

AFGHANISTAN



Operational highlights

- More than 278,000 registered Afghans were able to return to their homeland with UNHCR assistance in 2008. All benefited from a return and reintegration cash grant to help them provide for their basic needs in the first few months after return.
- Over 11,460 families benefited from standard or one-room shelters in 2008, exceeding the planning figure of 10,000. To more effectively support landless returnees staying with host families as well as displaced people from Pakistan, one-room shelter extensions were provided to host families.
- The Kabul Conference in November 2008 saw the Government of Afghanistan and the international community endorse the mainstreaming of returnee reintegration into the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. This is expected to lead to more support for returnees in the Government's and the international community's development plans.
- In December 2008, a national profile of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was completed. The profile, which identified an estimated 232,000 IDPs, will aid the development of a national strategy for IDPs in 2009.
- More than 200,000 vulnerable returnees and IDPs, including in the volatile southern region, benefited from timely UNHCR winterization assistance as a result of pre-positioning of stocks and emergency preparedness planning.

Working environment

The security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan deteriorated in 2008, particularly in the southern, south-eastern and eastern regions. The number of security incidents rose by 30 per cent in 2008. At the end of the year, the Government's effective control was limited to roughly half the country. International development and humanitarian actors had access to approximately 40 to 50 per cent of the country, illustrating the shrinking of humanitarian space. Thirty-eight humanitarian workers were killed in 2008, double the number in 2007, and more than 140 national humanitarian workers were abducted.

Making progress towards the goals set by the Afghanistan Compact in 2006 - security, governance and economic and social development - has proved challenging for the Government and its international supporters. To generate donor support, the Governments of Afghanistan and France convened a meeting in Paris in June to launch the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). A total of USD 20 billion was pledged over the next five years.

A significant portion of Afghanistan's population lacked access to essential services because of insecurity and inconsistent reconstruction and development programmes. The economy remained predominantly informal. With harsh winter, drought and continued displacement deteriorating the humanitarian situation, OCHA decided to establish a full presence in Afghanistan. Initial steps in this

regard, such as setting up an office and recruiting personnel, had been taken by the end of the year.

| Achievements and impact |

○ Main objectives

- Facilitate the voluntary, safe and gradual return of Afghans from Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other host countries, and support the initial reintegration of returnees.
- Provide assistance to IDPs through new and existing mechanisms.
- Strengthen the sustainable reintegration of returnees through national development programmes, particularly in key areas of return.
- Enhance the Government's ability to manage voluntary repatriation; assist its dialogue with neighbouring countries on the management of population movements; and develop strategies to address the internal and external displacement of Afghans.
- Ensure access to fair and efficient refugee status determination (RSD) procedures for refugees and asylum-seekers.

○ Protection and solutions

Although the Afghanistan repatriation programme in 2008 remained the largest return operation worldwide, it was still far below the scale of the mass return of the 2002-2005 period. Reasons for the decline include worsening security in Afghanistan, the country's limited absorption capacity and the long period in exile of more than 80 per cent of the remaining Afghans in the region.

During the 2002-2005 period, return was largely driven by positive developments in Afghanistan. Since 2006, the reasons for returning are increasingly influenced by conditions in host countries. In 2008, more than 98 per cent of returns were from Pakistan. The main drivers of return were the deteriorating security situation in the border regions of Pakistan, higher food prices, the closure of Jalozai refugee village, and increased pressure on rental accommodation in urban areas due to the IDP situation. At the same time, returnee reintegration in Afghanistan was hampered by the worsening security situation, rising living costs and particularly the lack of employment opportunities.

In 2008 some 28,000 Afghan returnees, or some 10 per cent of total returns, were forced into onward displacement. The majority of the returnees were forced to leave Pakistan due to the closure of Jalozai refugee village. They were unable to return to their places of origin due to insecurity,

tribal enmity, landlessness and lack of livelihood opportunities. The local authorities, UNHCR, other UN agencies and NGO partners provided this group, who were living in temporary settlements in the eastern region, with immediate humanitarian assistance. UNHCR worked with the authorities to find solutions for them.

