

## AFGHANISTAN

### PART I: Executive Summary

#### (a) Context and Beneficiary Population

##### 1. Political context

- The people of Afghanistan still face a bleak reality and future after 21 years of conflict. The peace process made no progress during 2000 and the conflict is expected to resume more fiercely in 2001. It is expected that military activities during the summer offensive and growing insecurity in several parts of Afghanistan will again play havoc with the lives and livelihoods of civilian populations in areas of armed conflict. In addition to destruction and the neglect of Afghanistan's agricultural and economic infrastructure due to the conflict, Afghans are confronted with the effects of the worst drought in living memory. This drought severely affected 2,5 million rain-fed farmers, livestock-owners, deprived over a million persons of coping-mechanisms and means of survival and resulted in large scale displacement, in addition to the displacement by conflict. This humanitarian crisis, the conflict, the abysmal human rights situation and the growing poverty cause new waves of massive displacement within and from Afghanistan and further reduce the prospects of voluntary repatriation – in the short and medium term - for large numbers of the remaining estimated 4 million Afghans in Iran and Pakistan. The continuing war and the policies of the authorities, are impediments to the launching of the reconstruction effort Afghanistan requires.
- The refugee situation in the two main countries of asylum, Iran and Pakistan, remains to be characterised by “asylum fatigue”, by an insecure legal status of Afghans, including threats of forcible return, by deteriorating living conditions and economic decline, as well as by drought in many areas of the two host countries. For Afghans, refugees and others, assisted voluntary repatriation (though often driven by push rather than pull-factors) is therefore seen as a solution to their predicament, provided they can receive the necessary support to return and re-establish their livelihoods in Afghanistan.
- UNHCR recognises that in 2002 a political settlement and the formation of a stable government are necessary for a comprehensive solution to the protracted problem of refugees in Iran and Pakistan.

##### 2. Security situation

- The front lines to the North of Kabul and in the north-east of the country (Takhar province) have seen regular exchange of rocket and artillery fire and a general increase in military activity, also during periods in which no actual fighting takes place. There are furthermore a number of areas in the Northern and Western Region of Afghanistan as well as the Hazarajat, which are insecure with actual, intermittent or anticipated fighting and no stable control over the area by either faction. Access to and the presence of UN international staff in these areas remain restricted. Areas of the North and the Hazarajat are particularly important for the return of Afghan refugees in Iran, a large portion of whom are of Hazara ethnic origin or members of other ethnic minorities originating from these areas.

- Returnees are normally well aware of the security situation and other conditions in their areas of origin or previous residence. However, many feel they have no option but to return, despite the only relatively improved security conditions and economically difficult circumstances to re-establish their livelihoods. Returnees are, generally, more at risk from the threat of landmines and UXOs than from other factors in the complex security environment of Afghanistan. Large areas of the country (latest estimates by the UN Mine Action Programme stand at 870 square kilometers) have been extensively mined in the course of the long conflict and pose a significant, yet hidden, danger.

### **3. Protection issues**

- Facilitation of voluntary repatriation as a durable solution: In the current circumstances of continuing conflict, serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law, and growing poverty, support for and facilitation of voluntary repatriation, in safety and dignity, is increasingly challenging for UNHCR. There are areas, which are neither affected by armed conflict nor the severe drought, which has impacted so strongly on food security in many parts of the country. But deteriorating asylum condition in the countries of first asylum has prompted an increasing number of Afghans to return, even to areas that are not considered viable for return and where prospects for durable reintegration are limited. Voluntary repatriation nevertheless remains an important component of UNHCR's strategy for Afghanistan and contributes to maintaining protection space for those Afghans that remain unwilling or unable to return. A strategy of facilitating return to selective areas is therefore being pursued taking into account key factors affecting absorption and retention capacities.
- Provision of country of origin information: With a view to enable UNHCR, countries of asylum as well as potential returnees to take informed decisions on continued protection needs of Afghans or the feasibility of voluntary repatriation, information on the complex situation in Afghanistan, including on the situation of returnees, needs to be continuously generated, analysed, updated and shared with concerned actors. This exercise has to be carried out carefully so as not to compromise the safety of UNHCR operations and staff in Afghanistan.
- Rights of returnees: Both sets of authorities in Afghanistan have adopted declarations of amnesty for returnees which contain relevant provisions such as non-discrimination on account of gender, ethnic origin and religion, a provision on non recruitment for the period of one year after return and provisions relating to recovery of property. Through systematic returnee monitoring at places of return, UNHCR raises awareness of the local authorities and returnee communities on the rights of returnees as contained in the declarations of amnesty, thereby enabling returnees to claim their rights and to share their concerns. Possibilities for direct interventions by UNHCR are limited under the current circumstances; however, both presence and awareness raising have beneficial effects on the overall protection situation of returnees.
- Returnee monitoring and monitoring of population movements: UNHCR has and will further increase its capacity to monitor and analyse the situation and composition of returnee movements, as well as the reasons for movements within Afghanistan and across borders. This will contribute to better planning of the required reintegration assistance, jointly with other agencies, and to responses to prevent and address further displacement.

