



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Country: Afghanistan

Planning Year: 2004

Afghanistan Country Operations Plan – 2004

1 May 2003

Part I: Executive Summary

(a) Context and Beneficiary Population

Overall planning figures for the return of Refugees and IDPs

	Iran	Pakistan	Other	IDPs	Total
Caseload 2001	2,350,000	3,300,000	500,000	1,230,000	7,380,000
2002 (assisted and spontaneous)	390,000	1,690,000	10,000	600,000	2,690,000
2003	500,000	600,000	100,000	300,000	1,500,000
2004	650,000	400,000	100,000	150,000	1,300,000
Remaining end 2004	810,000	610,000	290,000	180,000	1,890,000

INTRODUCTION:

Government and Institutions: Following the signature of the Bonn Agreement in December 2001, and the establishment of the Interim Authority of Afghanistan, new levels of peace and stability were achieved.

The Agreement sets out a calendar of events and processes designed to lay the foundations for the progressive and peaceful establishment of permanent government institutions by the end of 2004. In June 2002, an Emergency Loya Jirga created the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan. The most critical challenge facing the body governing this Transitional State will be to hold elections and install an inclusive and representative government in 2004.

At the same time, the government must establish functioning links with the country at large, and be seen to make progress on building national institutions: national army, police force, judicial reform commission, constitutional commission, human rights commission, civil service commission, commission of restitution of property, electoral commission, etc.

Repatriation:

In 2002, Afghanistan witnessed a massive repatriation movement, with more than 2.5 million refugees and IDPs returning, mainly to the centre, northeast and east of the country. It is anticipated that up to 1.5 million more could return in 2003, and a further 1.3 million in 2004. This large-scale return will only be sustainable, however, if the security situation is relatively stable and if rehabilitation and reconstruction facilitate the reintegration of returnees into their home communities.

Reconstruction:

Both the interim authority and the transitional government have made progress in re-establishing formal government structures and processes, and in normalizing foreign relations. For the first time in over 20 years, Afghanistan has begun to benefit from

multilateral and bilateral official development assistance - assistance that it is likely to depend on for many years to come. It has also won initial endorsement and support from the donor community for the quality and forward-looking vision outlined in its National Development Framework (NDF).

The development challenge, however, is enormous. Prior to the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan had some of the lowest socio-economic indices in the world. Now, after more than two decades of conflict and destruction, it is difficult to bring those indices even up to 1970s levels. In many parts of the country, people still depend on humanitarian assistance. At the same time, there is widespread recognition of the need to underpin political stability with progress in the field of reconstruction and to ensure that its benefits reach the population at large. As such, the Afghan authorities have pressed for an early progression from humanitarian relief to rehabilitation and development efforts. These are to be carried out in the context of national programmes within the National Development Framework. Programmes are in the early stages of implementation but it is anticipated that they will show increasing impact over the coming twelve months, in particular major infrastructure projects such as roads and irrigation systems, and that progress will accelerate in the following years.

A further element affecting the reconstruction process is the drought that has affected Afghanistan and parts of Iran and Pakistan for the past four years. Despite higher levels of precipitation during the winter of 2002-03, it is believed that the drought will have a long-term, possibly permanent, impact on agriculture and livelihoods in some parts of the country. Assistance resources will be mobilized in a more coordinated and concentrated manner by the UN and bilateral donors in drought-affected areas starting in the spring of 2003. However, most of some 250,000 drought-affected displaced persons in the south will not return to their areas of origin in 2003, and only a small proportion may be able to return in 2004. Drought will continue to affect nomadic people (Kuchi) who have lost their means of livelihood. In the absence of radical measures to address their plight (land distribution for settlements; livestock distribution; etc.) parts of the impoverished Kuchi population will most likely continue to settle in IDP camps to benefit from humanitarian assistance.

Security: At a regional strategic planning meeting held in Dubai in February 2003, UNHCR made certain assumptions about the likely course of events in Afghanistan, and their implications both for the Afghan populations in Iran and Pakistan and the internally displaced populations within the country.

It is anticipated that Afghanistan will continue to make moderate progress towards security, political stability, and reconstruction in the coming years, and that economic and social advances will be correspondingly gradual. Nevertheless, unforeseen events could still have a major impact on national stability. Diverse elements hostile to the present administration will continue to try to disrupt its progress. Localized factional fighting may cause an intermittent deterioration of security in parts of the country, and there could be political uncertainties both prior to and after the elections scheduled for the summer of 2004.

