

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

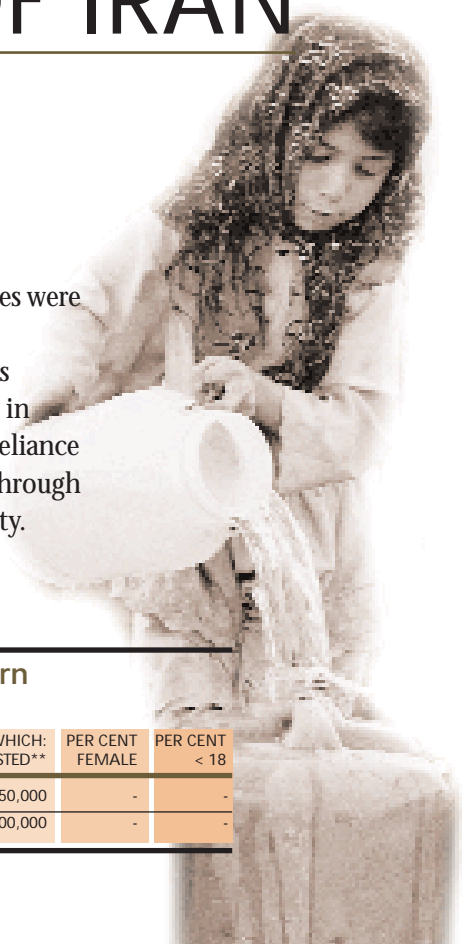
AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees and ensure that genuine refugees were identified through a transparent and fair procedure (and protected if found eligible) by establishing a Joint Programme with the Iranian Government; help Iraqi refugees wishing to return voluntarily to Iraq; continue to provide assistance to refugees living in camps; increase activities for refugees living outside the camps and foster increased self-reliance pending voluntary repatriation; expand and diversify protection and assistance through increased co-operation with NGO partners, specialised UN agencies and civil society.

Impact

- A total of 16,918 Afghan refugees were helped by UNHCR to return voluntarily. Some 18,000 Iraqi Kurds returned spontaneously to northern Iraq from camps and other locations and 2,550 Iraqi Arab refugees received cash and transport assistance to return voluntarily to other parts of Iraq.
- Progress was made in addressing the needs of refugees living outside the camps, particularly in health and education: some 170,000 refugee children were helped to study in Iranian schools, and more than 13,200 Afghan and Iraqi refugees had access to medical services.
- Limited progress was made in developing co-operation with international NGOs due to the absence of a legal framework defining the conditions under which they can operate in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Discussions were concluded in December on a Joint UNHCR/Government Programme to facilitate voluntary repatriation and address the situation of undocumented Afghan refugees. The text was finalised for signature in early 2000.



Persons of Concern

MAIN REFUGEE ORIGIN/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY*	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED**	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Afghan Refugees	1,325,700	250,000	-	-
Iraqi Refugees	510,000	100,000	-	-

* Government estimate.
** Estimates based on project data.

Income and Expenditure - SP Activities (USD)

WORKING BUDGET	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS*	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
4,465,736	317,797	4,340,939	4,658,736	4,001,696

* Includes contributions earmarked for the Afghan Repatriation and Reintegration Operation.
** Includes opening balance and adjustments.
The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

The majority of the estimated 1.3 million Afghans and half a million Iraqis currently in the Islamic Republic of Iran reside in spontaneous settlements in the provinces bordering their home countries or in major urban areas. Most Afghans arrived either during the Soviet military interventions in Afghanistan in the 1980s, or after the withdrawal of Soviet troops up to the end of the Najibullah regime in 1992. Repatriation of Afghan refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran did not take place at the same pace as from Pakistan, given the ethnic and religious differences between these refugees and the Taliban. Nevertheless, close to 600,000 Afghans have repatriated voluntarily from the Islamic Republic of Iran since late 1992. Regrettably, events in Mazar-i-Sharif and Bamiyan in 1998, and renewed fighting between factions in 1999 led to the arrival of a few hundred new refugees per week.

The Iraqi refugees fall into three categories: Iraqi Kurds from the three northern provinces who arrived in the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 1970s; Feilli Kurds (Shiites) who were denied Iraqi citizenship on the basis of their Iranian origin (although they had lived in Iraq for several generations); and Arab Shiites from government-controlled areas in the central and southern provinces of Iraq. The latter two groups entered the Islamic Republic of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88).

The Iraqi Government had objected to UNHCR organising the return of Iraqis of Kurdish origin through certain border crossing points in northern Iraq. In view of the refugees' reluctance to use crossing points authorised by the Iraqi Government, voluntary repatriation convoys were suspended at the end of 1998.

