

# South-West Asia

## Recent Developments

At the beginning of 2002, more than five million Afghans were estimated to have sought refuge in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics. In addition, more than one million people had been displaced inside Afghanistan because of drought and war.

Between March and September this year, some 1.7 million refugees repatriated with assistance from UNHCR, the vast majority from neighbouring countries. Around 230,000 IDPs were helped to return to their homes, with a further 400,000 making their way home on their own.

In order to support the massive return of refugees, which was on a scale far larger than UNHCR and its partners had anticipated (the original planning figure was 1.2 million) the organisation had to reorient its programme in Afghanistan and neighbouring

Afghanistan  
Islamic Republic of Iran  
Pakistan



countries. The programme had to transform itself from one set up to provide protection and assistance to refugees in asylum countries into a regionally co-ordinated return and reintegration programme. A tripartite agreement was signed with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan outlining the rights of returnees and specifying how many belongings and how much money they could take home with them. A similar tripartite agreement with Pakistan is still under discussion.

UNHCR established voluntary repatriation centres and mobile registration teams in the host countries to enable potential returnees to sign up for the assisted repatriation programme. The returnees could also ask about their specific home areas and UNHCR did its best to provide them with as much updated information as possible, on everything from general conditions and protection-related issues to the number of people who had already returned and the services available.

Inside Afghanistan, distribution centres were established where returnees could get relief items and transportation grants. The nation-wide return-monitoring network was also expanded and strengthened.

To enable potential returnees to make informed decisions, UNHCR has set up a regional mass information programme, designed to disseminate details about conditions in areas of return in Dari and Pashtu. The updated profiles of areas of return can also be accessed on the website of the Afghanistan Information Management Services. In the first few months of 2002, the organisation surveyed the refugee population in Pakistan in order to build up a picture of returnee needs and concerns, and to establish which sections of the population intended to return in the near future.

At the same time, UNHCR continues to seek durable solutions to the plight of refugees through-



Pakistan: UNHCR registration in Takhta Baig transit centre near Peshawar for the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. P. Benetar

out the region who are unable to return home (providing legal counselling and conducting interviews for resettlement).

## Strategic Objectives

Given the volatile security situation in Afghanistan, plans for 2003 must at this stage remain flexible.

Nevertheless, the voluntary repatriation and initial reintegration of Afghan refugees and IDPs will remain a priority. Within Afghanistan there will be more emphasis on reintegration. Offices in neighbouring countries will concentrate not only on repatriation but on drawing up strategies and plans for people who wish to repatriate at some stage but who are not yet ready to do so. They will also pursue solutions for those who cannot or who do not wish to return, as well as assisting recent arrivals.

Partnership and capacity-building will be the key elements in UNHCR's work throughout the region. Offices will work to strengthen the government ministries and departments with which they work, and will focus on enhancing links with other organisations. In an effort to ensure that reintegration work is mainstreamed and sustained, UNHCR will link up with long-term development actors, UNDP and the World Bank. To provide adequate coverage of sectors not covered by UNHCR, and to respond to immediate requirements, the organisation has concentrated on co-ordination with operational agencies such as UNICEF, FAO, and international and national NGOs.

## Operations

The country programmes in Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan are described in separate country chapters.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Afghanistan	600,000
Islamic Republic of Iran	16,736,382
Pakistan	26,625,319
Regional Activities <sup>1</sup>	520,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>44,481,701</b>

<sup>1</sup> The Annual Programme Budget includes scholarships for refugee students and regional consultations on population displacements.