

Islamic Republic of Iran



Main objectives

- Facilitate voluntary and sustainable repatriation of 200,000 Afghan refugees and 30,000 Iraqi refugees.
- Identify Afghans and Iraqis in need of international protection and help them to regularize their status in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Find solutions for vulnerable Afghans and Iraqis and assist them via their families and/or the community to access various services, assistance and protection.

Planning figures

Population	Jan 2005	Dec 2005
Afghanistan ¹ (refugees)	960,000	760,000
Iraq (refugees)	80,196	50,196
Total	1,040,196	810,196

¹ In July 2004, the High Commissioner decided to reassess the number of Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran of concern to UNHCR taking into account the 2003 registration exercise completed in November 2003 by the Iranian Government.

Total requirements: USD 17,545,793

Working environment

Recent developments

Over the first nine months of 2004 approximately 383,000 Afghans returned to their country - significantly more than during the comparable period in 2003. Of these, 81 per cent were assisted by UNHCR. The increase was largely a consequence of a series of measures implemented by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran aimed at accelerating the repatriation of Afghans. These include the strengthening of employment legislation restricting access to the labour market for Afghan work permit holders; reduction of access to health facilities; and the introduction of fees for education services. These new measures were widely publicized as part of an intensive information campaign to encourage Afghans to return home and participate in the rebuilding of their country. In order to cope with the increased number of

returns, UNHCR has had to double the capacity of its Voluntary Repatriation Centres, so that all Afghans could be interviewed, issued with Voluntary Repatriation Forms and could benefit from transport organized in a timely manner.

The Government has maintained its deportation policy for Afghans who failed to register with the authorities. UNHCR has had access to most deportees through a screening arrangement set up in Dogharoun in 2003. UNHCR has however been unable to ascertain whether or not there are refugees among Afghans deported under court order (UNHCR has no access to these people), or those crossing through Milak in the south-east of the country, where the authorities have yet to act upon their initial agreement to start a screening arrangement analogous to the one in Dogharoun.

The current Tripartite Agreement on Voluntary Repatriation of Afghans between the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Transitional Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR will expire in March 2005. At the time of writing, discussions are being held regarding the development of a new framework covering a variety of solutions that need to be contemplated in the future. Such solutions include: voluntary repatriation; a process for identifying and regularizing the status of refugees still in need of international protection; and special measures for those Afghans who, for personal or humanitarian reasons, wish to remain in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Owing to the prevailing insecurity in Iraq, UNHCR has only been able to assist the voluntary repatriation of some 8,000 Iraqi refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Most of them originated from the Basra area. In mid-2004, UNHCR negotiated the opening of a transit centre in Piranshahr to assist with the voluntary repatriation of Iraqis to the northern part of the country. Only very few refugees have, however, been able to take advantage of this arrangement because of the very volatile security situation and also because of the local authorities' concern about the region's capacity to accommodate and reintegrate the returnees. Many more Iraqis wish to return from the Islamic Republic of Iran to other areas of Iraq but are still waiting for an improvement of the security situation.

Constraints

The presence of Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran remains high on the domestic political agenda and is expected to continue to be an important issue in 2005. So far, the Government has been focusing exclusively on the need for all Afghans to return to their country and has been reluctant to engage in discussions on a more comprehensive solutions strategy.

UNHCR has been closely monitoring repatriation to ascertain that its voluntary character is respected. The Office has intervened, where necessary, to ensure that all parties adhere to their responsibilities under the Tripartite Agreement.

UNHCR's programme is largely implemented through government departments, public institutions and a few local NGOs. There are very few international NGOs present in the country. A special concern for UNHCR remains the authorities' explicit request that all international NGOs wishing to undertake activities in the Islamic Republic of Iran secure their own independent funding from sources other than UNHCR.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

UNHCR will continue to oversee and provide support for the voluntary repatriation of Afghans and to emphasize the importance of ascertaining that returns are truly voluntary. At the same time, the Office will intensify its consultations with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the establishment of a national procedure for determining refugee status - to be built around an agreed set of rights and obligations attached to refugee status. The Office will also seek to reach agreement on a set of special measures for those Afghans who for compelling personal or humanitarian reasons wish to remain in the Islamic Republic of Iran.



Islamic Republic of Iran

An Afghan woman and her baby who returned home in 2004. *UNHCR / Z. Soleimani*

For the Iraqi refugee population, UNHCR will continue to explore opportunities to assist those who want to return. For those who prefer to remain in the Islamic Republic of Iran for the time being, UNHCR will liaise with the Iranian authorities so as to ensure that they are protected in accordance with international standards and have access to basic public services.

Young educated women and unaccompanied women who could face risks upon return to their country of origin will continue to be a prominent feature in the resettlement programme which the Office intends to further strengthen as the most appropriate solution for such groups.

Assistance

The Afghan and Iraqi repatriation programmes will remain the core activities for 2005, consuming two-thirds of the year's project funding. Returnees will receive free transport for themselves and their belongings, medical assistance and mine awareness training. Afghans and Iraqis will have access to legal advice and assistance to solve their legal disputes through the network of Dispute Settlement Committees.

Deported Afghans will have the right to present a claim for continued protection in the Islamic Republic of Iran and have it determined in accordance with international standards. This will be achieved by means of screening services in Dogharoun, and eventually in Milak, further to consultations with the Government over RSD procedures.

The individual assistance programme (for subsistence or health care) will be further restricted to cover only those still in need of international protection or specific humanitarian attention. A reinforced Community and Social Service will be set up to identify vulnerable individuals with special needs, with a particular focus on children and women, and to propose solutions and assistance such as counselling, medical treatment, social services or financial aid.

Desired impact

The 2005 programme will be orientated towards the attainment of durable solutions. UNHCR will again facilitate voluntary repatriation and step up its efforts to identify solutions for individuals with continued international protection needs or other special needs. The allocation of 2005 resources to legal frameworks, screening and reinforced social services will underpin the solutions-oriented strategy.

Organization and implementation

Management structure

The UNHCR Representative for the Islamic Republic of Iran is responsible for all aspects of the country programme. UNHCR maintains seven offices and twelve Voluntary Repatriation Centres in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a total of 242 staff (29 internationals, 211 nationals and two JPOs).

Coordination

UNHCR's main interlocutors on refugee issues are the Ministry of the Interior through the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As part of the strategy on enhancement of RSD and migration, the Office will expand its contacts with the judiciary, the Ministries of Labour and Finance and other relevant Government entities. The Office also maintains its long-term partnership with WFP and participates in the UN Common Country Assessment (Development Assessment Framework) and the UN Disaster Management Team.

Offices
Tehran
Ahwaz
Dogharoun
Kermanshah
Mashad
Orumiyeh
Zahedan

Partners
Government agencies
Ministry of Interior/Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (MOI/BAFIA)
NGOs
Ansar Relief Institute
Iraqi Refugees Aid Council
Society for Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer
Others
Employees' Cooperative of the Ministry of Interior

Budget (USD)	
Activities and services	Annual Programme
Protection, monitoring and coordination	5,701,700
Community services	2,000,000
Domestic needs	87,000
Health	538,500
Legal assistance	1,011,445
Operational support (to agencies)	332,520
Transport/logistics	5,305,480
Total operations	14,976,645
Programme support	2,569,148
Total	17,545,793