

The Islamic Republic of Iran

Main objectives

The main objective for UNHCR in 2002 was the facilitation of the voluntary return of 400,000 Afghans from the Islamic Republic of Iran. To achieve this objective, UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement on a joint voluntary repatriation programme with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Afghan Transitional Authority. The organisation also supported the voluntary repatriation of Iraqi refugees. For those Afghans and Iraqis unable or unwilling to repatriate, UNHCR planned to provide some humanitarian assistance, notably in the areas of health and education, as well as legal aid.

UNHCR aimed to introduce a refugee status determination system for Afghans at risk of deportation to Afghanistan. Although agreement was reached in principle with the Ministry of the Interior, the programme has still not been implemented.



Resettlement also remained an objective for particular groups, mainly Afghans without any prospect of an alternative durable solution.

Impact

- By 31 December, more than 376,000 Afghans had repatriated from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Of these, some 260,000 returned with assistance

Persons of Concern		
Main Origin / Type of Population	Total In Country	Of whom UNHCR assisted
Afghanistan (Refugees)	1,978,300	1,978,300
Iraq (Refugees)	201,700	201,700
Returnees (from Iraq)	1,170	1,170

Income and Expenditure (USD) Annual Programme Budget and Supplementary Programme Budgets					
	Revised Budget	Income from Contributions ¹	Other Funds Available ²	Total Funds Available	Total Expenditure
AB	23,368,626	7,988,473	13,067,897	21,056,370	20,785,559
SB	6,032,414	7,575,117	840,564	8,415,681	4,424,737
Total	29,401,040	15,563,590	13,908,461	29,472,051	25,210,296

¹ Includes income from contributions restricted at the country level.

² Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments. The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.

from UNHCR, while another 116,000 went home under the government-organised return programme. Most of those going back had been living in urban areas (only three per cent of Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran live in camps).

- More than 80 per cent of the people who returned in 2002 had come to the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 1996-2001 period. Almost half were of Tajik origin, and most went to the central, northern and western parts of Afghanistan. There was one setback in that, although the authorities agreed in principle on the establishment of a screening procedure for Afghans being deported, the process was not started in 2002.
- Meanwhile, 675 Iraqi Kurds returned to northern Iraq and some 467 Iraqi Arabs received assistance to go home. At the same time, around 1,200 Iranian refugees returned voluntarily from Iraq. Resettlement places abroad were found for some 1,100 families unable to repatriate or remain in the country owing to protection concerns. Of those resettled, some 40 per cent were women at risk.
- Legal committees set up to help refugees settled almost 3,000 cases and UNHCR helped pay hospital costs for more than 27,000 refugees under a Medical Referral Unit programme.
- The organisation has also welcomed increased flexibility in the approach to NGOs adopted by BAFIA (The Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs, under the Ministry of Interior). The Bureau has approved the involvement of more non-governmental partners in the implementation of UNHCR programmes.

Working environment

The context

Although a large number of Afghans repatriated in 2002, refugees are still regarded as a social and economic burden, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran remains under pressure to find ways to further reduce the refugee population.

Thousands of unregistered Afghans were deported from the Islamic Republic of Iran throughout the year. A few months into the repatriation operation, the Government announced that all Afghans who

had not participated in the 2001 registration exercise implemented by the Ministry of the Interior were to prepare to leave the country by certain dates in August 2002. Repatriation figures promptly increased. At the same time, more unregistered Afghans were sent back to Afghanistan.

BAFIA has shared with UNHCR the database of information it gathered in the 2001 registration exercise. This included over 2.3 million Afghans, some 203,000 Iraqis and 5,500 other foreign nationals.

For the first time, the Government permitted United Nations auditors to access its financial records to see how contributions from UNHCR, amongst others, had been spent. This involved in particular the auditing of records of BAFIA, and the Ministry of Education and Health.

Constraints

The repatriation of Afghans was universally welcomed, but there was disappointment that so many more people had returned from Pakistan than from the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result, there has been increased pressure to see a more rapid rate of return.

UNHCR has not so far been able to implement the refugee status determination procedure for Afghans who are in the process of being deported. The three parties involved in consultations on the 2003 joint programme for Afghan repatriation are still working to resolve the question of the inclusion of unregistered Afghans in the programme.

