

Islamic Republic of Iran



Main objectives

To organize the voluntary repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees in safety and dignity while providing protection to all persons of concern, and to promote the development of a legal framework to manage the situation of asylum-seekers and refugees; to provide limited assistance to meet the emergency needs of vulnerable refugees.

Impact

- In 2004, some 390,100 refugees (377,600 Afghans and 12,500 Iraqis) were assisted by UNHCR for their voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan and Iraq respectively. More than half of the returnees were under 18 years. At the peak of the repatriation, UNHCR organized return movements of over 4,000 Afghans per day. Special attention was paid to the safe and dignified return of women, children, the elderly and extremely vulnerable individuals, with medical

teams on hand at voluntary repatriation centres and border exit stations.

- Refugees had access to education at state schools during the school year 2003-2004. In September 2004, the Government introduced very high fees for the enrolment of Afghan children (primary schools included). After intervention by UNHCR, the Government agreed to exempt children from low-income families from this fee-paying policy.
- Refugees enjoyed general access to public health care. Over 17,000 refugees facing high medical costs as a result of medical emergencies and hospitalization were provided with financial support by UNHCR.
- The UNHCR screening activities at the border ensured that most Afghans subject to deportation were able to present protection claims and have their cases reviewed by UNHCR protection staff. UNHCR reviewed approximately 1,000 cases and assisted some 100 of them to regularize their continued stay in the country.

- Some 1,100 refugees (80 per cent women-at-risk) with protection concerns were identified by UNHCR and about 830 departed for resettlement in third countries. UNHCR received and reviewed over 7,000 applications for resettlement.

Working environment

The context

In 2004, the number of Afghan people deciding to opt for voluntary repatriation reached some 454,600 according to the local authorities, out of which, 377,600 were assisted by UNHCR. The total figure represents a 70 per cent increase from the previous year. This increase is attributable not only to gradual political and social improvements in Afghanistan but also to measures taken by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to accelerate the return of Afghans to their country. These measures included a more stringent enforcement of employment legislation and limitations on access to health and education services. The authorities also explicitly urged the Afghan communities to return and

take part in the reconstruction of their country. However, at the end of 2004 approximately one million Afghan refugees remained in the country, still uncertain about returning. They are generally concerned about the lack of job opportunities in Afghanistan and limited health and educational services, with standards far below what they had become accustomed to in exile, as well as the lack of security in parts of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, in view of the violent situation in Iraq, only some 12,500 Iraqis decided to opt for voluntary repatriation through UNHCR, the majority of them Kurds returning to the northern part of the country.

Constraints

UNHCR's programme is primarily implemented through Government departments or institutions affiliated to the Government and a few national NGOs. The authorities want international NGOs to engage in complementary activities on their own account, with their own funding, rather than to implement programmes on behalf of UNHCR. UNHCR does at times encounter restrictions on access to refugees within camps and elsewhere.

Persons of concern				
Main origin/Type of population	Total in country ¹	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Afghanistan (refugees)	952,800	952,800	44	47
Iraq (refugees)	93,200	93,200	43	43

¹ Of which some 31,500 Afghans and 7,500 Iraqis are living in 29 camps.

Note: The High Commissioner decided to reassess the number of Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran taking into account the registration completed in November 2003 by the Government.

Income and expenditure (USD) Annual and Supplementary programme budgets					
	Revised budget	Income from contributions ¹	Other funds available ²	Total funds available	Total expenditure
AB	21,721,247	6,485,568	15,822,055	22,307,623	21,641,647
SB³	7,297,254	160,099	2,901,089	3,061,188	3,061,188
Total	29,018,501	6,645,667	18,723,144	25,368,811	24,702,835

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 supplementary programme figures apply to the Supplementary Appeal for the Iraq Operation.

Note: The supplementary programme budget does not include a 7 per cent charge (support costs) that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR. The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.

Funding

The Annual Programme was adequately funded in 2004. UNHCR gave priority to programmes in support of the voluntary repatriation of refugees and reintegration assistance in Afghanistan. This led to a reduction in health and education assistance for refugees in general. As for the camp residents, assistance to the long-standing Afghan refugee camps was discontinued in July 2004.

