

# Islamic Republic of Iran



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## Main objectives

Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees in the context of the Assisted Joint Programme agreed by UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and of Afghanistan; prepare for a possible large-scale outflow of Iraqis through inter-agency efforts; following the establishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority and

the Iraqi Governing Council, prepare to facilitate the repatriation of Iraqis wishing to return to their country of origin; ensure that persons of concern and refugees who were not yet ready to return continued to enjoy protection and asylum status in the Islamic Republic of Iran; improve programme delivery and implementation targeting women, girls and vulnerable groups.

Persons of concern				
Main origin/Type of population	Total in country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Afghanistan (refugees)	834,700	834,700	-	-
Iraq (refugees)	150,200	150,200	-	-

## Impact

- In 2003, some 142,000 Afghans were repatriated under the assisted joint programme. Another 127,000 went back spontaneously. As in 2002, almost all the returnees who went back had been living in urban areas. The majority repatriated to the centre, north-west, and west of Afghanistan.
- In late 2002 UNHCR was asked to lead an inter-agency contingency planning exercise for Iraq. This involved all UN agencies present in the country as well as government interlocutors, local and international NGOs. UNHCR established a field presence in Kermanshah and reinforced its existing presence in Ahwaz and Orumieh. UNHCR and the Government jointly identified a number of sites and agreed on the development of basic infrastructure in four sites to accommodate an initial target population of 60,000 refugees.
- It turned out that no refugees crossed into the Islamic Republic of Iran, and by early summer plans were made for the voluntary repatriation of refugees who had been in the country since the 1980s. It was initially expected that 80,000 Iraqis would return from the Islamic Republic of Iran over the summer and autumn. In fact, agreement on the modalities of return was only reached late in the year, and organized repatriation did not start until November. Weekly convoys then began to transport groups of people from camps in the west of the country through the crossing point at Shalamsheh. By the end of the year, some 50,000 persons were estimated to have returned spontaneously to Iraq, 550 with UNHCR assistance.

## Working environment

### The context

Returns of Afghan refugees were lower in 2003 than in 2002. Although there are many reasons why Afghans may have been reluctant to repatriate, there can be no doubt that social and economic conditions were better for refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran than in most areas of Afghanistan. Despite the rehabilitation and development efforts undertaken in Afghanistan, refugees remained concerned about access to job opportunities, education, health and other basic services. Additional concerns were the deterioration of the security situation in certain areas of Afghanistan, or for perceived risks for certain groups. Beyond such considerations, however, many Afghans feel that after living for 10-15 years in the Islamic Republic of Iran they have put down new roots, and feel decidedly ambivalent about returning to a country that many of their children have never even seen.

At the end of the year, the Iranian authorities announced a series of new measures that directly affect Afghans living in the country and may well encourage them to return. These include a re-registration (*Amayeshi*) of all Afghans who had been registered under the 2001 exercise (against payment of a USD 6-8 fee); introducing fees for the extension of identity cards; charging fees for Afghan schoolchildren and obliging Afghans to subscribe at full cost to health insurance schemes.

Income and Expenditure (USD)					
Annual programme and Supplementary programme budgets					
	Revised budget	Income from contributions (earmarked at the country level)	Other funds available <sup>1</sup> (inc. income earmarked at the sub-regional level)	Total funds available	Total expenditure
AB	15,153,298	3,785,514	9,624,112	13,409,626	13,388,562
SB	15,786,166	147,059	10,251,176	10,398,235	10,280,610
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,939,464</b>	<b>3,932,573</b>	<b>19,875,288</b>	<b>23,807,861</b>	<b>23,669,172</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance (amounting to USD 0.3 million for the AB and USD 4 million for the SB) and adjustments (of which USD 8.6 million for the AB and USD 5.8 million for the SB represent transfers of income earmarked at the subregional level). The above figures do not include costs at headquarters.

Note: The Supplementary programme budgets do not include a 7 per cent charge (support costs) that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

On 26 December 2003, an earthquake struck Bam in the eastern part of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some 4,000 Afghans lived in the city, and 2,000 are estimated to have lost their homes. 1,000 are reported to have been killed and 1,000 have since repatriated with UNHCR's assistance. The organization provided emergency relief materials to refugee earthquake victims and set up a small temporary office in Bam to oversee distributions.

## Constraints

UNHCR's programme is largely implemented through Government departments, public institutions affiliated to the Government, and a few local NGOs. There are very few international NGOs present in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The authorities have requested that the international NGOs secure their own funding from sources other than UNHCR so as to provide additional international contributions to the refugee programme.

UNHCR's ability to ensure protection of deserving cases was restricted by the delay in the authorities' agreement to the setting up of a screening process at the Milak crossing point (in the Islamic Republic of Iran) and the denial of access to people after a court has ruled that they be deported.

UNHCR's access to refugees remains limited, as prior notice still needs to be given to central or provincial authorities before visits can take place.