UNHCR advises against measures which precipitate return to Afghanistan before people are ready or able to successfully reintegrate. The voluntariness of return has to date been the best guarantor of sustainable return. Continued support is needed to host Afghan refugees until conditions improve in Afghanistan.

At the International Conference on Return and Reintegration co-chaired by the Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR in Kabul in November 2008, the Government and the international community agreed to mainstream returnee needs to increase the country's ability to absorb returnees. The Kabul Conference presented a Refugee Returnee and IDP (RRI) strategy identifying the gaps to be addressed in returnee reintegration. More than 5.7 million Afghans have returned since 2002, increasing Afghanistan's population by an estimated 20 per cent. Donor support for national development programmes in areas of high return to complement UNHCR's short-term humanitarian projects will be a key determinant of Afghanistan's ability to successfully absorb more returnees in the future.

○ Activities and assistance

Community services: The expansion of the extremely vulnerable individuals (EVI) project from 16 to 34 provinces allowed UNHCR to meet the needs of more than 4,000 vulnerable returnees. In the last few years an average of some 6 per cent of returnees have required additional support.

An evaluation of the EVI programme confirmed that it addressed urgent and immediate needs with cash assistance or grants. This flexible social protection programme helped individuals facing extreme hardship and hunger due to rising prices and seasonal extremes, as well as difficult protection situations including IDP movements. The grant also allowed some vulnerable returnees to break out of the cycle of poverty and start small businesses. However, increasing outreach to women and encouraging female participation in community projects is not without its risks; one female community representative, who was also a community worker, was killed in 2008.

Domestic needs and household support: More than 278,000 registered returnees received the USD 83 reintegration component of the cash grant within seven days of arrival in Afghanistan and were able to meet immediate basic needs

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Total	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Various	40	40	32	30
Asylum-seekers	Various	10	10	0	0
Returnees (refugees)	From Pakistan	274,200	274,200	48	60
	From Islamic Republic of Iran	3,700	3,700	48	60
	Various	600	600	48	60
IDPs		230,700	230,700	49	-
Returnees (IDPs)		6,500	4000	51	-
Total		515,750	513,250		

A Kabul-based NGO provides training to street children under 18, many of whom are returnees from Pakistan



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for the first two to three months after return. It also allowed returnees to pay debts incurred in the country of asylum and purchase goods to support the initial return phase.

An evaluation of the cash grant confirmed its importance in supporting the initial return phase of two to three months. Pre-positioning of winterization non-food items allowed timely distribution to 220,000 vulnerable returnees and IDPs, preventing cold-related deaths and reducing disease. The 28,000 Afghans who returned due to camp closure in Pakistan were helped to face difficulties in their temporary settlements over winter. Despite security challenges, winterization assistance was also provided to vulnerable IDPs in Kandahar and Helmand provinces.

Health and nutrition: At the encashment centres, some 23,600 returnees received basic medical support, including the vaccination of minors. Mobile clinics provided treatment for over 100,000 people - more than 50 per cent female - in the eastern region, where there is a lack of female doctors. Cooperation with partners helped address the health needs of returnees in temporary settlements, as well as of those displaced from Pakistan. Deportees identified during border monitoring also had access to health care.

Income generation: Seventy-five small reintegration projects in the eastern, central and western region focused on supporting agricultural livelihoods by cleaning canals and building mud walls and shallow wells for irrigation. Over 500 women benefited from livelihoods projects, which were also supported by cash-for-work (CFW) and food-for-work (FFW) schemes in cooperation with WFP. Together, interventions in this sector resulted in the construction of agricultural canals, drainage and a micro-hydro power plant in the communities with the highest rates of return, benefiting 29,000 families with income and also increasing

agricultural livelihood opportunities. Schools were also constructed based on the needs identified by the community.