Achievements and impact

Protection and solutions

UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan cooperated closely on the voluntary repatriation operation, which was organized within the framework of a tripartite

agreement. There were regular meetings to discuss progress and to adjust the programmes as required.

The screening mechanism at the Dogharoun border crossing-point in the north-east enabled UNHCR to ensure that no Afghan refugees were among the illegal Afghans who were arrested and returned by the authorities to Afghanistan. However, this mechanism was only partly effective as the Iranian authorities denied UNHCR access to court-ordered Afghan deportees and also stalled on their initial agreement to open a screening mechanism in Milak, another border point in the south-east through which a considerable number of the Afghans were deported.

UNHCR made considerable effort through meetings and workshops with senior government officials to promote the establishment of a comprehensive framework to manage the presence of refugees and migrants in the country, including the introduction of a national refugee status determination procedure and arrangements regulating seasonal labour migration.



Islamic Republic of Iran: Returning Afghan refugees at the transit centre in the border town of Dogharoun receive food provisions and supplies to help them rebuild their lives back home in Afghanistan. September 2004. UNCHR/Z. Soleimani

Activities and assistance

Community services: The main focus was to provide one-time emergency assistance to the most vulnerable refugee families (following an individual needs assessment) to build their capacity for repatriation. Family planning and reproductive health education sessions were conducted for women refugees, and 170 trainers of trainers graduated. Furthermore, a workshop was held on mainstreaming gender and age, with a view to integrating the relevant principles into all UNHCR-supported programmes.

Domestic needs/Household support: Afghan and Iraqi refugees in camps were provided with monthly rations of soap and detergent.

Education: UNHCR supported the Ministry of Education to enable all primary and secondary level students to attend school during the 2003-2004 academic year. In addition, 175 Afghan and Iraqi students were provided with assistance to continue their tertiary education through the DAFI scholarship programme.

Food: WFP provided food assistance to all refugees in camps. It was decided that food assistance to Afghan camps should stop at the end of December 2004. Returning refugees were provided with food for their journey home.

Forestry: Assistance was provided to close eight Iraqi camps, and consolidate three in an attempt to provide cost-effective and efficient logistical services to the remaining camps. Part of the assistance was used to rehabilitate areas adversely affected by the presence of refugees through tree planting, and the disposal of harmful solid and liquid waste.

Health/Nutrition: UNHCR maintained medical referral units in all its offices, and provided partial financial support to meet the cost of medical care for critically ill patients, emergency cases, complicated obstetric cases, and those suffering from contagious diseases or in need of emergency surgery. Health services were provided for all returnees, both at voluntary repatriation centres and at border exit stations. UNHCR also contributed to the Ministry of Health for the provision of primary health care in camps.

Income generation: Limited activities were undertaken.

Legal assistance: UNHCR reorganized legal assistance activities and established Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) in seven provinces with a high concentration of Afghan refugees. In addition, seven lawyers were contracted to provide free legal advice and assistance to refugees to resolve their legal problems.

Operational support (to agencies): UNHCR provided financial assistance to the Bureau of Afghan Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs at the Ministry of Interior (MOI/BAFIA) to partially cover its expenses in providing administrative and management support to the UNHCR programmes.

Sanitation: Sanitary workers were paid to collect and dispose of refuse in the refugee camps and settlements on a daily basis. Family latrines in the camps were fully operational throughout the year.

Shelter/Other infrastructure: Voluntary repatriation centres and border exit stations were maintained and remained operational throughout 2004. Decommissioned Iraqi camp sites were rehabilitated. As a response to the Bam earthquake emergency, 115 refugee families were provided with prefabricated shelters.

Transport/Logistics: Free transport and logistical support was provided to some 377,600 Afghan and 12,500 Iraqi refugees to return to their home countries with their belongings.

Water: All refugee camps, voluntary repatriation centres and border exit stations were provided with potable water of the required standard. The distribution and supply systems were repaired and maintained as required.

