agencies actively promoting human rights in Afghanistan, especially the Special Rapporteur of the UN on Afghanistan, the Senior Human Rights Advisor and the Civil Affairs monitors of United Nations Special Mission for Afghanistan (UNSMA), and initiate joint training activities for local officials. Regular consultations will take place with UNHCR's offices in asylum countries to report on protection issues in Afghanistan.

A small proportion of UNHCR's protection activities in Afghanistan will revolve around refugee status determination and, where necessary, resettlement for a limited number of Iraqi and Iranian asylum-seekers.

Assistance

The returnees' needs will be assessed in relation to their access to services, resources and opportunities on equitable terms with other members of the community to which they return. Rehabilitation works will take place through a community-based approach and will encourage beneficiary participation and ownership. WFP will sponsor Food-for-Work projects.

UNHCR's projects are designed to meet the most pressing needs of returnees during the initial reintegration phase: shelter and potable water. Initial reintegration assistance to rehabilitate buildings will be formulated together with the returnees and implemented with the involvement of the entire receiving community. Water supplies (shallow wells and handpumps) will be overhauled. These efforts will often target women, children and other vulnerable segments of the returnee population. UNHCR will continue to support and expand projects such as the pioneering Greater Azro Tizin initiative, which heralds further joint UN programmes in Afghanistan.

Afghans returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran will be helped to travel in safety to their communities of origin (avoiding displacement in border districts).

A huge burden is the absence of work or credit facilities, especially for women heads of household not allowed to work. The involvement of returnee women in community-based activities, including social counselling, literacy training, and income-generating activities will continue to be encouraged. Small-scale loans will be provided through group-guaranteed lending schemes.

Lack of educational facilities has served as an impediment to repatriation and successful reintegration. UNHCR will continue to fund rehabilitation and reconstruction of primary schools that must serve the entire community equitably with access to both girls and boys. Teacher training will be for both women and men and text books and other teaching materials will be supplied to these schools.

UNHCR will continue to monitor the implementation of a reforestation project that addresses some of the growing environmental concerns associated with the return of refugees.

Desired Impact

UNHCR's reintegration programme in Afghanistan will support the return of refugees, most of whom have been in exile for over 15 years. This in turn is expected to lessen the burden on neighbouring countries hosting Afghan refugees as well as on the international community.

The experience of the returnees during exile will shape expectations once they return home. Former refugees are indeed better placed than the international community to convince the local authorities to permit education for girls and health care for women.

Regular and systematic monitoring of conditions inside Afghanistan, coupled with activities to increase the awareness of local authorities and organisations of international human rights principles, aim to minimise current abuses and may help curb violations committed against minority groups and returnees.

It is hoped that reintegration assistance will alleviate the crushing poverty of returnees and help them return to normal life as soon as possible. Contributions to the rebuilding of civil society will reduce the chances of another exodus and lessen inter-ethnic conflict. However, without lasting peace and security, UNHCR's objectives, in particular the long-term sustainability of return and reintegration, may be compromised.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management Structure

The Chief of Mission (based in Islamabad, Pakistan) is responsible for UNHCR's interests in Afghanistan, liaison with the Government, donor embassies, other UN agencies and NGOs. The office in Islamabad will be manned by six international (including one United Nations Volunteer) and 20 national staff.

Field operations rely on five sub-offices in Afghanistan: Herat, Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Mazar-i-Sharif. A total of 12 international and 154 national staff will be working in these offices in 2000.

Coordination

Over the past two years, the international community has come to share a vision for the future of the aid effort in Afghanistan. The Strategic Framework (August 1998) identified five key areas of assistance (support to return, alleviation of human suffering, protection and human rights, basic services, and empowerment of the population). These contribute to more coherent and cost-effective planning. UNHCR chairs the working group on protection and human rights. The Afghan Programming Board oversees, in an advisory capacity, delivery of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. UNHCR is a member of the Board, which also comprises 14 other UN agencies, 16 NGOs and 15 donor governments. Regional Coordination Bodies are also currently in place in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad.

UNHCR will continue to mobilise the support of other UN agencies and NGOs to cover needs that are not met through UNHCR's limited resources. Discussions and joint planning will be arranged

with UNICEF (returnee children), OCHA (gender issues), FAO (crops and food security), WHO (health and sanitation), and UNOPS (water and community structures). UNHCR will also work to draw the attention of other UN agencies and NGOs to the needs of the most vulnerable among the returnee communities.

Offices

Kabul	Jalalabad
Herat	Kandahar
Islamabad (Pakistan)	Mazar-i-Sharif

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Repatriation

NGOs

Afghan-German Basic Education
Agency for Rehabilitation and Energy Conservation in Afghanistan
Care International
Danish Committee for Aid to Afghanistan
International Assistance Mission
International Rescue Committee
Save the Children Fund/USA
Local NGOs to be selected in 2000

Other

Food and Agriculture Organisation
International Organisation for Migration

Budget (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	1,071,548
Domestic Needs/ Household Support	200,000
Education	316,000
Health/Nutrition	250,000
Income Generation	200,000
Legal Assistance	899,800
Operational Support (to Agencies)	170,000
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	1,100,000
Transport/Logistics	1,750,000
Water (non-agricultural)	500,000
Total Operations	6,457,348
Programme Support	1,356,454
Total	7,813,802

