

Islamic Republic of Iran



Operational highlights

- Approximately 5,300 refugees repatriated to Afghanistan with UNHCR's assistance, while almost 240,000 repatriated on their own.
- The Tripartite Agreement between the Government of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR on the repatriation of Afghan refugees was extended for one year in March.
- More than 150 refugee families comprising some 740 people were resettled in third countries.
- In October, UNHCR and the relevant government ministries signed a Joint Programme to aim at encouraging voluntary repatriation by equipping refugees with vocational skills and providing education and health support.

Working environment

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted Afghan and Iraqi refugees for more than two decades. Since April 2002, when large scale repatriation began, 1.4 million Afghans have returned home, some 847,000 of them with UNHCR's assistance.

Most Afghan refugees currently in the country reside in the provinces of Tehran, Khorasan, Esfahan and Sistan-Balochistan. Only 26,000 Afghan refugees reside in camps.

UNHCR and the Government cooperated on the voluntary repatriation of registered Afghan refugees, of whom some 5,300 were helped to return home in 2006. The Government has agreed that those who did not return could continue to benefit from international protection. However, the authorities have compelled illegal Afghans who came to the country for economic reasons to go back home.

To encourage repatriation, the Government has indicated that it may issue work and residence visas to heads of families, enabling them to return to the Islamic Republic of Iran – but only after repatriating with their families to Afghanistan. The permits would enable such heads of families to live and work in the country legally.

In some provinces, the Government introduced stringent measures to accelerate the return of registered Afghans and to deport those without proper documents. The moves included making Afghans pay municipal taxes and school fees, and imposing fines on employers who

hire Afghans without work permits. The Government also declared some provinces off-limits to Afghans and restricted their movements between provinces. Arrests of Afghans, including of some registered refugees, were recorded.

There were approximately 54,000 Iraqi refugees remaining in the country at the end of 2006. Some 5,000 live in 12 refugee camps, with the rest dispersed in villages and towns. There was no assisted repatriation of Iraqi refugees in 2006 due to the violence in Iraq. A few new arrivals were also registered. Although Iraqi refugees are well-received by Iranians, the policy towards new arrivals is still under review by the Government.

The Government has adopted a new nationality law, which will allow children of Iranian mothers and foreign fathers to apply for citizenship. However, the time limits and scope of this new law require further clarification, notably in view of the need for affected families to have legally recognized marriages.

Achievements and impact

Main objectives

UNHCR's main objectives were to develop and implement comprehensive solutions for the populations of Afghan and Iraqi refugees remaining in the country; facilitate the voluntary, safe and sustainable repatriation of the two groups; and enhance the protection of asylum seekers and refugees by promoting respect for refugee rights. The Office also aimed to use resettlement as a protection tool; support the development of an effective national asylum-system; provide refugees with free legal advice; and enable them to submit legal claims and other problems for resolution by dispute settlement committees.

Protection and solutions

At 5,300, the number of refugees repatriated to Afghanistan in 2006 was the lowest since large-scale repatriation from Iran began in 2002. The Afghans' reluctance to return can be attributed to the low level of

economic and social development, high unemployment and poor security in Afghanistan. Refugees also cite the lack of funds to support their economic and social reintegration. Many of the Afghans remaining in the Islamic Republic of Iran have lived in the country for more than 20 years, and more than half were born there.

UNHCR's interventions prevented the *refoulement* of some registered refugees. Furthermore, some arrested refugees were released following interventions by the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) at UNHCR's request. A joint screening project at the Dogharoun border crossing into Afghanistan set up to identify potential *refoulement* cases was closed at the end of the year, partly due to restrictions on UNHCR's access to persons of concern.

The Government maintained that a national refugee status determination system was functioning in 2006. To date UNHCR has not received accurate and comprehensive information on its procedures, legal framework or implementation. Asylum seekers who presented themselves to BAFIA officials to regularize their stay in the country said no follow-up action was taken by the local authorities.

Of a total of some 130 asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan interviewed by UNHCR in 2006, only eight were recognized as refugees under the Office's mandate. UNHCR provided all asylum-seekers, except those from Afghanistan, with asylum-seeker certificates while their cases were being processed. Recognized refugees were given cards indicating their status. However, such measures were not enough to ensure the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees.

Activities and assistance

Community services: As part of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming initiative, UNHCR held discussions with refugees to identify gaps in assistance and find solutions to problems. The Office helped some 12,000 refugees as part of the Community Integrated Social and Medical Assistance Project. UNHCR also held meetings in the camps to encourage and promote self-reliance.