The three parties involved in consultations on the joint programme for Afghan repatriation are still working to resolve the question of the inclusion of unregistered Afghans in the programme.

## Funding

Global budget reductions led to prioritisation of a number of activities in Iran, which impacted refugees and created discontent among governmental partners. However, the Iraqi and Afghan repatriation operations were fully funded in 2003.

## Achievements and impact

### Protection and solutions

The screening mechanism introduced at the Dogharoun crossing point in 2003 affords UNHCR access to deportees, enabling Afghans in need of protection in Iran to have their claims examined in conformity with international standards.

UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan cooperated closely on the facilitated voluntary repatriation operation, as outlined in the tripartite agreement (commenced June 2003, expires March 2005). The three parties met regularly to discuss progress and review the operation, making adjustments as required.

The rate of resettlement for Afghan cases dropped from 10-12 per cent to three to five per cent due to their increasing complexity and general security climate. A total of 1,088 persons were accepted and 910 persons departed.

### Activities and assistance

**Community services:** The main focus was to provide family law assistance to refugee women, along with literacy classes and reproductive health training.

**Domestic needs/Household support:** Refugees were given soap, detergent and sanitary materials.

**Education:** Some 13,500 refugee children were provided with textbooks and stationery during the year. In addition, 268 Afghan and Iraqi students were provided with assistance to continue their tertiary education through the DAFI Scholarship Programme. UNHCR supported more than 150,000 non-camp refugee school children during the year.

**Food:** WFP provided food assistance to some 65,000 refugees in camps and 40,000 living elsewhere. In close coordination with UNHCR, WFP implemented an "Oil for Girls' Education" programme for 3,475 girls and their women teachers in the camps. WFP also provided wheat flour for refugees staying overnight at the border exit stations.

**Forestry:** In the context of budget prioritization, forestry activities were decreased. Trees were planted in camps and awareness sessions on sustainable use of natural resources were implemented. Refugee women involved in environment related activities were given incentives.

**Health/Nutrition:** UNHCR provided some support to the primary health care programme initiated by the Ministry of Health in the 29 refugee camps. Health posts were set up at the Voluntary Repatriation Centres and Border Exit Stations. Medical referral units assisted 29,508 non-camp Afghans and Iraqis in 2003.

**Income generation:** Very limited activities were undertaken under this sector, e.g. sewing machines were given to women headed families.

**Legal assistance:** UNHCR continued to support two legal committees in Tehran. Two national lawyers provided legal advice and represented Afghans during court proceedings. UNHCR also supported a local Mediation Committee to help Afghans solve legal disputes. In 2003 some 2,600 Afghans were assisted to solve their legal disputes. A training session on refugee law and practice was conducted for staff of the Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), and law enforcement personnel.

**Operational support (to agencies):** UNHCR provided financial assistance to MOI/BAFIA.

**Sanitation:** Sanitary workers were paid to collect and dispose of garbage in the camps on a daily basis. Facilities were upgraded and 200 latrines were constructed at Niatak camp in Sistan-Baluchestan. Latrines and showers were constructed in four designated camps under the Iraqi emergency programme.

**Shelter/Other infrastructure:** Voluntary Repatriation Centres and Border Exit Stations were set up and prepared for both Iraqis and Afghans. Refugee shelter units were repaired and maintained in the 29 organized camps. The electrical network was upgraded at Niatak camp.

**Transport/Logistics:** Transportation was provided to 142,084 Afghans and 524 Iraqis returning to Afghanistan and Iraq under the repatriation projects. Warehouses and associated services were

established in connection with the Iraqi repatriation programme.

**Water:** Water networks in the 29 camps were repaired and maintained. Chlorine powder was delivered to treat drinking water and water supply systems established in four new designated refugee camps under the Iraqi emergency programme.



## Organization and implementation

### Management

Operations are managed through the country office in Tehran and seven sub-offices and field offices (Mashad, Ahwaz, Zahedan, Kermanshah, Orumieh,

Dogharoun and Zabol/Milak). The office in Kermanshah was opened in December 2002. Staffing levels at the end of the year stood at 32 internationals and 221 nationals. The Afghan Operation was handled in cooperation with headquarters and coordinated with offices in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics. The Iraqi repatriation was coordinated with headquarters and UNHCR's offices in Iraq and Jordan.

Abdul Razagh was a teacher when he was taken from his classroom in Iraq just before the start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 and forced over the border into the Islamic Republic of Iran. Now, he is looking forward to going home. *UNHCR/J. Redden*



## Working with others

Working relations with the Bureau of Afghan Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) remained positive. In addition, UNHCR worked with the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Health, as well as directly with five NGOs and indirectly with three NGOs. UN auditors were allowed continued access (first granted in October 2002) to the financial records of BAFIA.

