

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Asia and the Pacific region hosts more than 9.5 million people of concern to UNHCR, including approximately 3.7 million refugees (originating mostly from Afghanistan and Myanmar), 2.4 million IDPs and 1.6 million stateless people.

Two main situations are likely to dominate UNHCR's operations in 2017: the likelihood that some 365,000 Afghan refugees will return to their country from Pakistan before the end of 2016; and the situation in Myanmar following the nomination of a new government, and the potential implications on internal displacement and the return of refugees. While maritime movements in 2016 were not on the same scale as those seen in 2015, with the situation in Myanmar remaining unresolved there is potential for such movements to continue in 2017. In this regard, the lack of alternative pathways for admission across the region is of great concern to UNHCR.



Boys displaced by fighting in Eastern Afghanistan sit in front of a shop in their informal settlement on the outskirts of Kabul.

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Asia and the Pacific

More than two-thirds of refugees in the region – an estimated 2.8 million people – live in urban and semi-urban areas. This requires UNHCR and partners to work with States and other actors to strengthen the protection of those living outside camps and ensure their access, including through new or innovative ways, to essential services. The organization will focus on four priority objectives: undertaking community outreach, strengthening relations with urban refugees, ensuring access to essential services, such as healthcare and education, and promoting livelihoods and self-reliance.

It is estimated that around 43 per cent of people that fall under UNHCR's statelessness mandate are in the Asia and Pacific region. Therefore, the prevention and reduction of statelessness, and the protection of the rights of stateless people, are key regional priorities for UNHCR. Considerable progress has been made on this front, particularly in Central Asia (for more details, see the chapter on *Safeguarding fundamental human rights*).

MAJOR SITUATIONS

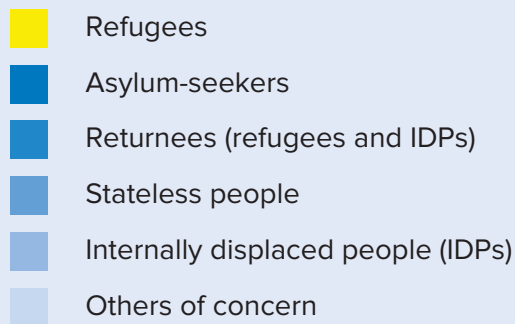
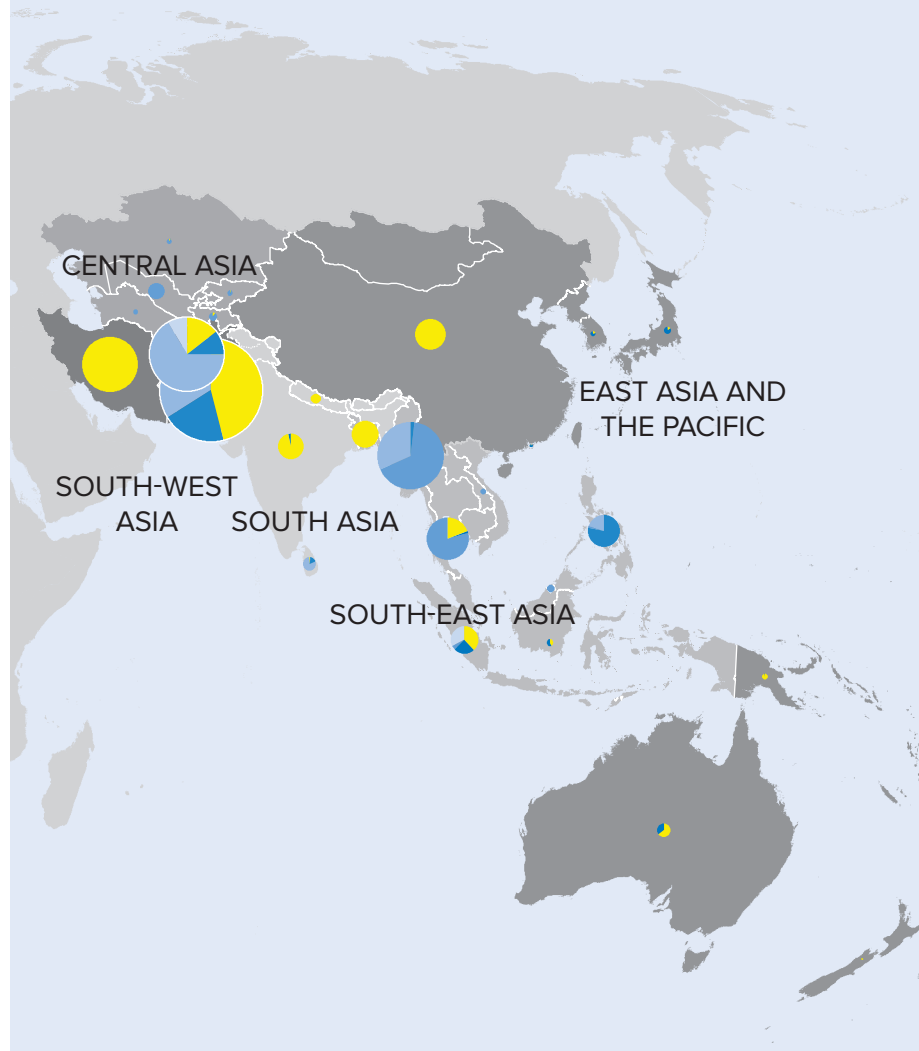
Afghan refugees in South-West Asia

