



South-West Asia

Working environment

Afghanistan has made substantial progress since the installation of President Hamid Karzai's interim administration in December 2001. The establishment of permanent institutions of government foreseen by the Bonn Agreement of that year — a constitution, a national assembly and an elected head of state — have been achieved. However, as the recent deterioration in the security situation in the southern and eastern provinces of the country illustrates, Afghanistan's recovery still faces many hurdles. It was in anticipation of the challenges ahead that the international community and the Afghan Government agreed in January 2006 to the Afghanistan Compact, an ambitious programme of state-building, reconstruction and development covering the years 2006 to 2010. The success of this partnership will determine the prospects for solutions to the Afghan refugee situation in the years to come.

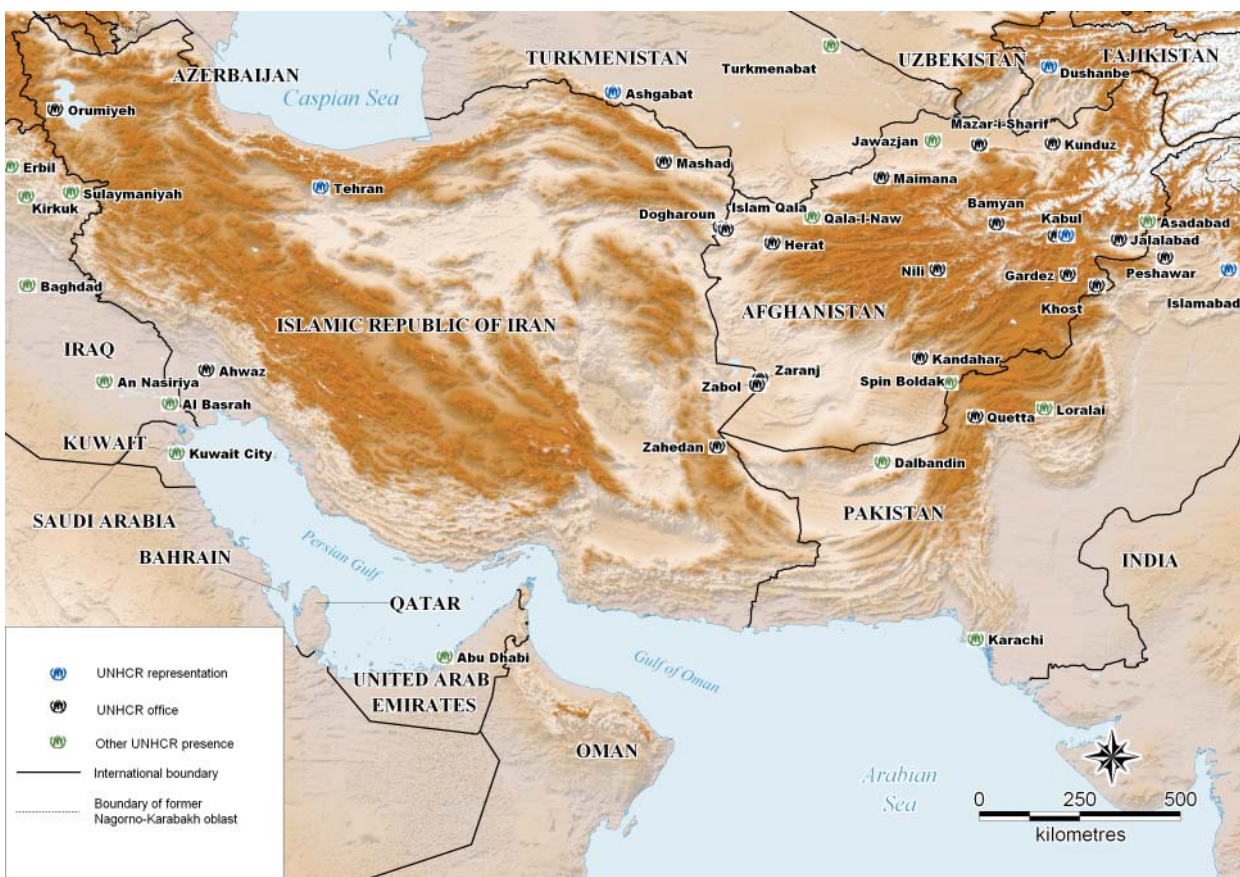
Since March 2002 more than 4.7 million Afghans have returned home, 3.5 million of them assisted by UNHCR. Return figures have declined significantly in 2006, with approximately 290,000 Afghans repatriating, just under half of them assisted by UNHCR.