#### **4. UNHCR's role**

- UNHCR's presence in Afghanistan and its involvement in the humanitarian operation in the country arise from the UNHCR's overall mandate for providing protection and solutions for Afghan refugees. The activities of UNHCR Afghanistan are closely linked to the Afghan refugee situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. UNHCR's overall mandate and statutory responsibility to seek permanent solutions for refugees by, inter-alia, assisting host governments to facilitate voluntary repatriation, and assisting returnees to return and re-establish themselves in their countries of origin, require UNHCR's continued presence in Afghanistan.
- The number of returnees has substantially decreased from its peak in the 1992-94 period. In 2000, following an agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR on a Joint Programme for the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, the number of returnees assisted by UNHCR more than doubled compared to 1999 to about 210,000 individuals. It is estimated that in 2002 some 290,000 Afghans, refugees and others, will return. The majority is expected to return from Iran.
- The need for monitoring the consequences of return and of the provision of initial reintegration assistance is of paramount importance in Afghanistan. The present situation will probably continue to be characterised by violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. In addition, environmental degradation, widespread presence of land-mines, food insecurity, a systematic brain drain, high levels of unemployment, large population movements, and the collapse of state institutions will remain the context in which voluntary repatriation may take place.
- A unique feature in Afghanistan is the Strategic Framework and Principled Common Programming (PCP) through which the UN's political assistance and human rights activities are bound together and to which UNHCR is an important partner. Refugee return is one of five major themes encompassing the activities of the assistance community in Afghanistan. This provides a framework, at regional and country level for close co-ordination and consultations, namely with regard to joint reintegration assistance. In addition UNHCR is actively involved, under the co-ordination of United Nations Co-ordinator's Office (UNCO) in strategy development, contingency planning, monitoring and response to the continued crisis of internal displacement. UNHCR also continues to play an active role in the thematic group on human rights where protection issues are being addressed jointly with other actors, UN and NGOs.

#### **5. Overview of beneficiary population**

- The primary beneficiaries of UNHCR in Afghanistan will be an estimated number of 290,000 returnees, assisted to return in 2002. The returnees are expected to comprise overall 65% male and 35% female Afghans of all ages. The return of a total number of 290,000 Afghans comprises two distinct categories, as explained below:
- UNHCR expects to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of 15,000 Afghan refugees from Iran and 55,000 Afghan refugees from Pakistan, to relatively peaceful and stable areas where the most vulnerable can benefit from initial reintegration assistance and a joint effort of the assistance community can contribute to the sustainability of return.
- In addition, UNHCR anticipates to assist a further 220,000 undocumented Afghans who will be opting for voluntary return from Iran to Afghanistan in safety and in dignity. Some 170,000 are expected to return through the border at Islam-Qala (Western region) and 50,000 through the

border at Zaranj (Southern region). These Afghans will benefit from humanitarian assistance, transit arrangements and in-country transportation.

- With regard to the expected 700,000 IDPs OCM 's contribution will essentially be through UNOCHA as part of a joint response including monitoring, strategy formulation and contingency planning but also modest material inputs (tents, quilts, blankets etc) to meet the most urgent needs. In co -operation with UNICEF and UNESCO, UNHCR will be part of an Education- in-Crisis- Situation's project in order to meet the needs of basic education for at least 10,000 primary school age IDP children