The Iranian Government does not support local integration as a lasting solution for refugees. On the other hand, conditions in the countries of origin discouraged large-scale voluntary repatriation. Over the years, refugees have been allowed to live alongside the Iranian population and have benefited from a number of national services and amenities. Since the majority of the Afghan and Iraqi refugees reside outside camps, UNHCR has recently begun increasing its assistance to this population. As a result, the allocation of funds for non-camp refugees increased from 20 per cent of the country budget in 1998 to 40 per cent in 1999.

Constraints

Several factors have contributed to asylum fatigue and a growing negative perception of refugees. These include not only deteriorating economic conditions (high inflation, widespread unemployment and the withdrawal of government subsidies for basic commodities) but also increasing fears of drug-smuggling and criminality. The mood is fuelled above all by a sense of frustration at seeing no end to the decades-old refugee problem. With no remedy in sight, the refugees are often publicly saddled with blame for a whole range of problems.

UNHCR was concerned about the return to Afghanistan in 1999 of an estimated 100,000 Afghans who reportedly returned involuntarily, as some of them might have had a valid claim to refugee status.

The 1999 programme was considerably delayed following a misunderstanding between the Government and UNHCR on the applicable exchange rate. Following confirmation in July that UNHCR could continue to benefit from the same rate of exchange as other UN agencies, all 1999 projects were extended until June 2000. UNHCR also initiated discussions with the authorities on a number of measures that could contribute to improved programme delivery. These ranged from improved access by UNHCR staff to refugees, greater decentralisation of project management to provincial levels, improved information-sharing, reporting and auditing, and a more efficient use of NGO partners. The proposed use of NGO partners under UNHCR's programme was met by some hesitation by the authorities, but it is expected that any remaining misunderstandings will be resolved in 2000.

Several security incidents in Sistan-Baluchistan, including a bomb blast in front of the office in Zahedan which injured a guard, resulted in temporary restrictions on movement of staff and additional measures to improve security in all offices in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Funding

Dwindling international solidarity with countries of first asylum in the region has left the refugees increasingly vulnerable, both materially and socially. Operations in the Islamic Republic of Iran were dependent upon funds for General Programmes and donor interest in the Afghan Repatriation Operation. As funding for General Programmes was in short supply (and arrived late for repatriation), some basic activities were curtailed, to the detriment of the most vulnerable.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

The main protection issue continued to be the status and documentation of both Afghan and Iraqi refugees, as a result of the absence of a functioning eligibility procedure. This resulted in the involuntary return to their country of large numbers of Afghans, 80 per cent of whom were men, who had presumably been seeking employment in the Islamic Republic of Iran. UNHCR was concerned that in the absence of a functioning mechanism to ascertain claims for protection, there could have been bona fide refugees among those returned. In general, refugees were also affected by more stringent application of laws and regulations, particularly those affecting access to employment.

In response to these trends, UNHCR and the Government agreed on initial steps towards three main objectives: a Joint Programme to assist voluntary returns and provide continued protection for those in need; a gradual shift of programme resources towards the majority of refugees living outside camps; and increased involvement of NGOs in refugee programmes. The contents of a Joint Programme were agreed, with implementation planned to begin by the spring of 2000. This very important development should improve the situation of unprotected groups of Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Following a decree issued in June 1999 by the Iraqi Government exempting from prosecution nationals who had left the country illegally, UNHCR was approached by a number of Iraqis requesting support for their return, mainly to southern Iraq. UNHCR provided candidates with information about the circumstances of their return, including UNHCR's lack of presence in areas of return. Between August and December, some 2,550 Iraqi refugees confirmed in writing their decision to return and were given repatriation assistance.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: UNHCR funded playgrounds and recreational facilities for refugee children and young adults, including community centres for women and disabled refugees in camps and settlements where no such facilities existed. Outside the camps, disabled refugee children were given wheelchairs and about 50 refugee children suffering from cancer, and their families, benefited from medical treatment and counselling. Health and literacy courses were provided for refugee women.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: Some 260 vulnerable refugee families received relief items including 262 mats, 356 blankets and 1,265 items of winter clothing. More than 15,500 destitute Iraqi refugees received a one-off subsistence grant of USD 30. Of these, 13,000 were Iraqi Kurds who decided to de-register at Ziveh camp and received an additional two US dollars for food during their relocation, and 2,550 were Iraqi Arab Shiites who decided to repatriate voluntarily to Iraq. The latter group received an additional repatriation grant of USD 30 each and one piece of plastic sheeting per family. All of the de-registered Iraqi Kurds reportedly made their way back to northern Iraq. A repatriation grant equivalent to USD 40, plus one plastic sheet, were given to each family among the 16,918 repatriating Afghan refugees.

