



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The region hosts some 3.5 million refugees (mostly from Afghanistan and Myanmar), 2.7 million IDPs and 1.6 million stateless persons.

From emergencies requiring urgent humanitarian assistance to situations where innovative longer-term solutions are required, the Asia and the Pacific region presents a complex set of situations requiring UNHCR's presence. Among the former is Afghanistan, where violence continues to create displacement and obstruct the chances of sustainable returns. Also among the former is the biggest and fastest growing refugee emergency the region has seen in decades—the flight from Myanmar of hundreds of thousands of refugees into Bangladesh. With the existing camps and settlements overcrowded, and with limited basic infrastructure and services, the humanitarian needs are astounding.

Asia ^{and the} Pacific

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A Rohingya mother wades through water as she crosses the border from Myanmar into Bangladesh, near the village of Anzuman Para in Palong Khali.

The volatile security situation in Afghanistan continues to trigger displacement, with more than 192,000 people forced to flee their homes in the first eight months of 2017. With the situation likely to remain precarious, displacement is expected to continue.

The protracted Afghan refugee situations in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan require long-term solutions, with a focus on the creation of conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan and support for refugee-hosting communities.

UNHCR has dramatically increased its presence, and the protection and assistance it is providing to refugees, including in Bangladesh since it was granted the authorization to expand its operational capacity beyond the two existing refugee camps. The operation will require significant support into 2018 to meet the comprehensive needs of all refugees in Bangladesh.

More than two-thirds of refugees in Asia and the Pacific—an estimated 2.8 million people—live in urban and semi-urban areas. This requires UNHCR and partners to work with States and other actors to strengthen the protection of those living outside camps and ensure their access to essential services in new and innovative ways.

The region is home to more than half of those under UNHCR’s statelessness mandate, approximately 50 per cent of the global stateless population. Preventing and reducing statelessness, and protecting the rights of stateless persons, will therefore be key regional priorities for the Office.

Despite the generosity and good practices evident across the region, only 20 of its 45 countries and territories have acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, posing challenges in terms of refugee protection and solutions. Ensuring access to territory will also remain a priority for UNHCR in the region.