At the time of writing, some 3.5 million Afghans remain in exile. The Governments and people of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan have been generous hosts. Indeed, more than 80 per cent of the remaining Afghans in the neighbouring countries have been there for more than 20 years, with half of them born in exile. Though security does remain a concern, surveys indicate that the major challenges to return now are primarily of a social and economic nature. Many Afghans move regularly between their place of exile and their homeland. Furthermore, normal cross-border movements in both directions are increasing.

Afghanistan

Islamic Republic of Iran

Pakistan



In view of this complex and changing operational environment, UNHCR and its partners have had to make both immediate and medium-term adjustments to their operations in Afghanistan and the region. In Afghanistan, the aim is to continue to support sustainable voluntary repatriation and reintegration while strengthening the Government's capacity to manage different forms of population movement. Security conditions have compromised access and service delivery in a number of provinces. Nevertheless, UNHCR and its partners still maintain a substantial programme covering shelter, water/sanitation, and returnee monitoring.

In Pakistan, the registration of Afghans who participated in the 2005 census is expected to be concluded by late 2006. It is estimated that some 2.5 million Afghans remain in Pakistan, divided in roughly equal numbers between rural and urban areas. The Government and UNHCR agree that not all Afghans are of concern to UNHCR. The data generated by the registration exercise will help to develop solutions for the remaining Afghan population. Registered Afghans will be issued with identity documents entitling them to remain in Pakistan for a period of three years.

In recent months, UNHCR, UNDP and the Pakistani authorities have been developing and organizing a needs assessment exercise to devise a programme for refugee-affected areas. The aim is to encourage longer-term support for the improvement of basic living conditions among both local and refugee communities.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the authorities held an additional registration exercise at the end of 2005 that

recorded 920,000 Afghans and 54,000 Iraqis. Despite the limited validity of the identity cards issued following the registration, and a more challenging asylum climate, the number of assisted returns to Afghanistan fell to its lowest level in a decade. UNHCR and the Iranian authorities have recently signed a two-year agreement to support projects designed to foster self-reliance, to increase repatriation prospects through vocational training, and to provide some targeted assistance for those with specific vulnerabilities. Discussions between UNHCR and the Government on the management of the remaining Afghan refugees in the country are expected to intensify in the months to come.

Strategy

In anticipation of more modest levels of return in the years to come, UNHCR will engage all stakeholders in the development of a strategy that would best address future repatriation and reintegration challenges faced by Afghans in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan.

UNHCR will continue to support voluntary repatriation in 2007. It anticipates an extension of tripartite agreements to provide the legal and operational framework for returns. To sustain its momentum and to improve cost effectiveness, UNHCR will introduce a number of changes to existing operations, such as an increase in the cash grant. It also aims to improve reintegration prospects within Afghanistan by supporting its partners engaged in the implementation of land-allocation schemes, employment services, and access to microcredit.



Pakistan. In 2007, UNHCR will continue its voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. *UNHCR / B. Baloch*

With respect to the remaining Afghans in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, UNHCR intends to work closely with the two Governments and with partners to develop a more detailed profile of this population. The objective would be to develop different approaches for specific groups. To that end, UNHCR will work to improve the identification of opportunities for future voluntary repatriation; the sustainability of future protection and assistance especially for the most vulnerable; the quality and validity of documentation issued; and the selection of candidates for resettlement.

Constraints

In the short term, security conditions in Afghanistan will determine the viability of reconstruction and development programmes in general and UNHCR's initiatives in particular. In the longer term, the key to achieving solutions for the long-established and registered Afghan populations still in exile will lie in agreements that might be reached between Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Pakistan on how to manage them. A further important task in the years to come will be the development of practical arrangements to manage future population movements outside a refugee and humanitarian framework.

Operations

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

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Afghanistan	60,978,721	52,270,958
Islamic Republic of Iran	16,411,128	12,849,430
Pakistan	23,327,170	19,053,563
Regional activities ¹	589,242	275,000
Total	101,306,261	84,448,951

¹ Includes repatriation of Afghans from various countries.