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Total	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Afghanistan	914,300	914,300	40	43
	Iraq	54,000	54,000	40	43
Asylum-seekers	Afghanistan	500	500	48	52
	Iraq	400	400	40	36
Total		969,200	969,200		

Domestic needs and household support: Afghan refugees received non-food items such as jerry cans, blankets and mattresses prior to their voluntary repatriation.

Education: UNHCR provided more than 80,000 Afghan and Iraqi refugee students with stationery and textbooks. It also conducted medical examinations required for school entry for some refugee students. Approximately 3,000 Afghan refugees received vocational training in Tehran, Mashhad and Zahedan.

Health and nutrition: UNHCR targeted assistance to the most vulnerable refugees in need of emergency medical attention. Some 12,000 refugees received medical care. Refugees also benefited from HIV and AIDS awareness programmes prepared by UNAIDS and the Ministry of Health. HIV and AIDS awareness pamphlets and posters were distributed for dissemination to all organizations working with the refugees. Returnees could also use medical facilities at voluntary repatriation centres and border exit stations.

Legal assistance: Besides the seven dispute settlement committees established to facilitate the repatriation of registered Afghan refugees by resolving their legal and other problems, BAFIA and UNHCR set up another five such committees in areas with large populations of registered Afghan refugees. In 2006, the number of cases filed with the committees was 20 per cent higher than in 2005. Some 150 refugee families comprising some 740 individuals, the majority of them Afghans, were resettled in third countries. Priority was given to refugees with special needs.

Operational support (to agencies): UNHCR ran mass information campaigns to publicize the procedures for repatriation. The Office also gave out hard copies and audio tapes of the return guidelines, dispute settlement committee brochures, flyers and weekly press clippings. Information bulletins on employment in Afghanistan were distributed to Afghan refugees through the representatives of Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) in Mashhad. Until August 2006, UNHCR and BAFIA ran a joint information centre in Golshar, a densely populated area of Mashhad. The centre provided information and free counselling on voluntary repatriation to registered refugees. UNHCR supported BAFIA's coordination and facilitation activities.

Shelter and infrastructure: UNHCR ran ten voluntary repatriation centres and two border exit stations for departing Afghans.

Transport and logistics: More than 5,300 Afghan refugees were transported from the voluntary repatriation centres to the two border exit stations.



An Afghan refugee child flying his kite in Saveh camp, during the filming of "Wherever I go the sky is mine", which was produced for World Refugee Day.

Constraints

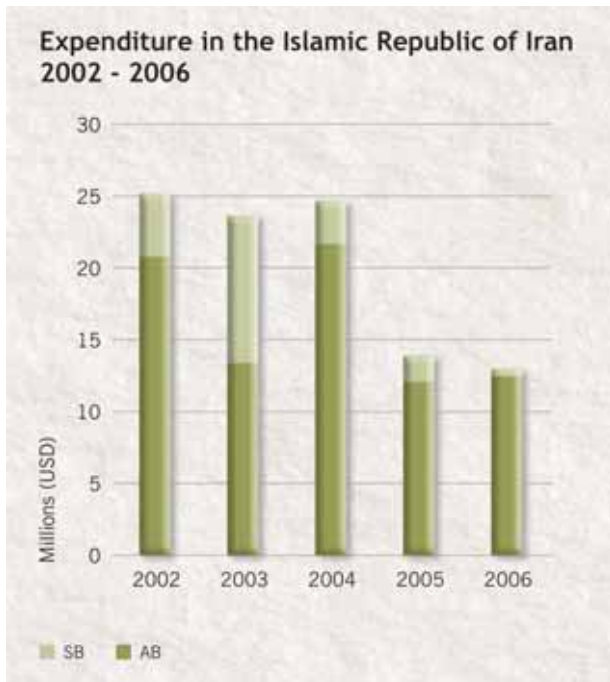
Security remained a challenge in Sistan-Balochistan province, prompting the Government to restrict the access of international organizations and diplomatic missions to the area. As a result, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security put restrictions on the movement of UN officials to, from and within Zahedan, the provincial capital. This limited UNHCR's access to refugees in the province.

By the end of the year, the Government had not yet shared the latest data on the age, gender, education, ethnicity and religious affiliations of the registered refugee population. UNHCR needed this information for policy and programme planning in Iran and in Afghanistan. Although an initial assessment to identify and analyse the problems of refugees was carried out in 2006, a follow-up age, gender and diversity mainstreaming workshop to evaluate the findings and draw up action plans could not be held, as the Government did not provide the necessary authorization.

