

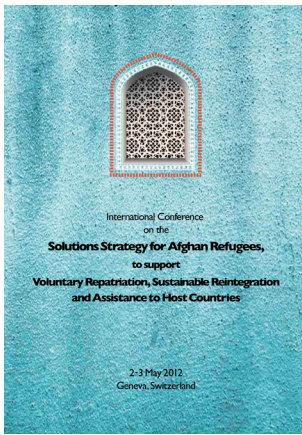
Update on the
Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
September 2012



Islamic
Republic
of **Afghanistan** Promoting sustainable
reintegration



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



Promoting sustainable reintegration

Update on the “Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries”

Background

Out of some 5.8 million Afghan refugees who have returned home since 2002, UNHCR has assisted around 4.7 million.

During the first eight months of 2012, around 52,000 have returned through UNHCR’s voluntary return programme, confirming a decreasing trend of voluntary repatriation by Afghan refugees living in neighbouring countries, especially in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

Most Afghan refugees indicate that limited livelihood opportunities, lack of access to basic services and security, are the main reasons for not voluntarily returning to Afghanistan.

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General situation in Afghanistan

Conflict-related displacement is increasing with 130,000 new internally displaced persons (IDPs) this year, bringing the total to around 425,000 IDPs for the first eight months of 2012.

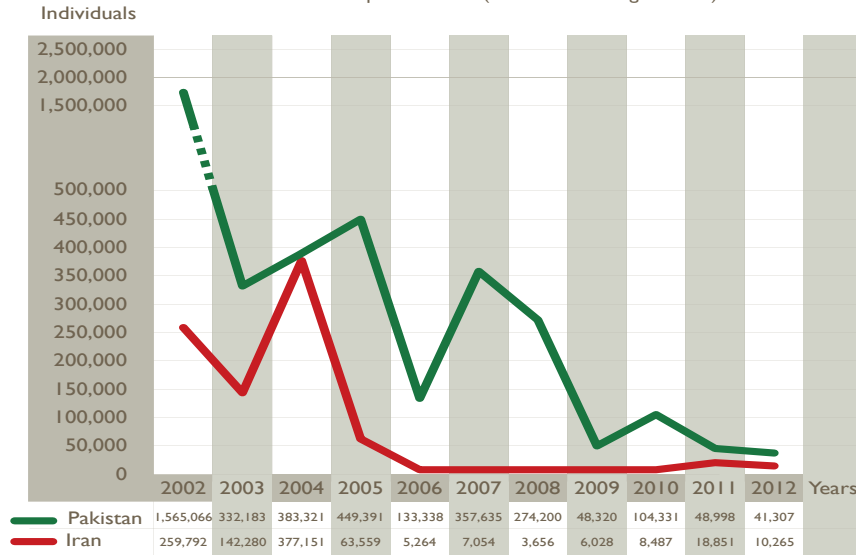
Humanitarian access is diminishing - although UNHCR continues to cover nearly 70 per cent of Afghanistan through its local implementing partners, Departments of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRRs) local authorities, etc.

Afghanistan remains the leading country of origin of refugees worldwide in 2011. On average, one in four refugees in the world is from Afghanistan with 95 per cent located in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Afghanistan was also in 2011, the top country of origin of asylum-seekers worldwide from industrialized countries, at around 35,000.

Photo cover : This suspension bridge in Jalalabad District facilitates the lives of locals, as evidenced by the large number of people using it. UNHCR/S. Schulman

Annual breakdown of return from
Pakistan and Islamic Republic of Iran (March 2002 - August 2012)



Returning home

For the last decade, Afghan refugees have been returning to their villages of origin, looking for a safe environment to re-establish themselves and settle down.

However, surveys and monitoring have indicated that due to lack of livelihoods, security, and access to basic services, at least

15 percent of assisted refugees have been unable to remain in their former communities.

They have moved out of Afghanistan once again, but now as irregular economic migrants, or moved into urban locations in Afghanistan.

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees aims to improve the lives of these returnees and the communities in which they live. And, more importantly, to establish conducive conditions for Afghan refugees still living outside the country to be able to envisage a voluntary and sustainable return.

Supporting communities with returnees

The Afghanistan component of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees is based on the premise that demonstrating how to improve the sustainable reintegration of returnees, will encourage Government ministries, international and national non-governmental organizations and civil society to replicate a successful strategy, and that donors, based on the evidence and information provided, will support the strategy.