MAJOR SITUATIONS

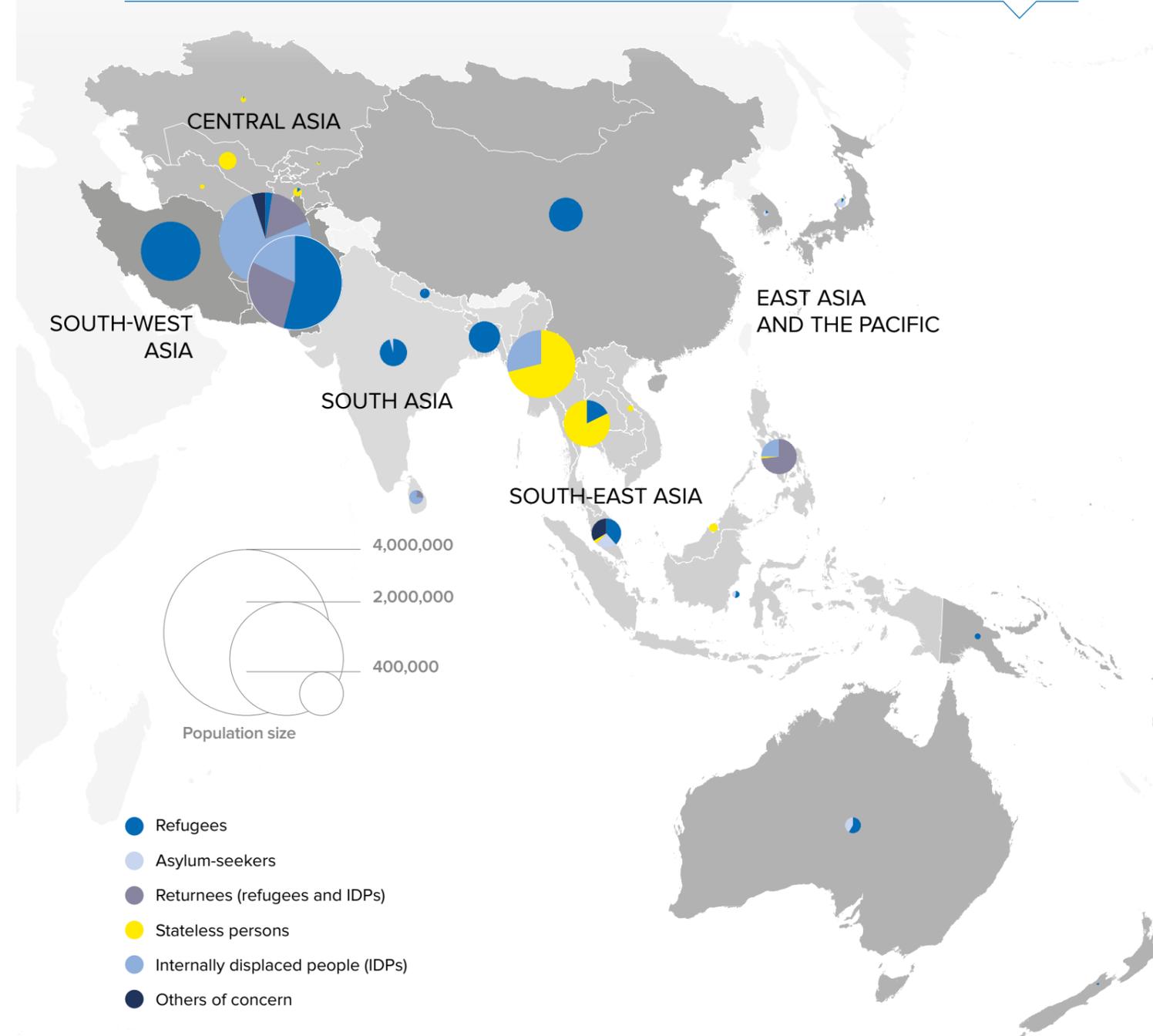
Afghan refugees in South-West Asia

The volatile security situation in Afghanistan continues to trigger displacement, with more than 192,000 people forced to flee their homes in the first eight months of 2017. More than half of those displaced were under the age of 18. There are more than 2.2 million Afghan refugees worldwide, with the majority of them having received protection and assistance from the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan for almost four decades.

The “Solutions strategy for Afghan refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries” (SSAR) is a multi-year regional framework that seeks solutions for Afghan refugees living in a protracted situation. The SSAR offers a comprehensive and integrated framework for joint interventions aimed at facilitating voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, while at the same time providing assistance to host communities and countries.

Within Afghanistan, some 1.2 million people are internally displaced. The situation is likely to remain precarious with continuing internal displacement. UNHCR will work to build closer partnerships with development actors, while supporting the Government to ensure that returnees are included in national development plans.

Pakistan hosts more than 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees, with the number of refugee returns from this country declining from some 370,000 in 2016 to around 50,000 in the first three-quarters



of 2017. The pace of returns is expected to remain modest in 2018. However, UNHCR cannot discount the impact that the parliamentary elections in Pakistan in 2018 may have on Afghan refugees. Nevertheless, the “Refugee affected and hosting areas” (RAHA) programme, a key element of the SSAR, will continue to support host communities and promote peaceful coexistence.

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to expand refugee access to healthcare through the universal public health

insurance scheme, supported by UNHCR. By the end of July 2017, some 125,700 refugees were registered in the scheme, giving them access to the same level of services as Iranian nationals. In 2018, the Office will continue to support the Government of Iran to ensure all refugees have access to public services, including in the areas of health, livelihoods, and education.

Refugee outflow from Myanmar

The Myanmar situation has become the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world. Triggered by security operations in northern Rakhine State in response to the attacks on Myanmar police and military posts launched in August 2017, the displacement situation is the largest and swiftest refugee exodus the region has experienced in recent decades. At least half a million refugees arrived in Bangladesh from Myanmar in little more than a month. They joined more than 300,000 refugees already in Bangladesh from previous waves of displacement.

While the Office is working closely with the Government of Bangladesh and other agencies to respond to the most urgent humanitarian needs, it is clear that the effects of the violence in Myanmar will continue to be felt in 2018. With the situation exacerbated by continuous refugee arrivals, and reoccurring natural disasters, local infrastructure has been overstretched and the environment placed under great strain.