Afghans remain one of the largest protracted refugee populations of concern to UNHCR. While more than 2.6 million Afghan refugees have found asylum in around 70 countries, 95 per cent of them continue to be hosted in the **Islamic Republics of Iran** and **Pakistan** where, for almost four decades, they have benefited from protection, assistance and support. Both countries also host large numbers of undocumented Afghans – an estimated 1.5 to 2 million in the Islamic Republic of Iran and 1 million in Pakistan. Moreover, Afghans, including large numbers of separated and unaccompanied minors, continue to be one of the largest groups arriving in Europe.

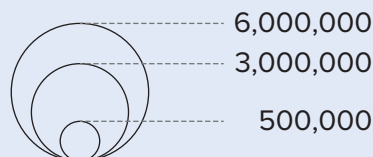
Within **Afghanistan**, some 1.2 million people remain internally displaced. Since mid-2015, the deteriorating situation in the country and increased

levels of violence have led to large-scale internal displacement and diminished humanitarian access. UNHCR is working with the Government of Afghanistan and partners to assist IDPs, support the reintegration of returning refugees, and to advocate sustained support from the international community.

Despite the complex political and security environment in Afghanistan, there has been a surge in the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan since July 2016. By mid-October, some 265,000 Afghan refugees had returned from Pakistan, and estimations are that some 365,000 Afghan refugees in total will return from Pakistan by the end of 2016. This trend is expected to continue in 2017. The scope and pace of return is likely to have an impact on Afghanistan's already limited absorption capacity.



Population of concern as of January 2016



The Government of Pakistan has committed to extending the validity of the proof of registration cards issued to refugees until the end of March 2017 but the legal status of Afghan refugees beyond this date remains uncertain. Consequently, UNHCR will continue working closely with host governments in the region, together with the Government of Afghanistan, to advocate for voluntary, dignified and phased returns.

The “Solutions strategy for Afghan refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries” (SSAR) continues to be a relevant regional framework to seek solutions for the Afghan refugees living in a protracted situation. However, the evolving situation inside Afghanistan in 2016 has hampered the attainment of durable solutions. In response to these developments, UNHCR developed a regional plan within the framework of the SSAR to be implemented throughout South-West Asia until the end of 2017.

The regional plan presents specific activities which will contribute to building resilience among Afghan refugees, IDPs, returnees and host

communities, and which will help find innovative solutions to their problems. These are articulated in five key areas of intervention: access to protection (legal and policy framework); access to basic services; youth empowerment through education, skills training and livelihoods support; durable solutions and advocacy; and coordination and partnership. Inside Afghanistan, the plan focuses on targeted assistance to the most vulnerable people of concern and local communities.