Whilst 48 pilot areas of high return were selected by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and UNHCR (end December 2011); only 22 were prioritized in early 2012 for implementation of a community-based approach.

Pending allocation of funding from other sources and/or active participation from other entities (governmental, non-governmental or international), UNHCR has funded community-based activities during 2012 in 12 high-return areas located in eleven provinces: Balkh, Bamyan, Farah, Faryab, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangarhar, and Paktia.

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Reintegration activities

Most sectors are being covered: Shelter, Water and Sanitation, Health, Education, Infrastructure, Community Mobilization and Protection. Livelihood - a key element in the reintegration strategy - is also being tackled but requires more dedicated input, expertise and resources than UNHCR, as a humanitarian agency, can provide. This sector urgently requires the active engagement of development actors.

Within 12 areas of high return in the above-mentioned provinces, UNHCR, together with MoRR and implementing partners, has been undertaking various activities such as:

- Construction of two-room shelters based on self-help from the communities;
- Construction / rehabilitation of roads (including road signs) to facilitate transportation of products to local markets;
- Construction / rehabilitation of culverts, protection walls, ditches and bridges;
- Construction of micro-hydro power plants and installation of solar lamps for street lighting, shelters and community infrastructure;
- Development of water points; drilling of wells; creating irrigation reservoirs and systems;
- Construction of public latrines and training communities in maintenance;
- Construction of primary and secondary schools;
- Provision of ambulances and rehabilitation of clinics (district);
- Community mobilization including awareness raising about gender-based violence, peace education, confidence building, hygiene education, etc.;
- Community leadership training for Shura members, including women;
- Livelihood training in poultry & dairy farming;
- Skills training especially for the youth;
- Cash-for-Work paid during construction / rehabilitation of infrastructure to temporarily support many families as well as involving the communities.

The protection situation, especially of vulnerable individuals and people with specific needs, is being monitored and assistance given where required.

Involving government ministries

This approach can only be successful as and when other entities become involved from the very inception of the Solutions Strategy to its implementation today. UNHCR and MoRR are coordinating closely with ministries such as Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Education, Health, Agriculture, and Water.

MoRR has started discussing with key ministries about assessing gaps in 22 prioritized areas of high return to identify the sectors in which they will intervene.

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This intervention has been foreseen through MoUs, signed between MoRR and key ministries, whereby the latter agree to prioritize these pilot areas of high return when implementing their National Priority Programmes (NPPs).

These key ministries are: Energy and Water, Public Health, Education, Higher Education, Justice, Labour, Women's Affairs, Urban Development, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Public Works, National Directorate of Security and also the Independent Human Rights Commission.

The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development developing infrastructure projects to work in up to 15 districts of high return through one of their National Priority Programmes.



A joint UNHCR-WFP irrigation project in Farmankhel provides returnees with arable land for growing staples and cash crops.
UNHCR/R.Arnold

Involving UN agencies

Other key entities who are becoming involved in these pilot areas of high return are UN agencies and NGOs:

- **UNOPS** baseline monitoring and evaluation survey to assess impact of reintegration interventions for the community and returnees in these high return areas.
- **ILO livelihood** assessment and opportunity mapping to provide a quick assessment of the feasibility and development opportunities of on-going economic activities of returnees, IDPs and host communities and identify provision of financial services, vocational training and business development services. This will inform and guide the design of pragmatic and effective interventions to enhance livelihood for the target population under the joint programme (see below).
- **UNICEF** is interested in identifying potential teachers and nursing personnel (in particular women) who have reached a certain level of education and could be trained to help their communities.
- **FAO** has offered agriculture and livestock expertise, and support for livelihood interventions.
- **WFP** continues to offer all returning refugees food rations for six months, and support to recent displacement, and has also offered its expertise and support to implement food-for-work schemes and address food insecurity for the most vulnerable.
- **WHO** continues to provide, in the refugee return encashment centres, vaccinations and health counselling, and has proposed additional support.
- **IOM** within the context of this strategy will also provide sustainable shelter, services and community support for undocumented migrants who have returned to these prioritized areas of high return.
- **UNHABIT** has identified a potential high-risk of illegal settlements linked to returning refugees, and secondary displacement (especially in urban areas), and proposes addressing these problems through a process of settlement regularization as well as supporting access to basic infrastructure in rural areas.
- **UN MACCA** will support the relevant ministries with de-mining in high return areas and provide Mine Risk Education for up to 400,000 people.
- **UNODC** has proposed providing drug treatment and HIV prevention services to up to 28,000 drug using returnees.
- **International and local non-government organizations** have been engaged from the inception, the planning, and operational implementation of the Solutions Strategy. Their engagement, operational partnership, involvement, accessibility, contacts, complementary projects are important for the effective implementation of the strategy on the ground.