## 6. Policy issues

- Large proportions of Afghan returnees who are of concern to UNHCR are **women and children**. Assistance such as the standard repatriation grant, shelter and drinking water will be geared to benefit women and children. With regard to providing safe drinking water UNHCR assistance will take into account that it are women and children who are the main water collectors, when deciding on the location and the accessibility of water sources. With regard to specific assistance for returning women, UNHCR will initiate micro-credit schemes in the Central, Eastern and Southern regions of Afghanistan, benefiting primarily female headed households. Women will also receive special home based vocational training
- The operational environment in Afghanistan hampers UNHCR's activities benefiting women, where complete segregation of sexes remains the rule. In spite of the restrictive policies of the authorities and the traditional social environment UNHCR continues to employ Afghan female staff. However, their freedom of movement to monitor and follow-up on programmes benefiting women is seriously restricted. UNHCR aims at a situation in which the organisation can employ female national staff to undertake returnee monitoring to ensure that the needs of returnee women are addressed.
- One of UNHCR's main concerns is the growing demand for access to education for both **boys and girls**. Often they have benefited from education while in exile and have come to appreciate the importance of education, also for girls. In this context UNHCR will continue in 2002 to produce educational material, provide training of teachers, and support schools, both formal and home-based, in Afghanistan in areas of refugee return. It is hoped that UNHCR's activities will be a catalyst for other specialised agencies to address the demand for education, which is particularly high among returnees. In addition, UNHCR will be part of a joint UNICEF/UNESCO initiative to provide emergency education to 10,000 primary school age internally displaced children.
- Another area requiring increased attention is the protection of **adolescents**, many of whom lack education and skills, and many of whom feel forced, by the extremely difficult economic situation of their families, to join fighting forces. UNHCR, on the basis of the declarations of amnesties, will continue to address the authorities to ensure that the exemption for returnees from military service is being respected. In addition, increased efforts will be made to provide alternatives for those who would otherwise feel compelled to join the armed forces, by developing skills-training and income-generating activities, especially for adolescents.
- The project for 2002 will address **environmental issues** by establishing nurseries as income-generating activity, and assist some households with environmentally sound roofing materials (concrete beams in stead of wood). Also the continued use of biogas technology will be looked into, and communities will be assisted in managing solid waste programmes. Finally it is envisaged to continue to create awareness among primary school pupils on the environment and practical ways in which to undertake conservation oriented activities.

- UNHCR’s returnee monitoring scheme will continue to aim at identifying **returnees with special needs**, e.g., physical, psychological or social vulnerabilities, with a view to providing specialised services in their areas of return. Where UNHCR is not in a position to assist directly those in need will be referred to agencies offering special services. .

#### **7. Linkages to other countries within the situation**

- UNHCR Offices in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan are primarily responsible for the management of the Afghan refugee situation in the region. Assisted voluntary repatriation remains an essential component of their strategy. Planning and co-ordination meetings are regularly held among staff from the three countries to share information and to ensure the implementation of an effective protection and assistance response.

#### **8. Capacity and presence of implementing partners**

- A number of international and local NGOs with a proven track record and the necessary expertise will be identified to implement activities under the sectors transport, water, health, education, and income-generation. The following implementing partners are foreseen for 2002

IAM	International Assistance Mission
CARE	CARE International
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
IRC	International Rescue Committee
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
AG Bas-E	Afghan German Basic Education
MADERA	Mission d'Aide au Developpement des Economies Rurales
BBC AEP	BBC Afghan Education Projects

#### **9. Presence and roles of other UN agencies and international organisations, and efforts made to co-ordinate activities**

- Under the Strategic Framework for Assistance to Afghanistan and through the PCP tools, various co-ordination structures were established in the course of 1999 and further developed in 2000. Under the auspices of the Office of the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Afghanistan in Islamabad, five thematic inter-agency groups meet regularly to discuss policy and operational matters ranging from return of refugees, alleviation of human suffering, provision of basic social services and sustainable livelihoods to respect of human rights. In Afghanistan, Regional Co-ordination Bodies are functional in most areas to ensure close collaboration, active participation and transparency at all levels of operation. Regional sectoral groups on refugee return have been established under the Regional Co-ordination Bodies in most of the regions. An Afghan Programme Board based in Islamabad and consisting of donors, UN agencies and NGOs oversees the development of the process in an advisory capacity.
- One of UNHCR’s main partners in Afghanistan is WFP who provides wheat to returnees both as part of the standard repatriation grant and as a contribution to ‘Food for Work’ shelter rehabilitation projects. WFP is an important partner as the prospects for return largely depend on the overall food security situation and information provided by WFP is crucial for UNHCR’s planning and programmes.

## **(b) Main Programme Goals and Principal Objectives**

- The **goal** of UNHCR’s programme in Afghanistan is to assist Afghans and countries hosting Afghan refugees in seeking a durable solution through facilitating voluntary repatriation, assisting safe and dignified return of others of concern and through providing initial basic assistance for sustainable reintegration. In addition, to ensure durable asylum to those in need of international protection UNHCR will support joint efforts in addressing movements of internal displacement and provide limited assistance to IDPs. To achieve this goal, UNHCR will systematically monitor the situation of returnees to identify their needs and those of the communities receiving them, and provide assistance to meet the immediate needs during an initial period of reintegration. To the extent possible, through sharing of information generated through returnee monitoring, and in the context of joint programmes, UNHCR will ensure that medium and longer-term assistance to returnees and communities is addressed through multi-sectoral and integrated programmes. In addition, UNHCR’s objective is to contribute to the realisation of basic human rights of returnees, particularly those guaranteed in the declarations of amnesty, through monitoring and awareness raising.