UNHCR will prioritize providing life-saving support and the distribution of core relief items and shelter materials. In line with its mandate responsibilities, it will also continue to lead the protection sector in Bangladesh—working alongside the Government to carry out biometric registration, count families, map newly arrived refugee communities, and establish transit centres on the Bangladesh border to support the immediate needs of new arrivals. Critically, it will also provide support to host communities, in which an estimated 120,000 refugees now live. UNHCR will mitigate the effects on host communities, including by improving infrastructure and roads, and providing technical support to local and national authorities.

Finally, when conditions are conducive and allow, UNHCR is prepared to support the voluntary return of refugees to their places of origin in Myanmar, working alongside the respective governments. This would require an end to violence, and safety and security restored for all, as well as progress on citizenship and rights and inclusive development for all communities in Rakhine State.



Many refugees fleeing Myanmar experience unimaginable horrors.

Mental health first aid on the frontlines of the Rohingya crisis

“Now I have to nurture these children. There is no-one else,” sixteen-year-old Abder Rashid tells Mahmuda, UNHCR’s psychologist, in a gentle voice. “I feel the burden when I try to sleep.” He explains that his father was shot dead in Myanmar. His mother drowned when the boat broke up off the beach, and – as the eldest of four brothers who survived – he is the new head of the family.

REGIONAL STRATEGY

Safeguarding access to protection and asylum

While advocating and supporting the establishment and improvement of asylum procedures by States, UNHCR will continue promoting protection-sensitive systems for the management of mixed movements in the region. The Office will work with States and other stakeholders to identify alternatives to the detention of asylum-seekers; ensure people of concern are protected; and establish mechanisms for achieving solutions for people of concern, including regional schemes beyond resettlement to third countries, such as labour mobility agreements. Strengthening the protection of refugee communities living outside camps will remain a priority.

UNHCR continues to undertake refugee status determination in countries without national asylum procedures and to promote protection-sensitive systems. In February 2017, the Government of Pakistan adopted a comprehensive policy on the voluntary repatriation and management of Afghan refugees, extending the validity of “proof of residence” cards until the end of 2017. The policy foresees the adoption of a draft refugee law and the creation of asylum and migration management regimes, including visas for Afghan refugees with specific profiles. In line with this policy, the Government of Pakistan launched a six-month programme in July 2017 to register undocumented Afghans. UNHCR welcomed this initiative and will continue working with the Government on its implementation in 2018.

In South-East Asia, UNHCR will remain actively involved in the Bali Process, building on the establishment of a task force on preparedness and planning in January 2017. This taskforce aims to promote a more cohesive response to mixed movements in the Bay of Bengal through its consultative mechanism in response to the crisis in Myanmar. UNHCR will endeavour to increase its engagement with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in order to address the root causes of displacement in Rakhine State and ensure that the return of the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees in the region is sustainable.

In Central Asia, a number of positive changes have been made to refugee and citizenship laws. In June 2017, Uzbekistan issued a decree outlining procedures for the granting of political asylum. UNHCR will continue to work with countries, including at the regional level, to bring about changes to refugee and citizenship laws that ensure people of concern have nationality and legal status in Central Asia.

Seeking durable solutions for protracted refugee situations

Given the ongoing conflict in the country and its limited absorption capacity, UNHCR still does not promote refugee returns to Afghanistan. However, it will continue to assist those who voluntarily chose to return in 2018, in accordance with its mandate and within the framework of SSAR.

In July 2017, a delegation of 160 Afghan refugees travelled from Pakistan to Afghanistan to advocate for measures to be taken to ensure return is sustainable,

including in relation to land, employment, shelter, health and education. In 2018, data from UNHCR's protection-based monitoring in Afghanistan will continue to help address protection issues in the country, support the transition between humanitarian assistance and development work, and inform government-led reintegration activities.

More than 880 Sri Lankan refugees have returned to Sri Lanka so far in 2017, many to the country's north and east. UNHCR staff met each family upon their return and provided cash grants for their transport and reintegration, as well as basic household items. It also carried out protection monitoring in areas of return, which helped inform advocacy efforts. In 2018, UNHCR will continue to expand its partners in Sri Lanka to further support the voluntary repatriation and return of refugees in India.