Education: UNHCR continued to assist the Ministry of Education in ensuring that refugee children had access to education, with a special focus on girls. Some 170,000 Afghan and Iraqi non-camp students attended Iranian schools and school supplies were given to schools in need of assistance. Some 10,000 books were printed and distributed to 20 primary schools (ten informal Afghan and ten Iranian schools in areas in and around Teheran) benefiting some 4,000 refugee pupils.

Food: Bakery facilities were improved and one dough-making machine was purchased and installed in Dlaki refugee camp for the benefit of 2,118 Afghan refugees.

Forestry: Small-scale tree plantations were established in and around the Iraqi refugee camps.

Health/Nutrition: UNHCR maintained and improved health facilities in the camps in order to complement the assistance provided by the Ministry of Health. UNHCR's Medical Referral Unit (MRU) provided medical assistance to the most needy non-camp refugees throughout the country. A total of 13,282 patients of Afghan and Iraqi origin were assisted through seven MRU offices in refugee areas. In collaboration with UNFPA, four reproductive health and family planning clinics were established in areas inhabited by Afghan refugees. A total of 180 refugees (130 women and 50 men) received training in reproductive health and basic health education.

Income Generation: In an attempt to give refugees some degree of self-reliance, small income-generating projects were set up to assist 1,000 of the most vulnerable, including female heads of household. The iden-

tification of vulnerable individuals was delegated to NGOs in order to reach as many refugees as possible.

Legal Assistance: UNHCR paid for legal advisors and mediation committees (for family and other disputes) and the costs of research and translation of legal documents.

Operational Support (to Agencies): Government counterparts were helped with some of their operating costs, including international travel, spare parts for vehicles and fuel. UNHCR also funded the salaries and travelling expenses of three UNVs and the overhead costs of IOM in Teheran.

Sanitation: Various activities were implemented to improve basic hygiene and waste disposal in 19 camps housing Iraqi refugees and seven housing Afghan refugees.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: UNHCR undertook routine construction, repair and maintenance of camp infrastructure in 19 Iraqi and seven Afghan refugee camps as well as facilities at border exit stations. Less than three US dollars per camp inhabitant was allocated for such routine maintenance.

Transport/Logistics: The second phase of construction of eight kms of access road connecting Ansar Camp to the main road was completed. The road will serve 2,223 Afghan refugees living in the camp. Transportation was provided to repatriating refugees from their places of departure to border exit stations. Eight vehicles were procured for use by UNHCR staff to facilitate monitoring of the refugee programme and warehouses were rented in or near Teheran, Ahwaz and Zahedan. Operational costs of IOM in Teheran and at the border exit stations were also covered.

Water: Sufficient safe drinking water was provided through improvements and/or maintenance of existing supply networks in the Iraqi refugee camps of Jahrom and Sara, and the Afghan refugee camps of Saveh, Niatak, Rafsanjan and Bardsir.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

Operations were conducted from Teheran and seven field-based offices. By year's end these offices were run by 12 international, one JPO and 84 national staff. They

were supplemented by four resettlement officers, one of them seconded from the International Catholic Migration Commission, six physicians involved in the MRU project and three UNVs. Three international protection posts were created to enhance protection delivery in Orumieh, Mashad and Zahedan.

An external audit was conducted from 29 March to 30 April 1999. It recommended that the issuance of implementing instruments and the signing of agreements with operational partners be accelerated. It also highlighted the absence of partners' audit certificates or sound statistics on refugees. An internal inspection mission took place in November and the related recommendations will be implemented in 2000.

Cross-border meetings resumed in December to plan assistance, repatriation and reintegration in co-operation between UNHCR staff in Mashad (Islamic Republic of Iran) and Herat (Afghanistan) and the respective local authorities. However, similar arrangements did not exist between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq, so co-ordination took place at Headquarters.

Working with Others

Increased NGO participation is essential to maintaining and eventually increasing support for refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The International Consortium for Refugees organised co-ordination meetings and training on project management, and conducted research and studies on refugees. UNHCR and UNICEF helped to organise an international NGO symposium in May. UNHCR began to work more closely with the University of Teheran, national NGOs and other institutions in the field of protection and dissemination of refugee law. This included the organisation of courses on refugee law, visits by Iranian university students to UNHCR premises, the commissioning of research on issues related to protection and the translation into Farsi of essential international instruments. So far, very few international NGOs have been able to establish a presence in the country. A network of national NGOs is slowly emerging but many lack experience in refugee matters and related work. Much work is therefore required to help them acquire the skills of traditional NGO partners. Four Government agencies, three national NGOs, one international organisation and three UN agencies were UNHCR's operational partners in 1999.