Legal assistance: Potential returnees received information on conditions in their home country through mass information flyers and popular radio programmes. The majority of cases handled by the information, counselling and legal aid centres were on property issues. Many cases were resolved through traditional justice systems, as well as recourse to national law. UNHCR and the Government released the national IDP profile in December 2008. An estimated 232,000 IDPs were identified in Afghanistan, a vast reduction from the 1.2 million in 2002. More than 600 IDP families were able to return from Kandahar to northern Afghanistan in 2008, and the Office worked with the authorities to find solutions for the remaining long-staying IDPs in the south.

Operational support (to agencies): In its operational support for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), UNHCR focused primarily on key provinces absorbing returnees or managing IDP situations. It also worked with the ministry on a range of policy issues related to Afghanistan's bilateral relations with third countries on the management of population movements. Furthermore, it cooperated with the Civil Service Reform Commission to improve the organizational, planning and management capacities of the ministry.

Shelter and other infrastructure: The shelter programme benefited more than 11,400 families (approximately 80,000 persons). This number is significantly higher than the planning figure of 10,000 due to innovative modifications in the shelter design. In addition to the standard two-room shelter, over 1,680 one-room shelter extensions were built for

returnees and people displaced from Pakistan staying with host families. This programme targeted landless individuals and vulnerable beneficiaries, such as female-headed households. Families who could not construct the houses themselves benefited from cash assistance to construct shelter. Advocacy and information-sharing on unmet shelter needs increased shelter interventions by other actors targeting returnees.

There are now 18 active land allocation sites, and 13 planned sites under the Land Allocation Scheme. The UNHCR-supported Programme Implementation Unit in the MoRR conducted follow-up technical assessments for sites. In some districts the security situation prevented the completion of work and resources had to be redirected to more secure areas. To date some 348,000 people have applied for land, more than 78,000 beneficiaries have been selected, almost 35,000 plots have been distributed and some 10,800 beneficiaries are living on site. Chamtala in the eastern province of Ningahar was designated a new Land Allocation Site by the authorities since a large number of returnees without other solutions have settled there spontaneously.

Transport and logistics: Over 278,000 returnees received a transport grant of up to USD 17 depending on their place of origin. The average payment was some USD 16 per person as most Afghans returned to the eastern region from Pakistan. Adequate warehousing and distribution capacity was maintained in cooperation with partners. As a result, winterization and other non-food items could be distributed on a timely basis to 220,000 vulnerable returnees and IDPs, including returnees who became IDPs in temporary settlements in the eastern region. Vulnerable irregular migrants deported from Iran were identified through border monitoring mechanisms and provided with transportation grants. Overall, only 2 per cent of a total of 406,000 deportees were identified as vulnerable.

Water: 327 of a planned 375 water points were completed by the end of the year. The cost of implementation rose due to the increased risks in insurgent-affected areas. Needs assessments showed that up to 40 per cent of the returnees were without potable water. As a result of active UNHCR advocacy and close coordination, other agencies met the emergency water needs of returnees in temporary settlements in the eastern region. Countrywide, over 5,500 water points were completed by other agencies through the Government.

● *Constraints*

The challenges to sustainable returnee reintegration in Afghanistan increased in 2008, with deteriorating security conditions, rising prices and limited employment opportunities. Timely delivery of assistance was hampered by sharp increase in security incidents as well as a reduction in access for the UN to less than half the country. However, winterization assistance was provided to vulnerable IDPs in Kandahar and Helmand province following a verification exercise carried out by UNHCR.