In the region, UNHCR continues to advocate alternative pathways for refugees. For example, it supports scholarship programmes sponsored by the Japanese Government, which started in 2017, to enable Syrian refugees to pursue post-graduate education. This will continue into 2018, and the selection process is ongoing.

Ensuring protection and durable solutions for IDPs

With the situation in Afghanistan expected to remain critical for IDPs in 2018, UNHCR will continue supporting their specific needs by running specialist services, and in-kind and cash-based assistance. This aims to help them meet urgent medical expenses, cover the cost of legal assistance, while promoting self-reliance. The Office, in coordination with other humanitarian actors, and in its capacity as lead of the emergency shelter and non-food items cluster, will also provide one-off assistance to families newly displaced by conflict.

In Myanmar, as part of an inter-agency response, and as the lead of the protection, shelter and camp coordination and camp management clusters, the Office will continue working with partners and the Government to protect and assist approximately 100,000 IDPs in Kachin and Northern Shan States, as well as a now unknown number of IDPs in Rakhine State. In 2018, UNHCR will continue to advocate increased regional support to help the Government of Myanmar address the root causes of displacement by providing temporary protection for refugees and sharing good practices on peaceful coexistence. UNHCR will also promote inclusive development, and the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

In Pakistan, UNHCR expects to disengage from its protection cluster responsibilities in relation to IDPs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by 2018, after building the capacity of the authorities.

In Sri Lanka, the Government adopted a national policy on durable solutions for conflict-affected displacement in August 2016. In line with this policy, Sri Lanka has committed to relocating IDPs from welfare centres to resettlement areas, with land from high security zones gradually released to facilitate returns. UNHCR will work closely with the authorities on this.

Reducing and preventing statelessness and protecting stateless persons

With more than 1.6 million people in the Asia and the Pacific region, the region is home to the highest number of stateless persons worldwide. Addressing statelessness will remain a key strategic priority in 2018, UNHCR will maintain its close cooperation with ASEAN in this regard.

Building on progress made in previous years, States in the region continue to take concrete steps to prevent and reduce statelessness. The support of UNHCR and civil society remains crucial in this regard. The Office remains committed to strengthening its engagement with States and other partners in 2018, to achieve the goals of its "#IBelong Campaign to end statelessness by 2024" and to build on the region's related successes.

For example, in line with the Campaign, the Thai Government provided Thai nationality to more than 30,000 stateless persons between 2012 and mid-2017. In 2018, UNHCR will continue to work closely with the Government of Thailand to ensure nationality is granted to an additional 80,000 stateless children and young adults.

Over 6,000 people have also had their nationality conferred through an ongoing tripartite registration exercise conducted by UNHCR and the Governments of Indonesia and the Philippines. In 2018, UNHCR will continue to support governments in this regard.

Further reduction of statelessness in Central Asia through the acquisition of citizenship will be a priority for UNHCR in 2018, building on the positive work already done.

CONSTRAINTS

Considerable challenges persist in responding to the influx of refugees from Myanmar into Bangladesh. With the refugee population having more than doubled within the space of a month, both capacity and facilities are critically overstretched. The existing coordination mechanism needs to be adapted to the fast-evolving, large-scale refugee situation. In Myanmar, particularly Northern Rakhine State, challenges remain. Despite UNHCR's presence there, by October 2017 there had been no humanitarian access granted, preventing the delivery of life-saving assistance.

Continuing violence in Afghanistan is creating an environment of increasing insecurity in which humanitarian access is limited. The deteriorating security environment is also a major concern for UNHCR staff, particularly national staff who are vulnerable to attacks and injury.

[More details on individual operations are available in the relevant subregional and country operations pages on the Global Focus website \(http://reporting.unhcr.org\).](http://reporting.unhcr.org)

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

While the region started 2017 with a relatively modest budget, accounting for some 6 per cent of the Office’s overall budget, a supplementary appeal was released in September to address the urgent protection needs generated by the Myanmar refugee emergency. This situation is likely to continue into 2018.

In 2018, the Asia and the Pacific region accounts for the majority of UNHCR’s global budget for statelessness, largely due to the situation in Myanmar. However, the refugee programme remains the most important aspect of UNHCR’s work, amounting to \$329 million, or 67 per cent of the region’s funding requirements.