Organization and implementation

Management

At the end of the year the number of staff stood at 28 international and 216 national (in the Branch Office in Tehran as well as the suboffices and field offices in Ahwaz, Dogharoun, Kermanshah, Mashad, Milak, Orumiyeh, Zabol, and Zahedan). The Afghan Operation was carried out in close

coordination with UNHCR's offices in Afghanistan and the Iraqi Operation was coordinated with those in Jordan and Iraq.

Working with others

The working relationship with the main government counterparts, MOI/BAFIA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, remained positive. In addition, UNHCR worked on a daily basis with the Ministries of Health, Education and Training, and the Bureau of International and Scientific Cooperation. UNHCR also worked with five national NGOs and two public institutions.

UNHCR was an active partner in the work of the CCA and UNDAF and held several consultations on refugee issues with other UN agencies. UNHCR also provided important contributions to the UN inter-agency response to the Bam earthquake, the application of the Millennium Development Goals, the Security Management Team and the United Nations Disaster Management Team.

Overall assessment

UNHCR was successful in assisting some 377,600 refugees to return to Afghanistan, the highest number since the start of the programme in April 2002. It remained a challenge throughout the year for UNHCR to balance active engagement in the repatriation programme with upholding basic protection standards for Afghan refugees still in the country. The number of Iraqi refugees who opted for voluntary repatriation was lower than initially planned, but the continuing violence in the country was not conducive to a safe return.

The change in the Government's education policy towards Afghan refugees left up to 30 per cent of Afghan refugee children unable to continue their schooling. UNHCR advised the Government to maintain fair and reasonable education fees for Afghan refugees.

Discussions were initiated for an extension of the Tripartite Agreement which was to expire in March 2005. UNHCR is actively pursuing consultations with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on a comprehensive framework capable of bringing this protracted refugee situation to an end. However,

these discussions are ongoing and UNHCR expects that progress will be accomplished incrementally - in line with the gradual reduction of the refugee population in the country.

Offices

Tehran

Ahwaz
Doharoun
Kermanshah
Mashad
Milak
Orumiyeh
Zabol
Zahedan

Partners

Government agencies

Ministry of Education and Training
Ministry of Education and Training – Bureau of International and Scientific Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Interior – Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs

NGOs

Ansar Relief Institute
Iraqi Refugees Aid Council
Pooya Educational Research Association
Society for Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer
World Relief Foundation

Others

Employees Cooperative of the Ministry of Interior
Family Planning Association
UNDP
UNFPA
UNIC
UNICEF
WFP

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects			Prior years' projects
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total	Annual and Supplementary programme budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	4,939,587	1,090,134	6,029,721	0
Community services	205,739	0	205,739	152,410
Domestic needs / household support	202,828	250,240	453,068	85,688
Education	22,300	0	22,300	1,622,102
Food	55	0	55	73,968
Forestry	10,157	0	10,157	7,813
Health and nutrition	2,590,208	0	2,590,208	413,993
Income generation	675	0	675	0
Legal assistance	806,170	0	806,170	0
Operational support (to agencies)	272,807	73,638	346,445	376,400
Sanitation	33,016	0	33,016	730,896
Shelter and infrastructure	168,932	373,544	542,476	903,790
Transport and logistics	6,401,849	520,533	6,922,382	703,027
Water	44,409	0	44,409	157,382
Instalments with implementing partners	2,923,959	632,433	3,556,392	(5,227,468)
Sub-total operational activities	18,622,690	2,940,522	21,563,212	0
Programme support	3,018,957	120,666	3,139,623	0
Total disbursements	21,641,647	3,061,188	24,702,835	0
Instalments with implementing partners				
Payments made	10,149,666	1,127,628	11,277,294	
Reporting received	(7,225,707)	(495,195)	(7,720,902)	
Balance	2,923,959	632,433	3,556,392	
Prior years' report				
Instalments with implementing partners				
Outstanding 1 January				3,598,271
Payments made				1,924,509
Reporting received				(5,227,468)
Refunded to UNHCR				(268,215)
Currency adjustment				(27,097)
Balance				0
Unliquidated obligations				
Outstanding 1 January				3,648,068
Disbursements				(3,350,138)
Cancellations				(297,930)
Outstanding 31 December				0