The Office maintained emergency preparedness in coordination with others to ensure a rapid response to sudden influxes. This allowed it to respond to the needs of the 28,000 returnees in temporary settlements unable to go back to their place of origin, and the sudden arrival of mixed

Afghan and Pakistani populations displaced by fighting in neighbouring Pakistan.

| Financial information |

UNHCR received solid financial support for its Afghanistan operation in 2008. An additional USD 27.6 million above the approved budget was made available to support unforeseen needs during the course of the year; this represented a 50 per cent increase in the country budget. These resources supported initial return and reintegration needs for a higher than anticipated level of return, and covered the rising costs of steel and fuel prices. Maintaining an operation in the deteriorating security environment also required increased security investments to ensure staff safety and minimum working and living conditions.

| Organization and implementation |

The Office in Afghanistan had 437 staff members, comprising 30 international and 397 national staff, three Junior Professional Officers and seven UN Volunteers. The Representation office in Kabul was complemented by five sub-offices in Jalalabad, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif, three field offices and three field units. The overall workforce level decreased slightly by 3 per cent (13 posts) compared to 2007.

In 2008 a country-wide review led to the adjustment and streamlining of office structures and staffing levels to reflect changed repatriation trends, the increase in insecurity and to meet the growing challenge of sustainable returnee reintegration. In areas with little or no access, primarily in the south and south east, the Office reduced presence and operations to concentrate on pursuing solutions and advocacy for those in protracted situations of internal displacement. UNHCR concentrated its resources in the areas of highest return, such as the central, eastern and northern regions, which were also the areas to which the Office had the most access and where it could consolidate support for returnee reintegration.

Overall, 95 posts were discontinued by the end of 2008, marking a 25 per cent reduction of the workforce. The policy of posting national staff on key functions was maintained, with an overall 91:9 national/international staff ratio by year's end.

| Working with others |

UNHCR had 76 agreements with 35 implementing partners in 2008: four governmental partners, 19 national NGOs, five international NGOs and seven others, including international organizations.

The Office enjoyed productive operational partnerships with the Government and humanitarian counterparts and worked closely with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), particularly on regional issues. In the humanitarian reform process, UNHCR led the protection and emergency shelter clusters. The Office intensified its links with ministries and organizations responsible for development programming to ensure the mainstreaming of reintegration into the broader reconstruction agenda.

The Office continued the inter-agency contingency planning processes for return and displacement from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in 2008. Both plans were activated, and a coordinated inter-agency response addressed the immediate needs of vulnerable returnees in temporary settlements, as well as deportees identified as vulnerable.

UNHCR advocated for food to be delivered in places of origin to prevent further displacement. WFP incorporated returnees and IDPs in its response to the drought. UNHCR shared information on unmet shelter needs with operational partners. The Office also led an inter-agency winterization response, pre-positioning stocks before winter set in. As a result, the needs of the most vulnerable during the cold season were better addressed.

OCHA established a presence in Kabul towards the end of year, and started to prepare the first UN Humanitarian Action Plan, in which UNHCR participated.

| Overall assessment |

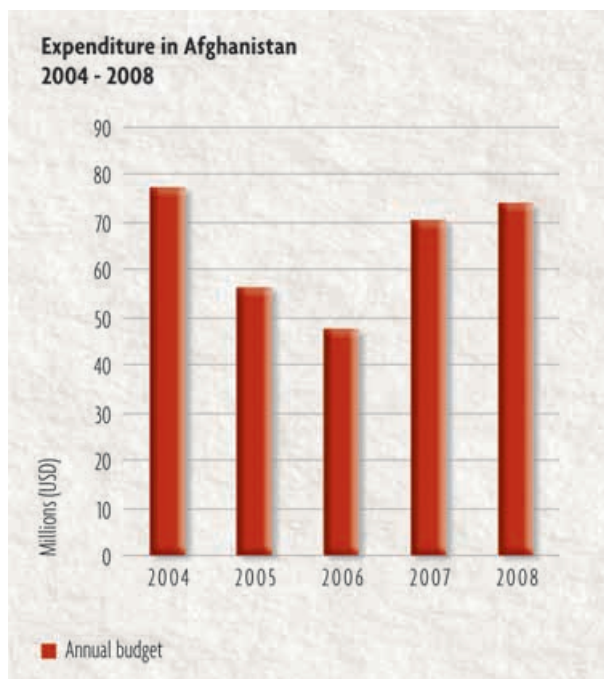
In 2008 the number of voluntary returns of registered Afghans was higher than expected due primarily to deteriorating conditions in the border regions of Pakistan. As a result many Afghans returned before being able to sustain themselves in their home country. Conditions in Afghanistan also declined in some areas, with rising insecurity, drought, high commodity prices and limited livelihood opportunities.

