



## Working environment

### The context

Even though the international community pledged an additional USD 21 billion to Afghanistan in 2008 to support the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, the country's transition to political, economic and social stability remains uncertain. Seven years after the replacement of the Taliban by an internationally supported Government, insecurity is spreading and the Government effectively controls half of the country, limiting access by humanitarian and development actors. This situation is likely to persist in 2009 as the country's recovery is threatened by growing insecurity.

At the same time, humanitarian needs rose sharply due to the impact of a harsh winter, drought in the north of the country, conflict-generated displacement and civilian casualties, secondary displacement of some 30,000 refugees who returned from Pakistan and the deportation of undocumented Afghans from the Islamic

Republic of Iran. On the positive side, the establishment of the UN Humanitarian Country Team helped the coordination of assistance. The national response to humanitarian needs has also improved.

The return of almost 5 million Afghans since 2002 has placed great pressure on the country's absorption capacity, especially on its limited local-labour markets. The spread of insecurity has also posed new difficulties for returnees. Nevertheless, by mid-September 2008, almost 250,000 individuals had returned to Afghanistan, driven mainly by a combination of rising prices and the closure of refugee villages in neighbouring Pakistan. With the prospect of more difficult living conditions in both Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, decisions on return have become increasingly complex for the remaining refugee population, 80 per cent of whom have been in exile for more than 20 years. These emerging developments underpinned the Government of Afghanistan's decision to call for an international conference on return and reintegration in Kabul in November 2008.

## The needs

While UNHCR will continue to fulfil its mandate for a modest number of asylum-seekers and refugees in Afghanistan, the bulk of its work will focus on voluntary repatriation and the reintegration of Afghan returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). A recent profiling exercise estimated that there are now some 200,000 IDPs in Afghanistan, although this is a fluid situation affected by drought in 2008 and localized conflicts.

Making direct contact with beneficiaries and conducting needs assessments is becoming increasingly difficult and dangerous in some regions. However, UNHCR has a clear understanding of returnee needs based on information gathering by its partners who have access to areas of high return. These indicate that improvements in the shelter and water sectors are vital if refugees are to be reintegrated into local communities. Employment, education and health and nutrition services are also important to sustain the population in return areas and avoid large-scale migration to the cities. Cash grants have supported returnees' initial reintegration, but are not enough to maintain longer-term economic and social stability.

## Main objectives

- Facilitate the voluntary, safe and gradual return of Afghans from Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other host countries, and support their initial reintegration.
- Monitor the physical, legal and material safety of returnees and the reintegration of both refugees and IDPs through direct field work and partnerships with protection agencies.
- Address the longer-term reintegration needs of refugee and IDP returnees by advocacy and enhance

cooperation with government ministries and donor agencies to improve resource allocation.

- Strengthen the ability of the Afghan authorities to plan for, manage, and respond to displacement within, to and from Afghanistan.
- Improve the access of asylum-seekers to fair and efficient refugee status determination (RSD) procedures, and facilitate durable solutions.

## Key targets

- Some 220,000 refugees return to Afghanistan.
- UNHCR monitors that the human rights of returnees are respected at borders, encashment centres and in villages of return, and activates immediate corrective measures in case of violations.
- Some 10,000 shelters are constructed for the most vulnerable returnee families.
- Existing information and legal counselling centres are expanded to reduce obstacles to sustainable reintegration, while the capacity of formal justice systems is increased to pave the way for the eventual phasing down of the existing centres.
- Preparedness measures are in place for the distribution of non-food items to 40,000 families in case of humanitarian disasters, deportation or forced displacement.
- Cash-for-work projects are implemented in selected rural communities with high returnee populations, and employment opportunities are created.
- Accurate information on conditions for return is provided to Afghans in asylum countries through mass information campaigns.
- The Government undertakes the management of asylum issues in accordance with relevant international legal standards and minimal support from UNHCR.

## Planning figures

Type of population	Origin	Jan 2009		Dec 2009	
		Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR
Refugees	Various	100	100	100	100
Returnees (refugees)		280,000	280,000	220,000	140,000
IDPs		200,000	50,000	200,000	50,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>480,100</b>	<b>330,100</b>	<b>420,100</b>	<b>190,100</b>

## Strategy and activities

UNHCR's main objectives in 2009 will be the voluntary repatriation and initial reintegration of Afghan refugees residing in asylum countries. The Office plans to support an initial 140,000 returnees with return and reintegration cash grants.

As the return of Afghans remains the focus of host country governments, UNHCR will need to balance protection and durable solutions concerns in view of Afghanistan's limited absorption capacity. The current Tripartite Agreement on voluntary repatriation with Pakistan has been extended until the end of 2009. The Iranian authorities have indicated that they will wait until the outcome of the return and reintegration conference in November 2008, before discussing any renewal of their Tripartite agreement.

Through the Kabul conference in November 2008 and as part of its advocacy efforts, UNHCR will, together with the Government of Afghanistan, seek

to mobilize political and financial support for national development programmes that target returnee reintegration. UNHCR will participate in all Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) forums overseeing the implementation of the sector strategy addressing social protection and refugees, as well as regional cooperation. The Office will also provide initial reintegration assistance and shelter for the most vulnerable families, as well as support water and sanitation projects. In addition, UNHCR will launch employment-related activities, including cash for work and income generation schemes, and provide access to training and skills development projects.

