

Islamic Republic of Iran



Main objectives

- Develop a comprehensive solutions framework which responds to the profile and needs of the residual populations of Afghan and Iraqi refugees; seek agreement on it and support for its gradual implementation.
- Facilitate the voluntary, safe and sustainable repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees, supported by mass information activities and careful monitoring to ensure the voluntary character of return movements.
- Enhance the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees by monitoring and promoting respect for refugee rights, using resettlement as a tool for protection and by supporting the development of an effective national asylum system.

- Provide refugees with access to free legal advice and opportunities to submit outstanding claims to efficient Dispute Settlement Committees.

Planning figures		
Population	Jan 2006	Dec 2006
Afghanistan (refugees)	713,000	473,000
Iraq (refugees)	58,000	38,000
Total	771,000	511,000

Total requirements: USD 16,411,128



Afghan refugees, at the transit centre in the border town of Dogharon, wait for the trucks that will take them back to Afghanistan. *UNHCR / Z. Soleimani*

Working environment

Recent developments

In June 2005, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan and UNHCR agreed to extend until March 2006 the tripartite agreement regulating the voluntary repatriation operation for Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During the first eight months of 2005, more than 160,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan from the Islamic Republic of Iran, 40,000 of whom were assisted by UNHCR. This is significantly fewer than the previous year, when over 350,000 Afghan refugees opted for voluntary repatriation with the assistance of UNHCR. This decline is linked to the changing profile of the population of Afghan refugees in the country. More than 60 per cent have been living there for over 15 years. Having settled and developed strong links with the communities which generously received them upon their arrival, their links to Afghanistan have weakened. Many who are reluctant to return have experienced a profound social change in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Furthermore, they harbour doubts about access to land, shelter, employment, health and education facilities in Afghanistan at present.

In August 2005, the Iranian Government requested UNHCR's assistance to facilitate the voluntary repatriation or relocation of up to

28,000 Afghan refugees living in Zabol district in Sistan-Baluchistan Province for reasons of national security. A repatriation and relocation operation is under way at the time of writing.

The continuing insecurity in Iraq remains an obstacle to return for many Iraqis in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the first eight months of 2005, 3,000 Iraqis requested UNHCR's assistance for their voluntary repatriation. UNHCR is aware that spontaneous returns are taking place from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Iraq but there are no reliable figures on the Iraqis remaining in the country.

No policy changes have been observed following the election of new President Mahmood Ahmadinejad and the nomination of the new Government. The new Cabinet is expected to undertake a review of the situation of refugees in the country, and UNHCR is looking forward to contributing to that review.

Constraints

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has so far maintained its policy of calling on all Afghans to return to Afghanistan. A number of recently introduced measures have exerted considerable economic pressure on Afghans. These include the recently announced imposition of a municipal tax on all Afghan refugees. UNHCR maintains that a punitive and discriminatory imposition of taxes on refugees – who have no

legal right to engage in wage-earning employment – is in violation of article 29 of the 1951 Refugee Convention that was signed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

UNHCR continues to face difficulties of access to Afghan refugees. Authorizations are not always granted and access to deportees in Dogharoun remains severely curtailed by the authorities. The authorities have also continued to object to the start-up of a screening operation in Sistan-Baluchistan which would allow UNHCR to confirm the absence of refugees amongst the sizeable number of Afghan migrants deported through that province.

UNHCR's programmes continue to be implemented by governmental organizations, with the participation of only a few authorized local NGOs. The lack of international and national NGOs authorized to implement UNHCR's assistance and repatriation programme reduces the presence of humanitarian field workers and consequently affects the efficient implementation of programmes.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

UNHCR aims to bring this protracted refugee situation to a close through the identification of an appropriate set of durable solutions, while upholding basic protection standards for the residual refugee population until such time as solutions are found. UNHCR also seeks to nurture cooperation around the development of a new asylum system and refugee management capacities.

The Office will continue to monitor the voluntary character of the joint repatriation programme to Afghanistan and Iraq. This includes addressing issues relating to documentation, and access to health and education services. The presence of a large number of Afghan migrant workers is expected to persist in 2006. In its discussions with the authorities UNHCR will insist that any measure to address the presence of undocumented migrants must not impinge upon registered refugees. The Office will continue to screen deportees to

identify those with protection concerns and prevent forced return of registered refugees. UNHCR will also continue to carry out refugee status determination under its Mandate for a small number of non-Afghan asylum-seekers.

UNHCR will work with the Iranian Government and other international organizations such as ILO and IOM to assist in developing the Government's capacity to manage migration issues in the future. UNHCR's role will focus on developing a national asylum system, reviewing legislation and providing opportunities for skills development for officials through training programmes and twinning arrangements. The Office will also engage in public awareness activities to garner greater public support for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees.

Assistance

Assistance to Afghan and Iraqi returnees remains the main component of the programme. Free transport of returnees with their belongings and mass information will be organized and medical personnel will ensure that sick and vulnerable refugees are provided with necessary support during their journey. Refugees will be issued with documentation and assisted with all border formalities. Reception arrangements and support for onward movement to their final destination will be coordinated with UNHCR's offices in Afghanistan and Iraq. Refugees will be assisted in solving legal problems by accessing free legal advice services established in seven provinces to facilitate their departure to Afghanistan.

UNHCR's direct assistance to refugees will be confined to providing medical and social support to a very limited number of the most vulnerable persons, in particular female-headed families. The Office will provide some support to community development initiatives aimed at improving refugee management of camp affairs and services. UNHCR will provide limited support to Iraqi camp refugees.

Desired impact

The implementation of activities will incorporate the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming

methodology. Multifunctional teams in each sub-office will complete local participatory assessments in order to provide appropriate protection to women, men, girls, and boys and to target the most vulnerable people within each group.

Organization and implementation

Management structure

The Office of the UNHCR Representative for the Islamic Republic of Iran oversees the activities of seven offices and 11 voluntary repatriation centres, with a total of 164 staff (21 internationals, 142 nationals and one JPO, excluding the posts funded under the Iraq Special Budget).

Coordination

UNHCR's main interlocutors on refugee issues are the Ministry of the Interior through the Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Affairs (BAFIA). All discussions with other line Ministries and with national NGOs, including the very small number of implementing partners, are coordinated by BAFIA, which also serves as the Secretariat for the National Council of Foreigners Policy. Through the CCA and UNDAF process, UNHCR prevails upon other UN agencies to consider the refugee dimension in the planning and implementation of their programmes. WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA could play a greater role in supporting refugee communities who remain in the country.

Offices
Tehran
Ahwaz
Dogharoun
Kermanshah
Mashad
Orumiyeh
Zabol
Zahedan
Eleven voluntary repatriation centres in provincial capitals

Partners
Government agency
Ministry of the Interior/Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (MOI/BAFIA)
NGOs
Assisting Marsh Arabs and Refugees
Educational Research Society
Iranian Red Crescent Society
Iraqi Refugees Aid Council
<i>Médecins Sans Frontières</i>
Society for Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer
Others
Employees' Cooperative of the Ministry of Interior
Global Partners
IFRC
NICCO

Budget (USD)	
Activities and services	Annual Programme Budget
Protection, monitoring and coordination	5,835,434
Community services	1,000,000
Domestic needs	126,000
Food	75,068
Health	1,626,002
Legal assistance	509,156
Operational support (to agencies)	370,000
Shelter/other infrastructure	50,000
Transport/logistics	4,158,960
Total operations	13,750,620
Programme support	2,660,508
Total	16,411,128