Approximately 28,000 of the 55,000 Afghans who returned following the closure of Jalozi camp in Pakistan in May 2008 either had no home to return to or could not return home due to insecurity, tribal enmity or lack of livelihoods. Maintaining an emergency preparedness capacity proved critically important and enabled UNHCR in coordination with others to address the needs of various sudden influxes into Afghanistan in 2008.

Important progress was made in support of the Refugee Return and IDP sector strategy of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy for 2008-2013. An important achievement was the endorsement by the Afghan Government, other governments in the region and the international community at the November 2008 International Conference on Return and Reintegration of plans to mainstream returnee needs into development programmes.

UNHCR's operational partnerships with other UN agencies and bilateral actors saw the latter's greater engagement in shelter, water and other sectors to support returnee reintegration.

Partners	
Implementing partners	
Government agencies:	Ministries of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled; Public Health; Refugees and Repatriation; Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NGOs:	Afghan Agency for Integrated Development, Afghan Blind Migration, Afghan Bureau for Reconstruction, Afghan General Help Coordination Office, Afghan Planning Agency, Afghan Public Welfare Organization, Afghanistan Association of the Blind, Ansari Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan, Child Fund Afghanistan, Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan, Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan, Engineering and Rehabilitation Service for Afghanistan, International Rescue Committee, INTERSOS, Laghman Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock Directorate, National Consultancy and Relief Association, Norwegian Refugee Council, Reconstruction and Employment Unit for Afghan Refugees, Relief International, Sanayee Development Organization, Voluntary Association for the Rehabilitation of Afghanistan, Watan's Social and Technical Services Association
Others:	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, Afghanistan Research & Evaluation Unit, British Broadcasting Corporation, <i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i> , ILO, IOM, UNV
Operational partners	
Government agencies:	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
Others:	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UN Country Team, World Bank and bilateral assistance missions in Afghanistan



Budget, income and expenditure in Afghanistan (USD)

	Final budget	Income from contributions	Other funds available	Total funds available ¹	Total expenditure
Annual budget	75,686,250	60,983,368	13,531,256	74,514,624	74,514,400

Note: Income from contributions includes contributions earmarked at the country level and do not include seven per cent support costs for NAM contributions. Other funds available include transfers from unearmarked and broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

¹ Total funds available include currency adjustment.

Financial report for UNHCR's operations in Afghanistan (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects	Previous years' projects
	Annual budget	Annual and supplementary budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	13,698,305	0
Community services	599,509	80,448
Domestic needs and household support	24,145,674	0
Health and nutrition	195,525	61,893
Income generation	608,410	63,051
Legal assistance	2,465,847	404,153
Operational support (to agencies)	1,454,834	340,789
Shelter and infrastructure	13,098,924	610,604
Transport and logistics	7,176,228	473,283
Water	821,187	217,400
Instalments to implementing partners	2,393,042	(2,251,621)
Subtotal operational activities	66,657,485	0
Programme support	7,856,915	0
Total expenditure	74,514,400	0
Cancellation on previous years' expenditure		(256,149)
Instalments with implementing partners		
Payments made	13,090,694	
Reporting received	(10,697,652)	
Balance	2,393,042	
Outstanding 1st January		4,099,003
Reporting received		(2,251,621)
Refunded to UNHCR		(187,606)
Currency adjustment		(7,100)
Outstanding 31st December		1,652,676