Funding

The Afghan repatriation operation was fully funded in 2002. However, UNHCR's global funding shortfall curtailed the implementation of some assistance activities for refugees remaining in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This mainly affected refugees who were not living in camps.

Achievements and impact

Protection and solutions

UNHCR staff in the ten voluntary repatriation centres provided applicants with information about the situ-

ation in their home areas, and checked that all those passing through were returning voluntarily. UNHCR also monitored border crossings to ensure that Afghans were able to re-enter their country safely.

Iraqi Arabs were able to return to southern Iraq with cash and transport assistance from UNHCR. The Government in Baghdad did not, however, allow UNHCR to provide full assistance packages to Kurds going back to the north.

Governments of some European countries as well as Australia and Canada accepted more than 1,100 families for resettlement over the year. These included Afghans, Iraqis, and Uighurs, many of them women-at-risk.

Activities and assistance

Community services: Refugee women's committees in camps enabled women and girls to become increasingly involved in community services.

Domestic needs/household support: UNHCR provided limited relief items, such as blankets and jerry cans for use on what is often a long journey home to either Afghanistan or Iraq.

Education: More than 190,000 children (mainly Afghans) received free education in Iranian national schools. More than 13,000 refugee children attended camp-based primary schools and were provided with textbooks and stationery. UNHCR also provided limited assistance to informal schools for undocumented refugee children. In addition, the organisation funded some short-term skills training programmes and trained more than 1,000 literacy teachers.

Food: WFP provided food to some 65,000 camp refugees; UNHCR provided extra food during the long journey undertaken by those travelling home to Afghanistan.

Forestry: A small budget was allocated to the plantation of trees in and around the camps.



Preparing to return home involves a lot of paperwork. Afghans receiving advice and help before embarking on the trip home. UNHCR

Health/nutrition: In all 29 camps in the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNHCR provided medical supplies and medicines and funded the monitoring and treatment of communicable diseases. UNHCR also supported the rehabilitation of refugees with disabilities and the training of sexual and reproductive health educators. Refugees returning to Afghanistan were able to seek health assistance both at voluntary repatriation centres and at border crossing points. Finally, the medical referral unit activities were streamlined, and management of personnel handed over to a private contractor.

Income generation: A small number of vulnerable families living outside camps were helped to start up small businesses, and some 140 sewing machines were distributed, mostly to households headed by women.

Legal assistance: UNHCR-sponsored legal committees settled almost 3,000 cases involving refugees. A newly appointed legal advisor provided training to the committees, which are made up of refugees with some legal experience. Three female members were appointed to the committees, and activities expanded to cities such as Qom and Arak as well as Tehran.

Operational support (to agencies): Funds were used for the smooth running of operations and as initial support to implementing partners.

Sanitation: Sewage systems were upgraded in eight camps. Showers were built and latrines improved in the Torbat-e-Jam site.

Shelter/other infrastructure: Several shelters were built for refugees who had previously been residing in tents, benefiting over 1,300 refugees. Community centres and administrative buildings in the camps were also built and maintained.

Transport/logistics: Ten voluntary repatriation centres were established to enable Afghans to sign up for return assistance and receive advice on what to expect during and after repatriation. As the operation gathered momentum, mobile teams played an increasingly important role, travelling to areas with a smaller Afghan population. Returnees were given free transport (for themselves and their belongings) as well as food and water for the journey. For travel beyond the immediate border area, Afghans

received financial support. Returns to Iraq were also funded under this sector.

Water: Water systems were upgraded in four camps and chlorine powder delivered to treat water in all sites.

Organisation and implementation

Management

Operations were managed through the country office in Tehran and six field offices. Staffing levels at the end of the year stood at 32 internationals (15 on mission status and one JPO), and 232 nationals. The Afghan Repatriation Operation took place in close co-operation with UNHCR offices in Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics, and Pakistan, as well as Headquarters.

Working with others

Working relations with BAFIA made progress during the year, and efforts were made to enhance relations with the available NGOs. Within the overall framework of the 2002 United Nations Country Common Assessment Steering Committee, the Office actively participated in information sharing, project design, implementation and funding of activities in key areas. UNHCR chaired the NGO Theme Group and participated at various levels in the other groups (on Economy and Poverty, Environment, Gender, Social Development, Joint Initiative Programme for Sistan-Baluchistan). UNHCR has most recently been working with sister UN agencies, NGOs and the relevant government departments to prepare contingency plans for Iraq.