Within Asia and the Pacific, the South-West Asia subregion will receive the large share of the region’s budget, with needs representing nearly 65 per cent of Asia’s budget, despite a reduction of \$38 million compared to 2017.

Shortfalls in funding have also resulted in UNHCR’s diminished presence in certain parts of the region, and a prioritization of resources is likely to reduce the number of UNHCR staff across Asia and the Pacific. If the funding levels continue to fall, this will put serious pressure on UNHCR’s ability to maintain an effective presence and deliver interventions. This will have a significant impact on its provision of life-saving support in the context of the Myanmar refugee emergency, critical support to Afghan refugees throughout the region and those who return home, as well as smaller, less visible operations across the region.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC 2018 BUDGET BY RIGHTS GROUP | USD millions



BUDGETS FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC | USD

OPERATION	2017 Current budget (as of 30 June 2017)	PILLAR 1				PILLAR 2		PILLAR 3		PILLAR 4		2019 Proposed budget
		Refugee programmes	Stateless programmes	Reintegration projects	IDP projects	TOTAL						
SOUTH-WEST ASIA												
Afghanistan	137,733,598	36,182,665	-	71,233,540	18,667,392	126,083,598					121,706,582	
Iran, Islamic Republic of	97,246,544	98,756,622	-	-	-	98,756,622					99,195,100	
Pakistan	127,073,202	68,608,451	595,000	28,982,218	1,000,000	99,185,669					96,685,643	
SUBTOTAL	362,053,344	203,547,738	595,000	100,215,758	19,667,392	324,025,889					317,587,326	
CENTRAL ASIA												
Kazakhstan Regional Office ¹	5,567,284	4,416,615	1,122,712	-	-	5,539,327					5,539,327	
Kyrgyzstan	1,038,189	562,367	341,578	-	-	903,945					822,945	
Tajikistan	2,347,732	1,568,862	612,865	-	-	2,181,727					2,181,727	
SUBTOTAL	8,953,206	6,547,844	2,077,155	-	-	8,624,999					8,543,999	
SOUTH ASIA												
India	15,814,436	15,633,434	181,000	-	-	15,814,434					15,814,572	
Nepal	7,910,131	6,173,108	538,995	-	-	6,712,104					4,595,444	
Sri Lanka	5,619,439	5,033,776	106,053	-	-	5,139,829					4,102,765	
SUBTOTAL	29,344,006	26,840,319	826,049	-	-	27,666,367					24,512,782	
SOUTH-EAST ASIA												
Bangladesh	13,765,846	14,571,728	14,148	-	-	14,585,876					14,185,771	
Indonesia	7,200,394	7,159,417	31,500	-	-	7,190,917					7,190,916	
Malaysia	18,525,588	15,841,742	763,655	-	-	16,605,397					16,498,119	
Myanmar	49,326,676	9,780,517	24,224,418	-	11,534,674	45,539,608					46,975,074	
Philippines	2,676,318	1,099,137	1,295,765	-	-	2,394,902					2,450,000	
Thailand	33,792,090	23,893,478	1,039,191	-	-	24,932,669					23,838,129	
Thailand Regional Office ²	7,023,852	5,788,135	593,928	-	-	6,382,063					7,023,852	
SUBTOTAL	132,310,762	78,134,153	27,962,606	-	11,534,674	117,631,432					118,161,862	
EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC												
Australia Regional Office ³	2,955,303	3,055,019	19,472	-	-	3,074,491					3,074,490	
China	3,195,086	4,715,880	140,770	-	-	4,856,650					2,693,208	
Japan	3,461,469	3,430,040	74,072	-	-	3,504,112					3,301,731	
Republic of Korea	1,720,000	1,655,916	78,611	-	-	1,734,528					1,504,275	
Regional activities	914,994	1,152,402	-	-	-	1,152,402					1,000,000	
SUBTOTAL	12,246,852	14,009,258	312,925	-	-	14,322,183					11,573,705	
TOTAL	544,908,169	329,079,312	31,773,735	100,215,758	31,202,066	492,270,871					480,379,674	

¹ Includes activities in Uzbekistan.
² Includes activities in Cambodia, Mongolia and Vietnam.
³ Includes activities in New Zealand, the Pacific Island countries and Papua New Guinea.

BUDGETS FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC 2010-2019 | USD

