

AFGHANISTAN

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate the voluntary return of up to 800,000 refugees and 400,000 IDPs in safety and dignity and in accordance with recognised international standards governing repatriation and IDP return.
- Support returnees with assistance through multi-sector and integrated programmes to meet their immediate needs in the initial period of reintegration, preferably at their places of origin. Ensure that medium and longer-term assistance to returnees and their community is addressed.
- With a view to supporting sustainable reintegration, provide and share information with agencies providing humanitarian assistance on the situation of returnees at their places of origin and return, their needs, as well as the needs of the communities receiving high numbers of returnees through systematic monitoring.
- Strengthen partnerships with the Government, implementing partners and international and local NGOs, on the reintegration of refugees and IDPs within the National Development Framework.
- Ensure the basic human rights of returnees through continuous monitoring and awareness raising.
- Provide information regarding the profiles, places of origin and intentions of refugees in the main countries of asylum in order to develop and diversify strategies for voluntary return and reintegration.
- Provide relevant country of origin information for the identification of Afghans in need of protection and work towards their continued protection. Seek durable solutions for those Afghans in host countries who are not able to return home.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED, AND CONSTRAINTS

UNHCR officially began its voluntary repatriation programme from Pakistan in March and from the Islamic Republic of Iran in April 2002. Up to June, over 1.1 million Afghan refugees voluntarily repatriated from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, well above the initial annual target of 800,000. In addition, UNHCR assisted some 170,000 IDPs to return home. Given the unforeseen high levels of returns so far, the planning figures for 2002 have been revised upwards from 1.2 million returnees to 2.03 million.

In April 2002, a tri-partite agreement was signed between the Afghanistan Interim Administration (AIA), the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR for the voluntary return of Afghan refugees. In May, the AIA issued a decree on the dignified return of Afghans. A tri-partite agreement seeking to ensure the rights of refugees and returnees is still under negotiation with the Government of Pakistan.

Whilst immediate assistance is provided to returnees in the form of standard non-food items (blankets, plastic sheeting, soap, etc.), the challenge is to ensure that conditions are created to allow returnees to remain in Afghanistan. UNHCR has undertaken discussions and entered into planning exercises with the Ministry for Repatriation, inter-ministerial bodies and partner agencies for the reintegration of refugees in Afghanistan.

Partnerships with WFP, IOM, and international agencies played a prominent role in the repatriation operation, and are key to the success of both the repatriation and initial reintegration of Afghans. In January 2002, UNHCR participated in a joint World Bank/Asian Development Bank/UNDP assessment of reconstruction needs in Afghanistan. From January to June 2002, UNHCR focused on

developing relationships and strategies with relevant development organisations.

Recently, UNHCR was appointed Programme Secretariat for Returnees and IDPs, one of the nine programme groups established by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Its responsibilities will cover strengthening the Government's capabilities for planning, co-ordination, and management of national programmes for returnees and IDPs. More specifically, the Secretariat's role will be to assist the Afghan Assistance Co-ordination Authority (AACAA) and the Ministry of Finance to compile all recorded and planned programmes and budgets in the returnee and IDP sectors, within the framework of the National Development Budget (2002-2003). In its capacity as Programme Group Secretariat, UNHCR now formally assumes responsibility for the coordination of IDP issues.

Although some 170,000 of Afghanistan's estimated 1.2 million IDPs have returned home, many more are still displaced - some because of protection concerns, others as a result of the drought. Large numbers (particularly Pashtuns from the north and the traditionally nomadic Kuchis) are still unable to return in the foreseeable future, posing an enormous humanitarian and social problem.

As a result of the higher number of displaced Afghans inside and outside the country, UNHCR offices operating in Afghanistan are now having to revise their plans for the rest of the year. In the south of the country, for example, where relatively few refugees are returning, the programme for the rest of the year will focus on finding ways to address the needs of the different IDP groups currently living there.

In its reintegration activities, UNHCR consistently makes efforts to meet the needs of returnees. The Office put in place a series of systems, such as the regional information unit, which is able to provide rapid and accurate

information on the intended destinations of returnees, as well as, bio-data on age, gender, ethnicity, and family-size of the returnees. This is gathered, in part from the declarations in the Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF). Data in both tabular and map format and is regularly shared with the Government, multi-lateral and bi-lateral organisations, donors, UN agencies and NGOs. Physical verification on a random basis is carried out through returnee monitoring. Concomitantly, UNHCR is completing a district profiling exercise that provides information on conditions and key issues in major returnee destinations. The finalised profiles are shared on a monthly basis with interested parties and are available on the website of the Afghanistan Information Management Services (AIMS).

The situation varies according to provinces and districts, but in most areas priority needs include water and shelter. UNHCR identified these as key activities for 2002. UNHCR has forged partnerships with other agencies for the provision of assistance in the fields of health, education and income-generating schemes. At the end of June 2002, UNHCR had signed sub-agreements or Letters of Mutual Intent with 35 NGOs.

Constraints remain, which will determine to what extent long-term reintegration success can be achieved. These constraints range from political considerations, protection-related issues, cultural sensitivities, the pace of intervention of national and international actors depending on climatic factors (the drought in the south is not yet over). On the political side, UNHCR and others remain concerned by the harassment of the Pushtun minority in the north. Pashtuns continue to migrate southwards despite the various interventions made through high-level missions by the central authorities and UN bodies. An independent commission has been created to look into the issue.