Solutions for people of concern from Myanmar

A number of significant political developments have taken place in Myanmar over the last few years. Most notably among them, the signing of a nationwide ceasefire agreement in 2015, followed by the installation of a democratically-elected government led by the National League for Democracy in April 2016. These developments are expected to impact on the large number of refugees originating from Myanmar in the region, as well as the hundreds of thousands of people who remain displaced inside the country. UNHCR is working with the Government to address protection and other issues

related to people of concern. In light of the positive developments in Myanmar, plans for the voluntary repatriation of refugees from camps in **Thailand** and other neighboring countries were discussed. A strategic roadmap and operational plans have been designed in this regard. The week of 24 October saw the first pilot voluntary returns of Myanmar refugees from Thailand. UNHCR will continue to work with the two Governments, development and other partners to enable the return of refugees to Myanmar under safe and dignified conditions.

Irregular migratory movements in South-East Asia

People continue to risk their lives on dangerous boat journeys throughout South-East Asia and further afield. The “Bali Process Declaration on people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crime”, adopted in March 2016, resulted in a number of important recommendations. These included a proposal to explore temporary protection and local stay arrangements for asylum-seekers and refugees.

The Declaration notes the importance of comprehensive, long-term solutions to address mixed migratory movements and highlights the collective responsibility of countries in the region to find such solutions. The Bali Process reunited many of the governments that took part in the 2015 Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean in Bangkok. Together, the progress made in Bali and Bangkok provides a strong foundation for the coordinated regional action required in 2017 to manage mixed movements in a humane way and protect refugees at sea.

REGIONAL STRATEGY

Safeguarding access to protection and asylum

While advocating and supporting the establishment and improvement of asylum procedures by States, UNHCR will continue promoting protection-sensitive systems for the management of mixed movements in the region. The Office will also continue working with States and other stakeholders to identify alternatives to the detention of asylum-seekers; ensure

access to protection; and establish mechanisms for achieving solutions for people of concern, including through regional schemes beyond third-country resettlement, such as labour mobility migration agreements. Strengthening the protection of refugee communities living outside camps will remain a priority in 2017.

Seeking durable solutions for protracted refugee situations

Taking into account the realities on the ground, UNHCR will continue exploring a comprehensive solutions package per situation encompassing voluntary return, resettlement and local solutions, as well as temporary protection, and residence or labour migration schemes. This is especially relevant in the context of the Afghan and Myanmar situations.

Through the SSAR, UNHCR will continue to play a more instrumental role in calling for more international attention and support to Afghanistan and the neighbouring refugee hosting countries to ensure equitable responsibility-sharing. It will also promote the need to address root causes of displacement as part of the comprehensive approach to securing solutions.

The Office will continue working with the newly-elected Government of Myanmar to enable refugees return home under safe and dignified conditions, in line with the strategic roadmap referred to above. On addressing irregular movements by sea, the focus in 2017 will remain on strengthening cooperation with states in the region, with IOM and UNODC. Consultations on the issue will continue, including in the context of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, as well as other regional platforms.

In South Asia, resettlement of Bhutanese refugees in camps in Nepal is continuing with, at present, an estimated 10,000 refugees remaining in two camps. In 2017, UNHCR, together with partners, will continue working with the concerned governments to find lasting solutions for those remaining.

UNHCR will also continue assisting the voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from camps in India. Returnees receive repatriation and transportation grants, core relief items and access to legal advice on housing, land and property issues. However, challenges remain in the reintegration process, including ensuring access to livelihood opportunities, land and documentation.

Ensuring protection and durable solutions for IDPs

In Afghanistan, UNHCR will continue supporting IDPs with specific needs through service provision, in-kind and cash-based assistance, including for urgent medical expenses, legal assistance and to promote self-reliance. The Office, in coordination with other humanitarian actors, and in its capacity as lead of the emergency shelter/non-food items cluster, will also provide one-off assistance to families newly displaced by conflict.

In Myanmar, as part of the inter-agency response and as the lead of the protection, shelter and camp coordination and camp management clusters, the Office will continue working with partners and the Government to protect and assist approximately 100,000 IDPs in Kachin and northern Shan States, and an estimated 120,000 IDPs in Rakhine State.

Reducing and preventing statelessness and protecting stateless people

With more than 1.6 million people in the Asia and Pacific region falling within UNHCR's statelessness mandate, the region is home to the highest number of

stateless people in the world. Addressing statelessness will remain a key strategic priority for the organization in 2017.

