



South-West Asia

Recent developments

Over the past two years, UNHCR and its partners, notably the Governments of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Pakistan, have facilitated the voluntary return of more than 2.5 million Afghan refugees and IDPs to their homes. The vast majority of these refugees have left urban settlements in Iran and Pakistan. Most have returned to central Afghanistan, notably the province of Kabul.

A series of tripartite consultations with UNHCR and the Afghan Transitional Government gave both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, which have hosted massive populations of Afghan refugees for more than two decades, the time to acknowledge their neighbour's limited capacity to provide for large numbers of returnees. Both countries have agreed that the current assisted voluntary repatriation programme should continue over a three-year timeframe, and have signed tripartite agreements with UNHCR and the Government of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan
Islamic Republic of Iran
Pakistan



The agreements provide an important legal framework for the repatriation process. They detail joint programmes under which refugees receive information about conditions in their home areas. Refugees who wish to return can sign up for the assisted repatriation programme, which provides a transport grant (based on the distance travelled); food donated by WFP; and a limited range of relief items (including emergency shelter material and soap). Returnee children are inoculated (under a programme run by UNICEF and the Ministry of Public Health), and all returnees receive mine-awareness training from mine action NGOs. When they return to their villages of origin, vulnerable families who have access to building land receive shelter kits, consisting principally of beams, doors, windows and a cash grant, so that they can construct houses.

A nationwide return-monitoring network in Afghanistan was strengthened in 2003, and a comprehensive report was published on the network's findings. The Office has also co-operated with the Afghan government and local leaders to identify obstacles to return. At the same time, UNHCR continues to seek durable solutions to the plight of refugees throughout the region who are unable to return home (providing legal counselling and conducting interviews for resettlement).

Although the Iraq situation is described in a separate chapter, it should be noted here that UNHCR's offices in the Islamic Republic of Iran have been preoccupied with events in Iraq in 2003, preparing to receive refugees during the conflict, and negotiating for the return of Iranians from Iraq and Iraqis from the Islamic Republic of Iran in the aftermath of the conflict.

Strategic objectives

The primary objective in 2004 will be to continue to facilitate voluntary repatriation from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan (and, if feasible, from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Iraq) and to ensure that returns are sustainable.

Within Afghanistan there will be a further shift from "hardware" (direct assistance and immediate reintegration activities such as building shelters and improving water supplies in returnee areas) to "software" – building government capacity to meet returnees' needs, both in terms of protecting their rights and ensuring that they are included in all national development programmes.



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Pakistan: Afghan refugees in the Chaman waiting area preparing to go back home. UNHCR / B. Baloch

Offices in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan will continue to provide some basic services to refugees in camps and settlements, making sure that the assistance reaches the most vulnerable.

Although there are many more Afghans who are expected to return to their homes in 2004 and 2005, the three Governments are now beginning to hold preliminary discussions with different partners about ways of finding alternative durable solutions for those who remain.

Operations

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

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Afghanistan	76,209,468
Islamic Republic of Iran	20,930,693
Pakistan	28,352,780
Regional Activities ¹	850,000
Total	126,342,941

¹ Includes repatriation of Afghans from various countries and scholarships for refugee students.