

Islamic Republic of Iran



Working environment

The context

Since 1979 the Islamic Republic of Iran has received millions of Afghans and Iraqis fleeing conflict or persecution in their homelands. While almost all these refugees have settled amidst local communities throughout the country, some 3 per cent live in six camps managed by the Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) at the Ministry of the Interior.

Currently, the country is seeing the movement of significant numbers of people to and from Afghanistan. Most of those crossing the border are seasonal migrant workers. However, the number of Afghans returned to their country by the Iranian authorities increased significantly in 2006. Discussions are underway between the Governments of the two countries on how best to manage these movements.

The past year saw a decline in the number of voluntary repatriations. Though more than 1.5 million Afghans have gone back to their country since 2002, the pace of return in 2006 suggests that a period of massive voluntary repatriation is coming to an end. The decline is attributed to poverty and lack of marketable skills

among many of the potential returnees, as well as the deep assimilation of many Afghans into Iranian society.

Of the approximately 54,000 Iraqis in the Islamic Republic of Iran, some 49,000 are settled in urban areas or villages. The other 5,000 live in 12 camps managed by the authorities. Iraqis in the Islamic Republic of Iran are well integrated and have access to legal employment, schools and the health system.

The needs

At the end of 2005 the Iranian authorities registered some 920,000 Afghan refugees holding valid identity cards. Many of them are expected to decline the option of voluntary repatriation and remain in the country. This will require a review of UNHCR's operations.

As UNHCR does not have access to all refugees, it does not have a complete picture of their living conditions in the country. A comprehensive household poverty and vulnerability study of all Afghans needs to be carried out in order to address protection gaps; tailor solutions for specific groups — such as couples in mixed marriages; and provide support to those who will not or cannot return to Afghanistan.

Despite the lack of comprehensive data, UNHCR recognizes that many refugees lack the marketable skills that would allow them to rebuild their lives in Afghanistan, while others lack the financial resources to do so. In order to create an environment conducive to gradual voluntary repatriation, these refugees will need to be helped to gain the necessary skills and resources for return.

The country's protection framework needs to be readjusted. An increasing number of Afghans, some of whom may be documented refugees, are subject to arrest, detention and deportation. A screening mechanism established at border exit stations has been only partially effective in preventing the deportation of documented refugees and identifying non-registered Afghans in need of protection. Some form of guaranteed temporary stay for refugees is needed if they are to complete their skills training and sustain themselves for a period without fear of deportation. Complicating the issue is the Government's refusal to grant UNHCR the right to determine the refugee status of individual asylum-seekers.

Finally, UNHCR must address the needs of those refugees, both Afghans and Iraqis, who are identified as especially vulnerable. They will need to be provided with food, health care, education and shelter.

Total requirements: USD 12,849,430

Main objectives

- Continue voluntary repatriation to allow the return of some 300,000 Afghan refugees over the period 2007-2010 together with a gradual improvement of the economic situation in Afghanistan.
- Develop a framework to address migration issues and avoid the forced return of Afghan refugees by the Iranian authorities.
- Create a favourable asylum environment for refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Ensure that Afghan refugees are given assistance and skills training to help them to rebuild their lives upon return.
- Provide resettlement in special cases.

Key targets for 2007

- Voluntary repatriation of 100,000 Afghans and 4,000 Iraqis.
- Identification of all Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran and their socio-economic profiles assembled through household poverty and vulnerability studies.
- Refugees undergoing skills training are allowed to remain temporarily in the country.
- Some 10,000 vulnerable refugees benefit either from specialized health treatment or are provided with financial or social assistance.
- Some 950 deserving individual cases are resettled.

Strategy and activities

In pursuit of UNHCR's long-term strategy to manage one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world, in October 2006 the High Commissioner and the Ministry of the Interior agreed upon a Joint Declaration on strategic cooperation. If an agreement with the authorities on different return procedures is reached in early 2007, UNHCR plans to support the voluntary repatriation of some 100,000 Afghan refugees. It will provide the returnees with transport, medical screening, mine awareness training and food assistance. Vulnerable refugees in this group will benefit from special transport arrangements and medical care. Repatriation processing and departure will take place through six voluntary repatriation centres and two border exit stations.