Operations have received guidance to support them to plan interventions in line with UNHCR's "Global Action Plan to End Statelessness", with a focus on strengthening national systems and including all people of concern to UNHCR in national civil registration systems of births, marriages and deaths. UNHCR will also encourage the exchange of good practices in the region in relation to nationality and birth registration. Political space for asylum and protection has also been narrowing in some of the countries with protracted refugee populations.

CONSTRAINTS

Only 20 of the 45 countries and territories in the region have acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The lack of a legal framework to anchor protection and solutions remains a challenge in the region. Continuing violence in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is creating an environment of increasing insecurity for UNHCR's staff, resulting in limited humanitarian access to people of concern. ■

Financial information

The 2017 comprehensive needs assessment budget for the Asia and Pacific region is \$545 million. The financial requirements for South-West Asia - comprising operations in the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan - represent around 66 per cent of the total regional budget. Financial requirements for the Myanmar operation represent approximately 9 per cent of the budget, while the remaining 25 per cent is shared among three regional and 17 country operations.

While the budget level for the region has remained fairly steady, earmarked funding has declined, from \$260 million in 2013 to \$207 million in 2015. Consequentially, operations in the Asia and Pacific region suffer from funding shortages, resulting in constraints in the

delivery of key protection and solutions activities, and requiring operations to constantly re-prioritize needs.

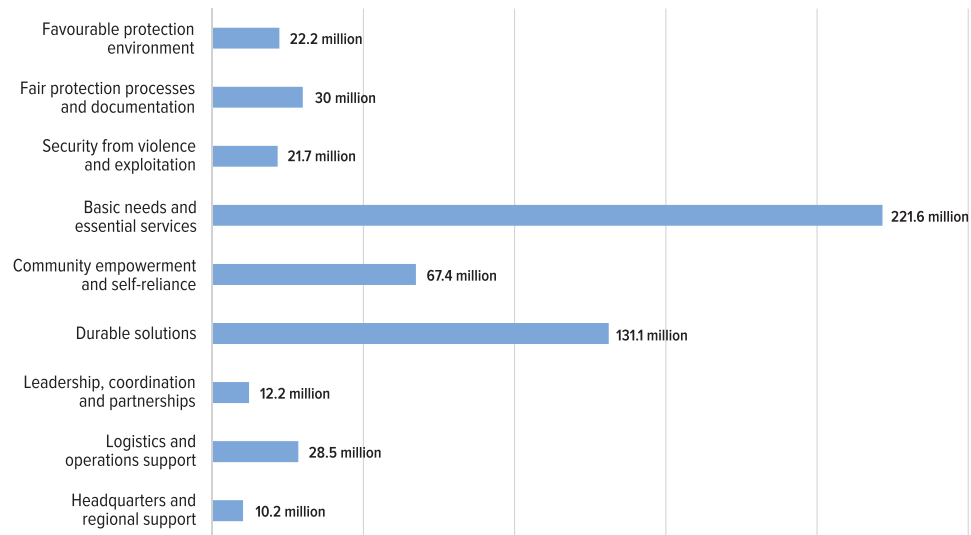
In 2016, UNHCR found itself critically short of the funding needed for repatriation grants to refugee returnees, and was obliged to reallocate and reprioritize resources within Afghanistan and from other operations. The danger for 2017 is that, unless further resources are made available in a timely manner, provision of repatriation cash grants will come under severe strain, with concomitant risks to operations.

Funding shortages for the Afghan situation in 2017 could further exacerbate the precarious situation of Afghan refugees in the region and, for example, risk leaving many of