The Land Allocation Scheme will be re-invigorated in 2009, and UNHCR will improve planning, management and implementation of the scheme. An oversight committee, including key donors, will guide policy and practice.

Partnerships will be strengthened with human rights and rule of law actors through bilateral exchanges and cooperation, as well as through the humanitarian



Afghan returnees in front of a shelter provided by UNHCR in the north-eastern province of Takar.

reform process, in which UNHCR leads the protection cluster. This expanded network will monitor the return of refugees and IDPs and intervene to address problems, especially for people with specific needs, such as women at risk.

UNHCR will develop its existing network of contacts with government ministries and organizations addressing both the policy and operational aspects of population movements, and provide them with guidance on refugee, reintegration and internal displacement issues. UNHCR welcomes the reform of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and will continue to support this process in 2009.

The Office will also provide technical support and guidance to the Government on the implementation of its obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, particularly in the development of national refugee legislation and the management of refugee protection. Furthermore, UNHCR will continue to conduct RSD under its mandate and explore durable solutions.

## Constraints

Rising insecurity, political instability and economic and social conditions in Afghanistan have constrained voluntary repatriation. Any deterioration in current conditions could further reduce the expected number of returnees and hamper delivery of assistance to individuals with specific needs and protection risks. UNHCR will update its contingency plan for sudden displacement emergencies on both the Pakistan and Iranian borders. Access to the south and south-east are likely to remain difficult.

## Organization and implementation

UNHCR presence	
Number of offices	12
Total staff	355
International	28
National	315
JPOs	2
UNVs	9
Others	1

## Coordination

The ministries at central and provincial level, humanitarian and development agencies and the donor community will continue to be key partners for the Office. The establishment of the Humanitarian Country Team and the introduction of the cluster approach will yield benefits in the protection sector, in particular with regard to IDPs, deportees and protection of civilians, and bring greater coherence to the emergency shelter sector, both led by UNHCR.

## Financial information

The growing needs for the cash grant for returnees, the impact of rising shelter and fuel prices and the deteriorating security situation all contributed to the increase of financial requirements for Afghanistan.

## Partners

### Implementing partners

**Government agencies:** Ministries of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled; Public Health; Refugees and Repatriation; Rural Rehabilitation and Development; Women's Affairs

**NGOs:** Afghan Bureau for Reconstruction, Afghan General Help Coordination Office, Afghan Planning Agency, Afghan Public Welfare Organization, Ansari Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan, Child Fund Afghanistan, Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, Coordination of Rehabilitation and Development Services for Afghanistan, Engineering and Rehabilitation Service for Afghanistan, INTERSOS, Norwegian Refugee Council, Reconstruction and Employment Unit for Afghan Refugees, Voluntary Association for the Rehabilitation of Afghanistan, Watan's Social and Technical Services Association, Afghan Agency for Integrated Development, Sanayee Development Organization, Relief International, Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan, National Consultancy and Relief Association, Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan

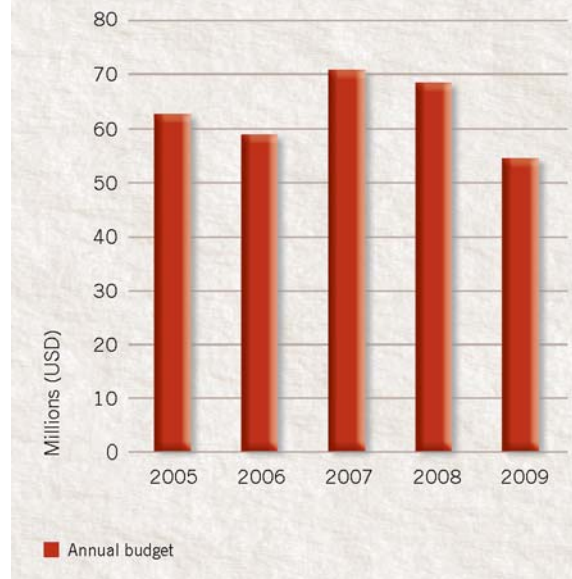
**Others:** Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, British Broadcasting Corporation, *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*, ILO, IOM, UNV

### Operational partners

**Government agencies:** Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development

**Others:** United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UN Country Team, World Bank

### UNHCR's budget 2005 - 2009



## Budget (USD)

Activities and services	Annual budget	
	2008	2009
Protection, monitoring and coordination	12,909,090	11,835,647
Community services	575,000	675,000
Domestic needs	10,165,000	11,922,500
Health	150,000	360,000
Income generation	1,000,000	1,100,000
Legal assistance	3,170,000	3,355,000
Operational support (to agencies)	1,991,530	1,845,000
Shelter and infrastructure	9,776,000	11,769,417
Transport and logistics	4,380,000	4,747,500
<b>Total operations</b>	<b>44,116,620</b>	<b>47,610,064</b>
Programme support	5,755,280	6,737,427
<b>Total</b>	<b>49,871,900</b>	<b>54,347,491</b>