UNHCR also supported joint initiatives within the UN system: WFP continued to give basic food supplies to

some refugees in camps and cooking oil to families with girls at school; in collaboration with UNFPA, four reproductive health and family planning clinics were established in areas hosting Afghan refugees; and a UN initiative for poverty alleviation in Sistan-Baluchistan was supported by UNHCR in order to enhance overall protection of and assistance to refugees.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Painfully slow progress towards a political settlement in Afghanistan, coupled with diminishing national and international resources for refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran, left the refugees there increasingly vulnerable. Nevertheless, limited progress was achieved towards lasting solutions through the voluntary return of both Afghan and Iraqi refugees. The large number of spontaneous returns by Iraqi refugees of Kurdish origin left many camps nearly empty, so it was proposed to the Government that several camps be combined. UNHCR carefully monitored the gradual start of voluntary return movements by other Iraqi refugees to central and southern Iraq.

Despite significant operational delays, some progress was achieved towards meeting the four primary objectives of the Office in 1999. It is hoped that the efforts made by both UNHCR and the Government to re-orient activities and improve programme delivery will produce tangible results in 2000.

Offices

Teheran
Ahwaz
Dogharoun
Kermanshah
Mashad
Orumieh
Zabol/Milak
Zahedan

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Education and Training (Bureau for International and Scientific Cooperation)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Interior (Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs)

NGOs

International Consortium for Refugees in Iran
Iraqi Refugees Aid Council
Muslim Hope

Other

International Organisation for Migration
United Nations Population Fund
United Nations Volunteers
World Food Programme



Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects			Prior Years' Projects		
	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	1,787,053	1,570,141	3,357,194	14,834	25,778	40,612
Community Services	54,408	0	54,408	224,526	0	224,526
Domestic Needs / Household Support	149,175	1,021,763	1,170,938	20,103	0	20,103
Education	10,655	0	10,655	1,830,181	0	1,830,181
Food	0	0	0	4,201	0	4,201
Forestry	7,085	0	7,085	10,295	0	10,295
Health / Nutrition	537,713	0	537,713	1,479,615	0	1,479,615
Income Generation	33,996	0	33,996	1,841	0	1,841
Legal Assistance	44,320	229	44,549	10,851	0	10,851
Operational Support (to Agencies)	40,879	108,637	149,516	857,598	196,806	1,054,404
Sanitation	3,356	0	3,356	805,403	0	805,403
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	6,081	11,593	17,674	1,245,670	0	1,245,670
Transport / Logistics	81,841	110,431	192,273	69,072	140,715	209,786
Water	0	0	0	320,475	0	320,475
Instalments with Implementing Partners	2,768,147	352,770	3,120,917	(4,657,019)	(176,749)	(4,833,768)
Sub - total Operational	5,524,710	3,175,564	8,700,274	2,237,647	186,550	2,424,197
Administrative Support	433,026	30,804	463,830	1,346	0	1,346
Sub - total Disbursements/Deliveries	5,957,736	3,206,368	9,164,104	2,238,993	186,550	2,425,543
Unliquidated Obligations	6,871,809	795,328	7,667,136	0	0	0
TOTAL	12,829,545	4,001,696	16,831,241	2,238,993	186,550	2,425,543
Instalments with Implementing Partners						
Payments Made	2,866,871	470,000	3,336,871	2,025,859	178,274	2,204,133
Reporting Received	98,725	117,230	215,955	6,682,877	355,023	7,037,900
Balance	2,768,147	352,770	3,120,917	(4,657,019)	(176,749)	(4,833,768)
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	0	6,461,549	176,749	6,638,298
Refunded to UNHCR	0	0	0	0	0	0
Currency Adjustment	0	0	0	245,679	0	245,679
Outstanding 31 December	2,768,147	352,770	3,120,917	2,050,208	0	2,050,208
Unliquidated Obligations						
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	0	2,458,071	425,919	2,883,990
New Obligations	12,829,545	4,001,696	16,831,241	0	0	0
Disbursements	5,957,736	3,206,368	9,164,104	2,238,993	186,550	2,425,543
Cancellations	0	0	0	219,078	239,369	458,447
Outstanding 31 December	6,871,809	795,328	7,667,136	0	0	0