Protection will focus on the voluntary and gradual character of repatriation. Refugees must be provided with the information necessary to make informed decisions, and be able to sustain their return. In view of the above, UNHCR will continue to support mass information campaigns and dispute-settlement committees and provide legal aid to facilitate repatriation.

Resettlement will remain an option for those refugees who cannot return to Afghanistan or need international protection. The support of the Iranian authorities will be

Planning figures

Type of population	Origin	Jan 2007		Dec 2007	
		Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR
Refugees	Afghanistan	910,000	910,000	810,000	810,000
	Iraq	53,000	53,000	49,000	49,000
Asylum-seekers	Various	200	200	200	200
Total		963,200	963,200	859,200	859,200

essential to facilitate the departure of these people to resettlement countries.

UNHCR's assistance to refugees will continue to emphasize self-reliance and aid to the most vulnerable. It will concentrate on legal employment, skills training, income generation, health and education, with the aim of helping future returnees to better cope with their new lives back in Afghanistan.

In cooperation with ILO and IOM, UNHCR will continue to advocate for the respective Governments of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Afghanistan to increase their contacts in dealing with population movements in and out of Afghanistan.

UNHCR will also establish closer ties with other UN agencies and the Iranian ministries of health, education, labour and welfare. This alliance is essential in jointly combating drug addiction, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS and domestic violence among refugees. Given the fluid situation in Iraq, UNHCR will also maintain and update its contingency plans.

Constraints

The Office continues to face restrictions on access to Afghan communities. The screening operations in the border exit stations have been curtailed by the authorities, making it impossible for UNHCR to identify refugees among the increasing number of Afghans who are deported.

The implementation of UNHCR's projects is limited by the lack of national and international NGOs. Few national NGOs are authorized to work with UNHCR, and the authorities insist that international NGOs can only work for the refugee programme in the country if they bring their own funding.

Organization and implementation

UNHCR presence

Number of offices	7
Total staff	144
International	20
National	123
JPOs	1

Coordination

The Ministry of the Interior, through the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs is UNHCR's main counterpart and implementing partner. All discussions with other line ministries and national NGOs, including implementing partners, are coordinated through BAFIA, which serves as the Secretariat for the National Council for Foreigners Policy. A very limited number of national NGOs work as implementing partners for UNHCR.



Afghan refugees try to make a living by selling food at a market in Sistan-Balochistan, Iran's poorest province.
UNHCR / J. Redden

The Office remains an active participant in the UN Country Team. In an effort to develop partnerships with development-oriented UN agencies and increase their involvement in refugee issues, UNHCR continues to participate in the development of the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). It is hoped that in the future WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNDOC, UNIDO, UNFPA, IOM and ILO will play a greater role in helping refugee communities find durable solutions.

Partners	
Implementing partners	
Government: Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Interior/Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs.	
NGOs: Assisting Marsh Arabs and Refugees, Iranian Red Crescent Society, Iraqi Refugees Aid Council (IRAC), <i>Pooya</i> Educational Research Society, Society to Protect Children Suffering from Cancer.	
Operational partners	
Others: UN Country Team, WFP.	

Budget (USD)		
Activities and services	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Protection, monitoring and coordination	5,835,434	5,134,754
Community services	1,000,000	792,000
Domestic needs	126,000	313,373
Food	75,068	15,998
Health	1,626,002	1,284,832
Legal assistance	509,156	407,324
Operational support (to agencies)	370,000	334,497
Shelter and infrastructure	50,000	57,777
Transport and logistics	4,158,960	2,088,356
Total operations	13,750,620	10,428,911
Programme support	2,660,508	2,420,519
Total	16,411,128	12,849,430