Voluntary return and reintegration programme (VRRP)

This nationally managed joint programme is governed by UNDP-UNHCR financial rules and regulations, and its deliverables are integrated within the National Priority Programmes (NPPs).

With a proposed budget for a four-year period of USD 227.5 million (roughly USD 55 million per year), it will be implemented by UNHCR and UNDP in partnership with the Ministries of Refugees and Repatriation, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Agriculture and Labour and Social Welfare.

Direct beneficiaries will be around one million people, but indirect beneficiaries (i.e. nearby communities who will also benefit from some activities aimed at reducing tension—peaceful coexistence) will be far greater.

Under Phase I (2012 - 2014), VRRP activities have four distinct outcomes:

1. Improved living conditions through including access to essential services such as health and sanitation, education, water, improved access to land tenure and shelter;
2. Increased local economic opportunities and enhanced employability of the male and female returnees and vulnerable youth in the communities;
3. Increased protection, social reintegration and peaceful coexistence at local levels;
4. National capacities at the central and local levels strengthened to effectively assist returnees.

The Programme will establish close partnership with National Priority Programmes (NPPs) including National Area-Based Development Programme (NABDP), National Solidarity Programme (NSP), Afghan Rural Enterprise Programme (AREDP), Afghanistan Sub-National Programme Governance Programme (ASGP), Justice and Human Rights for Afghanistan Project (JHRA) and National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) of MoLSAMD.

Cross-border involvement

The Islamic Republic of Iran is keen on identifying at least one pilot area in the Herat region where they would bring in expertise and resources to support activities aimed at the sustainable reintegration of returnees and the community at large.

On-going discussions aimed at designing cross-border joint programmes involving the Islamic Republics of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan are taking place between UNHCR and international NGOs and UN agencies including:

- **UNIDO / NRC / DRC / UNDP** - Market survey and livelihood opportunities in Herat province (Afghanistan) and Khorasan Razavi province (Islamic Republic of Iran) which would focus on a value chain analysis as a tool to assess the business and labour situation;
- **FAO** - skills training in Pakistan followed by the provision of tools/seeds/livestock, etc. to returning Afghan refugees that would match the needs of a particular return site.
- **Istanbul Process** (Confidence Building Measures - CBMs)
 - **On refugees:** Ministerial meeting of 14 June 2012 agreed to prioritize an eighth Confidence Building Measure on refugees in the region, in their next meeting scheduled for early 2013;
 - **On education:** Construction of schools, supply of staff and equipment in line with the Islamic Republic of Iran's chair role for this particular CBM.

Other linkages

It is important to ensure that the Afghanistan component of the Solutions Strategy, namely sustainable reintegration for Afghan refugees, is not a parallel or separate strategy or structure. It is therefore linked to and embedded in the National Priority Programmes (NPPs) and the Istanbul process.

Another important framework is the 'Ending Displacement in the Aftermath of Conflict' launched by the UN Secretary-General. The UN Country Team Kabul, under the UN Resident Coordinator, supported the selection of Afghanistan as a pilot country to develop a Durable Solutions Strategy for Refugees and IDPs (notwithstanding the fact that the country is not post-conflict).

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The UN Resident Coordinator is tasked with developing this initiative, in coordination with UNDP, UNHCR, the early recovery group, other UN agencies and the relevant Afghan Government ministries.

This Durable Solutions Strategy for IDPs and Refugees is highly relevant to the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and links well with the National IDP Policy which is being drafted this year in Afghanistan.

Sheikh Mesri, near Jalalabad, is a thriving new township for returned Afghans who were provided land by the government. Extending over the area, evidence building, and architectural detailing speaks of optimism for the future.
UNHCR / S. Schulman





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