To underwrite the moderate progress scenario outlined above, four factors are likely to be particularly important:

- the continuing presence of the International Security Force (ISAF) and the consistent and timely flow of funding for rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes
- the formation of a more inclusive and representative government after the elections of 2004
- an increase in support for the establishment of law and order across the country
- steady progress in economic and social development, most importantly in the area of employment opportunities and basic social services (health and education.)

Human Rights:

It is not easy for UNHCR to identify effective "protection partners" in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's own independent Human Rights Commission requires strengthening, and may be able to be more active in some areas than others. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights does not plan to expand its field presence significantly in 2003 (although some increase is likely for which UNHCR should continue to advocate). The Return Commission in the North should start to have some impact in the spring/summer of 2003, but return of "minority" IDPs (and refugees) is unlikely to be substantial in the short term.

Funding predictions:

Key donors have repeatedly expressed their resolve to remain engaged in Afghanistan, ensuring that a substantial level of resources will continue to be put into the reconstruction of the country. Smaller donors, however, may find it harder to do this.

Regional Aspects:

Through 2002 and early 2003, most returning refugees made for eastern, central and northeastern Afghanistan. Most of UNHCR's resources have so far been located to these areas, and the Office expects a similar trend to continue through 2004. In 2002, volatile security conditions discouraged large-scale return to the Central Highlands and parts of southeastern Afghanistan, although many refugees originated from these areas. In early 2003, however, more people have begun to head back and it will be important to increase UNHCR's engagement here. Returns to the south have also been low, largely because of the drought and the deteriorating security situation. The south continues to host a large IDP population, and UNHCR's focus in the region is largely directed to finding solutions (both temporary and longer-term) to the particular problems these people face. IDPs have been returning from camps and temporary settlements in the west, although some (people who cannot return for protection reasons and destitute Kuchi nomads) will remain in IDP settlements. It is anticipated that more returnees will head for western provinces in 2003 and 2004.

Main Countries of Asylum:

With the signing of a three-year tripartite legal framework with Pakistan in March 2003, it is hoped that the pressure on refugees to return from Pakistan will slightly ease. Should the impact of the development assistance increase in 2003, more refugees living in camps in Pakistan will be willing to return to Afghanistan. Pressure on Afghans to return is likely to continue from Iran. The Afghan government, on its

side, will continue to press for gradual returns from neighboring and non-neighbouring countries.

UNHCR's Strategy in 2004 and beyond:

The overall goal is to identify and pursue solutions to the problems of Afghan displacement by the end of 2005, ensuring in the process the protection and assistance of Afghans who are still refugees or internally displaced people. Building on the achievements of 2002, a three-year strategy is proposed (in line with parallel strategies in Iran and Pakistan), articulated as follows:

- 2002: focus on return.

UNHCR played a key role in facilitating the return of over two million Afghans to their chosen locations, by helping governments (including the Afghan government) provide return and initial reintegration assistance.

- 2003: Building reintegration.

As part of the 4Rs strategy, UNHCR will continue along the lines established in 2002, assuming that a slow but progressive improvement of security conditions, a strengthening of the government, and the launch of national development programmes will help create conditions conducive to the reintegration of returnees. The key priority will be to ensure that returnees are involved in national development programmes.

- 2004: Transition to "soft" programmes.

UNHCR will progressively (but substantially) reduce the "hardware" component of its programme (e.g. reduce shelter by two thirds, phase-out water, etc.). Essential "soft" components such as capacity building, advocacy, protection, returnee monitoring and mass information will continue, as will return assistance. In-country reintegration assistance provided by UNHCR will be limited and focused (coexistence projects, groups with special needs, residual IDPs). UNHCR's secretariat of the Consultative Group on refugees and IDPs is likely to be necessary at least until the elections. UNHCR's now extensive presence will be reduced, although the implementation of "soft" components will require the maintenance of at least part of the network could be more staff intensive than hardware projects.

- 2005: Towards the Endgame.

The 2004 shift towards "soft component" approach will continue and UNHCR's presence in Afghanistan will be further reduced. Assuming that elections are held in 2004 and cause no instability, shifting to a promotion mode in repatriation should be considered. In parallel, discussions with host countries on the "residual caseload" will be held.