Overall assessment

Developments in Afghanistan have inevitably had a major impact on UNHCR's activities in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The facilitation of voluntary repatriation will continue to be the key focus for 2003.

In terms of achievements, the long-standing question of gaining access to the accounts of BAFIA, the

Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Training, was resolved. Another significant achievement was the increase in the number of NGOs implementing UNHCR's activities, from three in 2001 to seven in 2002.

UNHCR's relationship with its two main interlocutors – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) – has remained valuable. Co-operation with the latter has been especially crucial in the repatriation operation, with BAFIA playing a key implementing role and contributing significantly to the smooth running of the operation.

Offices

Teheran
 Ahwaz
 Dogharoun
 Mashad
 Milak
 Orumieh
 Zahedan

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Education and Training
 Ministry of Education and Training/Bureau of International and Scientific Co-operation
 Ministry of Health
 Ministry of Interior/Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs

NGOs

Adventist Development and Relief Agency
 Iraqi Refugees Aid Council
 Pooya Educational Research Association
 Society for Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer
 World Relief Foundation

Others

Family planning Association of Iran
 Faragir Jonoub Institution of Ahwaz
 Ferdowsi University of Mashad
 Khorasan Education and Training Organisation
 Literacy Movement Organisation
 Mashad Technical and Professional Training Centre
 Tarbiat Modarres University of Tehran
 Trade Association of Passenger Transport Companies in Iran
 University of Sistan-Baluchistan

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects			Notes	Prior Years' Projects	
	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total		Annual Programme and Supplementary Programme Budgets	Notes
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	2,065,143	2,347,518	4,412,661		37,044	
Community Services	321,108	0	321,108		50,753	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	354,823	212,413	567,236		(13,369)	
Education	966,863	0	966,863		872,435	
Food	397,878	0	397,878		15,081	
Forestry	1,212	0	1,212		1,135	
Health / Nutrition	3,108,533	0	3,108,533		901,749	
Income Generation	8,416	0	8,416		20,924	
Legal Assistance	33,681	0	33,681		1,007,548	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	249,001	0	249,001		13,248	
Sanitation	271,610	0	271,610		215,228	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	1,034,692	0	1,034,692		788,047	
Transport / Logistics	3,368,531	0	3,368,531		107,275	
Water	63,282	0	63,282		255,110	
Transit Accounts	23,407	0	23,407		(19,725)	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	2,597,826	212,278	2,810,104		(1,845,731)	
Sub-total Operational	14,866,007	2,772,209	17,638,216		2,406,753	
Programme Support	1,640,362	860,114	2,500,476		61,558	
Sub-total Disbursements / Deliveries	16,506,369	3,632,323	20,138,692	(3)	2,468,311	(5)
Unliquidated Obligations	4,279,190	792,414	5,071,604	(3)	0	(5)
Total	20,785,559	4,424,737	25,210,296	(1) (3)	2,468,311	
Instalments with Implementing Partners						
Payments Made	8,442,641	212,278	8,654,919		1,953,858	
Reporting Received	5,844,815		5,844,815		3,799,589	
Balance	2,597,826	212,278	2,810,104		(1,845,731)	
Outstanding 1st January	0	0	0		3,407,354	
Refunded to UNHCR	0	0	0		55,191	
Currency Adjustment	0	0	0		(36,914)	
Outstanding 31 December	2,597,826	212,278	2,810,104		1,469,519	
Unliquidated Obligations						
Outstanding 1st January	0	0	0		2,557,542	(5)
New Obligations	20,785,559	4,424,737	25,210,296	(1)	0	
Disbursements	16,506,369	3,632,323	20,138,692	(3)	2,468,311	(5)
Cancellations	0	0	0		89,231	(5)
Outstanding 31 December	4,279,190	792,414	5,071,604	(3)	0	(5)
Figures which cross-reference to Accounts:						
(1) Annex to Statement 1						
(3) Schedule 3						
(5) Schedule 5						