During the Iraq crisis, UNHCR was the focal agency for NGOs and liaised with more than twenty international NGOs. UNHCR also worked with other UN agencies in the CCA and UNDAF process, and on the emergency preparations for the Afghan and Iraqi crisis. UNHCR maintained good relations with provincial governors.

## Overall assessment

One of the main achievements was the agreement reached with the Iranian authorities on establishing a screening mechanism which ensured that Afghans repatriated by the Iranian authorities have access to UNHCR to submit a claim for continued protection and have their claim determined in accordance with international standards.

However, UNHCR did not succeed in convincing Iranian authorities that in order to comply with its international responsibilities under the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is essential that Afghans deported by order of a court are given access to the screening procedure.

In reorienting its assistance activities towards repatriation, UNHCR had to make difficult prioritisations in reducing programmes in the area of skills training, health and education. This has been indispensable in order to avoid creating factors which would delay repatriation of those wishing to return.

### Offices

#### Tehran

Ahwaz  
Dogharoun  
Kermanshah  
Mashad  
Milak  
Orumiyeh  
Zabol  
Zahedan

### Partners

#### Government agencies

Bureau of International and Scientific Cooperation  
Ministry of Education and Training  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Health  
Ministry of Interior/Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs

#### NGOs

Ansar Relief Institute  
Iraqi Refugees Aid Council  
Pooya Educational Research Association  
Society for Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer  
World Relief Foundation

#### Others

Employees' Cooperative of the Ministry of Interior  
Family planning Association of Iran  
IFRC  
Iranian Red Crescent Society  
Literacy Movement Organisation  
OCHA  
UNAMA  
UNDC  
UNDP  
UNFPA  
UNIC  
UNICEF  
WFP  
WHO

## Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects				Prior years' projects	
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total	notes	Annual and supplementary programme budgets	notes
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	2,598,330	2,892,547	5,490,877		8,559	
Community Services	240,527	0	240,527		146,682	
Domestic Needs/Household Support	44,664	70,876	115,540		135,488	
Education	216,910	0	216,910		2,863,645	
Food	0	244,581	244,581		233,468	
Forestry	2,651	0	2,651		3,607	
Health/Nutrition	3,324,699	155,743	3,480,442		953,537	
Income Generation	13,862	0	13,862		1,601	
Legal Assistance	114,476	69,796	184,272		5,277	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	123,235	53,636	176,871		758,802	
Sanitation	156,866	0	156,866		476,590	
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	126,704	200,711	327,415		878,603	
Transport/Logistics	45,952	2,141,600	2,187,552		1,417,939	
Water (non-agricultural)	48,315	0	48,315		188,299	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	1,488,487	2,109,784	3,598,271		(4,092,905)	
<b>Sub - total Operational</b>	<b>8,545,678</b>	<b>7,939,274</b>	<b>16,484,952</b>		<b>3,979,193</b>	
Programme Support	1,957,972	1,578,180	3,536,153		80,746	
<b>Sub - total Disbursements / Deliveries</b>	<b>10,503,650</b>	<b>9,517,454</b>	<b>20,021,104</b>	<sup>(3)</sup>	<b>4,059,938</b>	<sup>(5)</sup>
Unliquidated Obligations	2,884,912	763,156	3,648,068	<sup>(3)</sup>	0	<sup>(5)</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,388,562</b>	<b>10,280,610</b>	<b>23,669,172</b>	<sup>(1) (3)</sup>	<b>4,059,938</b>	
<b>Instalments with Implementing Partners</b>						
Payments Made	2,882,649	4,404,625	7,287,273		12,008,601	
Reporting Received	1,394,162	2,294,840	3,689,002		16,101,506	
<b>Balance</b>	<b>1,488,487</b>	<b>2,109,785</b>	<b>3,598,271</b>		<b>(4,092,905)</b>	
Outstanding 1st January	0	0	0		4,279,623	
Refunded to UNHCR	0	0	0		186,639	
Currency Adjustment	0	0	0		(79)	
<b>Outstanding 31 December</b>	<b>1,488,487</b>	<b>2,109,785</b>	<b>3,598,271</b>		<b>0</b>	
<b>Unliquidated Obligations</b>						
Outstanding 1st January	0	0	0		5,071,604	<sup>(5)</sup>
New Obligations	13,388,562	10,280,610	23,669,173	<sup>(1)</sup>	0	
Disbursements	10,503,650	9,517,454	20,021,104	<sup>(3)</sup>	4,059,938	<sup>(5)</sup>
Cancellations	0	0	0		1,011,666	<sup>(5)</sup>
<b>Outstanding 31 December</b>	<b>2,884,912</b>	<b>763,156</b>	<b>3,648,068</b>	<sup>(3)</sup>	<b>0</b>	<sup>(5)</sup>

Figures which can be cross-referenced to the Accounts:

- (1) Annex to Statement 1
- (3) Schedule 3
- (5) Schedule 5