

Executive Committee Summary

Country Operations Plan 2003 : PAKISTAN

Context and Beneficiary Populations

At the beginning of 2002, the Government of Pakistan estimated that 3.3 million Afghans reside in Pakistan. Nearly one-half of the Afghans live in old refugee villages (including New Shamshatoo), 200,000 are accommodated in new sites established in 2001 and early 2002, and 1.6 million refugees are scattered throughout the country, mainly in urban areas such as Peshawar, Quetta, Islamabad/Rawalpindi, Karachi and Lahore.

Events in the region and elsewhere in 2001 and 2002 have led to a radical change in Afghanistan. There is renewed hope that the Afghan refugee situation may be resolved through a repatriation programme. The environment in Afghanistan, however, remains fragile, and vigilance is required. Despite its readiness to see the refugees depart, the Government of Pakistan has clearly indicated that Afghans will not be forced to leave. A particular concern of the government is the presence of refugees in the cities, where they receive very little help, live in miserable conditions and are perceived to contribute to law and order problems. Addressing the urban refugee problem is a major preoccupation for the government.

At the same time, the Government of Pakistan maintains its closed border policy to new arrivals, whereby only those travelling with valid documents are allowed to enter Pakistan. UNHCR has been assured that the policy on admission of vulnerables, as announced in November 2001, will continue.

In addition, there is a group of some 1000 individuals of various nationalities, mostly Somalis (418), Iraqis (213) and Iranians (181), for whom UNHCR is actively seeking resettlement or repatriation.

Security situation

The GOP is responsible for the security of the refugees and humanitarian staff in the refugee camps and collaborates with UNHCR to ensure the civilian character of the refugee villages and camps. Measures have been taken especially in the new sites, which are extremely close to the border and, in the case of NWFP, in tribal areas, including a heightened presence of staff from the GoP Commissioner for Afghan Refugees' office in Chaman/Baluchistan. Movements to the sites are accompanied by armed escorts and in convoys. As part of the camp security problem, training of security guards has been initiated.

Protection issues

Pakistan has not acceded to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. The present protection situation is characterised by the asylum policies adopted and implemented by the Government, including the continued border closure and the Foreigners Act, under which refugees not in possession of valid travel or stay permits are categorised as illegal immigrants and therefore subject to arrest and deportation. As such, Afghans – who frequently lack valid travel and residence permits – have a precarious protection status. Nevertheless, the GOP has unequivocally stated that there will be no forced returns. Moreover, there is now a broad understanding that the issue of the residual caseload will be addressed jointly by the GOP and UNHCR, according to international standards and through a screening mechanism successfully tested during 2001. Some minority ethnic groups are reportedly targets of violence in Afghanistan and continue to seek asylum in Pakistan. UNHCR's protection activities will therefore strive to negotiate for a favourable asylum regime which permits admission for new asylum seekers, facilitates a free and informed repatriation and embodies internationally accepted minimum refugee law standards. Resettlement

will also be pursued for refugees in need of continued international protection without other possible durable solutions.

Overview of refugee population

The Afghan population is of diverse ethnic backgrounds, the majority being Pathans, with minority groups including Baluchis, Hazaras, Tajiks, Nuristanis and Turkomens, originating mainly from the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, but also from Kabul and a number of northern areas. They have different cultural, religious and social backgrounds and they have reached Pakistan in successive waves. Their protection and assistance needs thus are also equally varied.

Refugees from other origins also receive protection and assistance from UNHCR. They are mainly Somalis (418), Iraqis (213) and Iranians (181), and they reside mostly in Islamabad/Rawalpindi. A substantial number of them are female heads of households falling in the women-at-risk category, and single men. With no national legislation on refugees, the government considers them as illegal immigrants and as such they have no access to public services or employment. They are allowed to remain in the country pending the identification of a durable solution elsewhere, during which time they receive basic assistance from UNHCR, including subsistence allowances, health care and education. While the majority wishes to be resettled, many of them have received multiple rejections from resettlement countries, and consequently voluntary repatriation appears as the most likely option when feasible.

Policy issues

Gender equality, children and adolescents, refugees with special needs including older refugees and environmental concerns are UNHCR policy priorities and as such are addressed in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of protection and assistance activities. Generally, UNHCR Pakistan's programme adopt a community-based approach through refugee committees, trainers and volunteers under the guidance of the Community Services Officers and in close partnership with the GOP Social Welfare Cell and a number of NGOs.

Linkages to other countries within a defined "situation"

UNHCR's programme in Pakistan is an integral part of the Afghanistan regional strategy which includes in addition to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian Republics.

Capacity and presence of implementing partners

UNHCR programme is implemented in collaboration with the GOP through the SAFRON Ministry, the Chief Commissioner's office and the Commissionerates for Afghan Refugees. UNHCR regularly engages in dialogue and partnership with a network of national and international NGOs. Co-ordination is undertaken through regular meetings, sectoral and general, at the provincial and country levels. Training of partners focuses mainly on protection/legal aspects of UNHCR's work.

Presence and role of other UN agencies and international organisations

A number of UN agencies provide invaluable support to UNHCR's programme: UNDP facilitates the dialogue with the authorities and in addition is leading a new project for the rehabilitation of refugee hosting areas which is expected to contribute to the preservation and expansion of the asylum space, WFP supplies food for refugees in the new sites as well as to returnees inside Afghanistan, UNICEF provides support in education and water in the new sites, and WHO, UNAIDS, UNDCP, UNFPA and UNESCO, in different ways, all support the refugee programme.

Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Afghan refugees	
Main Goal (s): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees 2. To protect and assist Afghan refugees and asylum seekers 3. To address effectively refugees' needs by maximising strategic partnerships with UN agencies and implementing partners. 4. To develop a protection and assistance framework to respond, if required, to the needs of a potential new influx 	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees who desire to repatriate do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information campaign launched • Voluntary Repatriation Centres open and functional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees are allowed to remain in Pakistan and enjoy security and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiations with the GOP to ensure voluntariness of return conducted • Legal Advice Centres established and functional • Government officials trained
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women-at-risk and refugees facing security problems benefit from a rapid protection response, including assessment and submission for resettlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures established and applied • Cases requiring dislocation relocated or resettled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees arrived in 2000 and 2001 and residing in the new sites benefit from basic assistance, including food and domestic items, while refugees who arrived earlier and reside in refugee villages have access to community based health care, primary education and water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food distributed regularly and effectively • Coal for heating and cooking procured and distributed regularly and effectively • Health, water and education services established and functional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women, children, adolescents, elderly people and other extremely vulnerable individuals benefit from protection and assistance according to their needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs assessment undertaken • Cases referred for attention to the appropriate care giver
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum-seekers are allowed to enter and remain in Pakistan, where they receive the support of the international community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiations conducted with the GOP to seek their agreement • Contingency plan developed

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Refugees of other origins	
Main Goal: To identify suitable durable solutions outside Pakistan, i.e. voluntary repatriation or resettlement	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
Refugees and asylum-seekers are allowed to remain in Pakistan pending the identification of a durable solution elsewhere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual RSD procedures established and applied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees who desire to repatriate do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling available and provided • Repatriation assistance provided
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees who are unable or unwilling to repatriate are processed and their cases submitted for resettlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual RSD procedures established and applied • Cases in need resettled