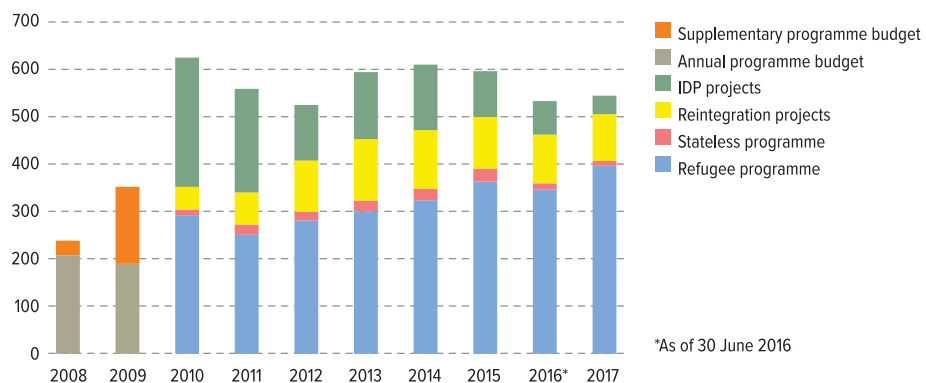
the recent returnees without critical support right when they need it most. Inadequate funding could adversely impact key programmes focusing on education and youth empowerment, which are essential to preventing the marginalization of youth, as young people represent almost two thirds of the Afghan refugee population.

Shortfalls in funding have also resulted in UNHCR's diminished presence in certain parts of the region, and a prioritization of resources is likely to reduce the number of UNHCR staff across Asia and the Pacific. If the funding levels continue to fall as predicted, this will put serious pressure on the organization's ability to maintain an effective presence and interventions.

Asia and the Pacific 2017 budget by rights group | USD millions



Budgets for Asia and the Pacific 2008-2017 | USD millions



BUDGETS FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC | USD

Operation	2016 Current budget (as of 30 June 2016)	2017				Total
		Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	
SOUTH-WEST ASIA						
Afghanistan	137,733,865	87,966,470	0	39,813,250	9,953,878	137,733,598
Iran, Islamic Republic of	70,663,243	97,246,544	0	0	0	97,246,544
Pakistan	127,352,356	63,723,623	235,000	59,053,714	4,060,864	127,073,202
Subtotal	335,749,464	248,936,638	235,000	98,866,964	14,014,742	362,053,343
CENTRAL ASIA						
Kazakhstan Regional Office ¹	7,485,827	4,288,567	1,308,424	0	0	5,596,991
Kyrgyzstan	2,876,272	699,437	309,045	0	0	1,008,483
Tajikistan	4,067,141	1,577,403	770,329	0	0	2,347,732
Turkmenistan	249,214	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	14,678,453	6,565,408	2,387,798	0	0	8,953,206
SOUTH ASIA						
India	15,061,846	15,742,000	72,436	0	0	15,814,436
Nepal	9,691,325	7,421,663	488,468	0	0	7,910,131
Sri Lanka	6,382,919	5,559,273	60,166	0	0	5,619,439
Subtotal	31,136,090	28,722,936	621,070	0	0	29,344,006
SOUTH-EAST ASIA						
Bangladesh	13,667,947	13,751,629	14,216	0	0	13,765,846
Indonesia	7,376,180	7,173,894	26,500	0	0	7,200,394
Malaysia	19,872,522	18,009,477	516,111	0	0	18,525,588
Myanmar	56,047,915	22,282,485	3,368,718	0	23,675,472	49,326,676
Philippines	4,970,567	578,338	751,474	0	1,346,505	2,676,318
Thailand	30,690,639	32,617,574	1,174,516	0	0	33,792,090
Thailand Regional Office ²	7,115,827	6,369,912	653,940	0	0	7,023,852
Subtotal	139,741,598	100,783,309	6,505,476	0	25,021,978	132,310,763
EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC						
Australia Regional Office ³	1,980,000	2,679,999	0	0	0	2,679,999
China Regional Office	4,766,286	2,955,086	240,000	0	0	3,195,086
Japan	3,300,000	3,396,541	64,927	0	0	3,461,469
Republic of Korea	1,700,000	1,617,012	102,988	0	0	1,720,000
Regional activities	444,000	1,190,299	0	0	0	1,190,299
Subtotal	12,190,285	11,838,937	407,915	0	0	12,246,852
Total	533,495,890	396,847,226	10,157,260	98,866,964	39,036,719	544,908,170

¹ Includes activities in Uzbekistan

² Includes activities in Cambodia, Mongolia and Viet Nam

³ Includes activities in New Zealand, the Pacific Island Countries and Papua New Guinea