Many returnees coming back to the country in the spring and early summer told UNHCR that

they wanted to repatriate to be in Afghanistan in time for the Loya Jirga. In June, political and tribal leaders and other representatives throughout the Afghan society gathered together to choose the new transitional government. President Karzai was re-elected, and it is hoped that this new transitional government will be the first step in moving the country towards increasing peace and stability.

One of the many important changes that have taken place recently is the re-emergence of Afghan women in the work force. UNHCR has striven to increase the number of women

(both national and international) working in its Afghanistan programme. The Office has also made efforts to implement a gender strategy in all of its programmes, encouraging women to participate in the decision-making process concerning reintegration activities. Overcoming the traditional customs, however, remain a challenge and this requires a careful and long-term approach to women's (official) role in society.

The reintegration of returnees is but a part of the overall plan for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. In that sense, it requires concerted efforts by all humanitarian and development actors.

Progress measured against indicators

Impact/Performance Indicators	Actual Progress
Displaced Afghans (Refugees and IDPs) can return to places of their choice in Afghanistan, in conditions of safety and dignity.	Under the UNHCR facilitated-repatriation scheme, over 1.1 million Afghan refugees and 170,000 IDPs were assisted to return voluntarily to their places of origin (Pakistan: 1,027,280, Iran: 86,040, and 9,317 from other countries). UNHCR monitored the repatriation, which was orderly, took place in conditions of safety, and respected the necessary legal instruments: the AIA issued a decree on the dignified return of Afghan refugees in May 2002; a tri-partite agreement (Iran, Afghanistan and UNHCR) was signed on 4 April 2002; and UNHCR undertook discussions with the Government of Pakistan for the preparation of a similar type of agreement. A Letter of Understanding designating UNHCR as the programme secretariat for returnees and IDPs was signed in June 2002. UNHCR's role vis-à-vis IDPs focused on the co-ordination and facilitation of return. The Office has reinforced protection assessments of IDP camp management in the North and in the West, and developed the plan on the relocation/return of refugees and IDPs from the Spin Boldak/Chaman waiting areas.
NGO/UNHCR protection and monitoring network were established.	UNHCR made significant progress in the establishment of field protection and monitoring presence: 140 field/protection staff were deployed, nine monitoring posts established and protection cases were followed up with authorities. The Office systematically collected information on the areas of return: district profiling has been completed for 53 districts. UNHCR provided co-ordination and training services to partners: protection working groups were established at the regional level with relevant UN agencies and NGOs; and two protection workshops were provided for NGOs.
Distribution centres for assistance were established in 22 districts.	The Office established 22 distribution centres. Due to security constraints, distribution centres were constructed mostly in high return areas and not in all the provinces.
Water: 327 tube wells (1/200 persons) and 3,275 dug wells (1/2,000) were constructed, and existing water facilities improved.	UNHCR built 49 new wells, rehabilitated 12 wells, and is constructing 153 more wells. The Office will continue to improve/construct pipe schemes/water reservoirs/other water systems.
Shelter: 40 per cent of 1.2 million planned returnees (96,000 families) benefited from shelter projects.	UNHCR signed sub-agreements to construct some 28,000 houses. (Central: 8,040 houses, Eastern: 2,000, Southern: 400, Western: 9,200, Northern: 8,040). The location of the 320 remaining houses has yet to be decided. The Office finalised the international procurement of shelter material and the local procurement of certain types of timber, suitable for beams. UNHCR will also continue to register beneficiaries and undertake construction work.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER 2002

UNHCR now seeks to assist the voluntary return of 2.03 million refugees - 1.2 million from Pakistan, 400,000 refugees from Iran, 30,000 from other countries, and 400,000 IDPs within the country.

The initial objectives of the country programme remain valid. However, the significant increase in the number of returnees has compelled UNHCR to revise the contents of its assistance programme. Whereas support for the facilitated return of Afghans will continue to be provided, assistance in the field of immediate reintegration will focus mostly on shelter and water.

Planning parameters have been modified to take into consideration the expected increase in the number of persons returning, and the implementation capacity of UNHCR, its implementing partners and other actors. The security situation and financial constraints must be borne in mind:

Non-food item packages: Most of the items - except for plastic sheeting - will not be distributed when the stocks procured for the initial 1.2 million planned beneficiaries are exhausted;

Shelter activities: The revised target number is 40,465 houses, because some 19 per cent of the returnees in rural areas are expected to benefit from shelter projects instead of the 40 per cent initially foreseen;

Shelter tool kits: The kits will be provided only for beneficiaries of shelter activities;

Transport allowances for refugee returnees: UNHCR will distribute cash allowances to cover returnees' transportation costs from the West to the North, due to the withdrawal of IOM in June 2002 from those areas. The allowances will vary from USD 5 to USD 30 per person according to the final destinations;

IDP Returns: UNHCR will cover transportation costs to areas where IOM is no longer operating.

Annual Programme Budget				Supplementary Programme Budget			
Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level
9,492,176	9,516,676	6,120,511	4,584,690	0	135,513,510	72,758,642	72,424,393