Financial information

The programme received sufficient funding to implement all planned activities in 2006. Although repatriation figures were lower than expected, all available resources were used to implement planned activities.

Expenditures have declined over the past five years. Spending peaked at the height of the repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees in 2002 and 2003. From 2005 onwards the repatriation of Afghans has proceeded at a much slower pace, while the number of Iraqis returning home has stopped almost completely.



Organization and implementation

Management

The UNHCR operation in the Islamic Republic of Iran was managed by the Office of the Representative in Tehran, with three sub-offices in Ahwaz, Mashad, and Zahedan and two field offices in Orumieh and Dogharoun. There were a total of 170 staff members, of whom 22 were international and 148 national. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of UNHCR Operations in Iran in August and September 2006. The audit covered activities costing USD 18.9 million in 2004 and 2005. OIOS assessed the operations in Iran as adequately managed. UNHCR is addressing particular issues raised by OIOS with government implementing partners.

Working with others

UNHCR maintained good relations with BAFIA, its main partner. More regular meetings with this partner helped improve assistance to the refugee population.

WFP distributed a food basket consisting of wheat flour, rice, vegetable oil, pulses and sugar to Iraqi refugees in

all the camps throughout the year, while Afghan refugees in the camps were provided with wheat flour. From October 2006, full rations were distributed to Afghans with special needs in the camps. Furthermore, WFP implemented an "Oil for Girls Education" project in all the 18 camps hosting Iraqi and Afghan refugees, whereby each girl received a quantity of oil every month if she attended school.

UNHCR involved national NGOs and local communities in initiatives to support self-reliance for Afghan refugees. Under the programme, refugees were given skills training and provided access to employment, education and medical facilities. UNHCR contributed supplies to several organizations to encourage them to maintain their support for refugees. These initiatives will be developed in 2007 with a view to gradually enabling national NGOs and local communities to take over refugee-aid programmes.

Overall assessment

The renewal of the tripartite agreement known as the Joint Programme for the Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees and Displaced Persons, and other measures introduced in 2006 to encourage returns did not yield the anticipated results. In order to address this challenge, the parties to the tripartite agreement began to consider new measures that might encourage sustainable returns in 2007.

Effective refugee protection in the Islamic Republic of Iran remains subject to Government control. UNHCR worked with BAFIA to try and develop a transparent and reliable national asylum system and move ahead on a range of other issues pertaining to refugees. However, reservations made by the Government on four articles of the 1951 Convention at the time of accession remain an obstacle to refugee self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, many registered Afghans remain in the country and benefit from its traditional and long-standing hospitality.

Partners
Implementing partners
Government agencies: Ministry of the Interior - Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs.
NGOs: Ansar Relief Institute, Assisting Marsh Arabs and Refugees, Iranian Red Crescent Society, Iraqi Refugees Aid Council, Pooya Educational Research Association, Society for Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer.
Operational partners
Government agencies: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Others: UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNIC, UNICEF, WFP, WHO.

Budget, income and expenditure (USD)

	Final budget	Income from contributions ¹	Other funds available ²	Total funds available	Total expenditure
AB	16,485,204	2,692,741	9,925,546	12,618,286	12,491,737
SB ³	849,867	0	508,327	508,327	507,978
Total	17,335,071	2,692,741	10,433,873	13,126,613	12,999,715

¹ Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

² Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

³ The SB figures apply to the Iraq Operation. The budget does not include a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects			Previous years' projects
	AB	SB	Total	AB and SB
Protection, monitoring and coordination	5,009,337	337,590	5,346,927	0
Community services	500,742	0	500,742	0
Domestic needs and household support	107	0	107	0
Health and nutrition	1,722,960	0	1,722,960	45,987
Legal assistance	339,748	0	339,748	44,445
Operational support (to agencies)	60,205	0	60,205	62,225
Shelter and infrastructure	51,809	102,274	154,084	10,851
Transport and logistics	518,082	0	518,082	407,639
Instalments with implementing partners	1,735,258	18,783	1,754,041	(571,147)
Sub-total operational activities	9,938,249	458,648	10,396,897	0
Programme support	2,553,488	49,330	2,602,818	0
Total expenditure	12,491,737	507,978	12,999,715	0
Cancellation on previous years' expenditure				(232,401)
Instalments with implementing partners				
Payments made	2,152,883	28,414	2,181,297	
Reporting received	(417,625)	(9,630)	(427,256)	
Balance	1,735,258	18,783	1,754,041	
Previous years' report				
Instalments with implementing partners				
Outstanding 1st January				870,871
Reporting received				(571,147)
Refunded to UNHCR				(189,071)
Adjustments				0
Balance				110,653