

# Islamic Republic of Iran

## Main Objectives

- Ensure the effective protection of Afghan and Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers, both new arrivals and those who arrived earlier.
- Address the essential needs of refugees in the country, both in and outside the camps, while seeking to improve programme-delivery and impact, in particular through increased involvement of NGOs.
- Continue to address the needs of the vast majority of refugees living outside established camps.
- Promote the implementation of legislation for the legalisation of foreigners' rights.
- Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees.



## WORKING ENVIRONMENT

### Recent Developments

At the time of going to print, planning for possible 2002 activities in the Islamic Republic of Iran related to the Afghan crisis has not yet been finalised, owing to the rapidly changing situation in the region after the terrorist attacks on 11 September. These activities will be presented in an Addendum to this Appeal which will be published once the needs have been assessed and the Supplementary Programme approved.

At the end of October, there has been no significant rise in the number of Afghans entering the Islamic Republic of Iran as a result of the military action in Afghanistan. However, UNHCR has significantly increased its level of preparedness to accommodate up to 80,000 new arrivals. Basic relief items such as tents, blankets and kitchen sets have been purchased. UNHCR is urging the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to keep its borders open to fleeing Afghans.

### PLANNING FIGURES

Population	Jan. 2002	Dec. 2002
Afghan Refugees <sup>1</sup>	1,482,000	1,482,000
Iraqi Refugees <sup>1</sup> (Kurds and Arabs)	386,000	381,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,868,000</b>	<b>1,763,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> Governmental estimates

### TOTAL REQUIREMENTS • USD 25,555,447

During the first months of 2001, some 700 to 1,000 Afghans per day crossed the borders into the Islamic Republic of Iran, despite the fact that the border was officially closed. The numbers represent an increase from previous years, which may be due to the ongoing drought, continuing hostilities inside Afghanistan and persecution because of ethnic origin. Before these new Afghans arrived, the Government estimated that some 1,482,000 Afghan and 386,000 Iraqi refugees were living in the country, holding various kinds of documents issued by the authorities. The number of undocumented aliens, mainly Afghans, considered as staying illegally in the country is estimated at half a million.



Refugee women building in Songhor camp, Kermanshah Province. *UNHCR/S. Besharat.*

In February 2001 the Government granted UNHCR access to detention centres for Afghans in two provinces, Khorassan and Sistan-Baluchistan. UNHCR sees this as major progress. The second major development was the Government's assurances that all new legislation concerning foreigners would be implemented in full respect of the country's commitment to international instruments, and would not lead to the forcible return of refugees. These assurances are vital in light of the implementation of Article 48 of the Five Year Development Plan (2000-2005) legislation which was adopted by the Iranian Islamic Consultative Assembly, Majlis (parliament), in April 2000. Article 48 requires all foreign nationals not holding a work permit to leave the country unless they face "physical threats" in their country of origin.

As a first step in the implementation of Article 48, the Government carried out the initial phase of a registration exercise for all foreigners in the country. According to the authorities, the data collected through this exercise will be the basis for the implementation of Article 48 during the ongoing Five-Year Development Plan. Subsequent steps may involve the introduction of a refugee status determination procedure for all Afghans wishing to remain in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### Constraints

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to host one of the world's largest populations of refugees. As there is little sign of an end to a two decade-long refugee problem, "asylum fatigue" has now become a major theme in the country. This is reflected

in the reactions to refugees in an internal economic environment where they are perceived and portrayed as an unbearable social and economic burden. The current public debate concerning refugees, particularly Afghans, links high unemployment figures, increasing insecurity, drug trafficking and human smuggling to their presence. The Government is under strong pressure to find the means to deal expeditiously with the situation.

A more practical constraint is the absence of a legal framework defining the conditions, under which NGOs can operate, which limits the presence of international and national NGOs. Although there are a number of local NGOs, which are generally structured as charitable organisations along traditional Islamic lines, they are often constrained by their lack of resources and experience. The spectre since mid-September, of a potential emergency has, however, slightly alleviated these constraints.

## STRATEGY

### Protection and Solutions

The majority of the Afghans arrived during the period of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s and up to the end of the Najibullah regime in 1992. However, the fighting in Mazar-i-Sharif and Bamyan in Afghanistan in 1998, and the renewed fighting between factions in 1999, resulted in new arrivals of mainly Hazara Afghans (from the central part of Afghanistan). The Afghan population is con-

centrated in the eastern and central parts of the Islamic Republic of Iran, although every major Iranian city has a sizeable population of Afghan refugees.

In order to provide protection to those who need it among the more than 1.5 million Afghans and other foreigners residing in the country, a joint screening of these persons will be conducted by the Government and UNHCR in 2002. The Government has stated that all persons recognised as refugees will be requested to reside in camps. This would be a major change for the refugees, as an estimated 95 per cent of the entire refugee population is dispersed all over the country. They live side-by-side with the host population in the provinces bordering their country of origin and in major urban centres. UNHCR has therefore, proposed a continuation of the existing generous policy and will, to the extent possible, try to find ways of lessening the social and economic burden shouldered by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

UNHCR will pursue its support of repatriation for Afghans after establishing that they have decided to return of their own free will. Given the current situation in Afghanistan, voluntary repatriation will only be organised if and when conditions inside Afghanistan so permit.

The Iraqi population is concentrated along the border areas of the western part of the Islamic Republic, as well as in Tehran and Qom. Two main sub-groups exist: Kurds from northern Iraq and Arabs from the marshes of southern Iraq. These groups entered the country during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and following the chemical bombardments of Halebjah and other areas in 1988.

UNHCR will continue to organise voluntary repatriation convoys for Iraqis of Arab origin wishing to return to southern Iraq. Given the low trend in returns in 2000-2001, this assistance will be organised on an ad hoc basis, depending on demand. Since the Government of Iraq has raised objections to any returns directly to areas of northern Iraq, UNHCR will not be organising the voluntary repatriation of Iraqis of Kurdish origin unless they wish to return under the procedure established by the Government of Iraq. However, Iraqis of Kurdish origin who decide to return will be eligible for one-time relocation assistance, subject to confirmation in writing of their intention to return.

Resettlement will remain a solution for a very limited number of vulnerable refugees – especially women and children and adolescents at-risk – refugees reuniting with their family abroad, and refugees with severe protection problems.

## Assistance

UNHCR will continue to assist Afghan and Iraqi refugees living in camps in terms of health, sanitation, water, community services and education. Small-scale community projects and

micro-credit schemes to reduce dependency and foster some degree of self-reliance will also be implemented. UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior will participate in the committees who select projects and approve loans.

Assistance activities will be targeted towards those determined to be in need of international protection and towards vulnerable and newly arrived refugees. For the latter, several options are being explored. These include: assistance in sectors such as shelter, water, health and education in the spontaneous settlements where the existing facilities are extremely poor; the expansion of existing refugee camps to accommodate additional refugees; and the establishment of new "refugee villages". Regardless of the chosen option, UNHCR has agreed to contribute towards the construction of 30,000 shelters, which will benefit around 150,000 refugees. This approach will be different from the one developed for existing "camps"; it will be largely based on self-help and self-participation. Only refugees volunteering to reside in the "villages", or newcomers recognised as refugees and having no other residence option, will participate in the shelter project.

A total of 80,000 persons have recently received medical assistance under a medical health insurance pilot project. Subject to the positive evaluation of this first pilot project, the formula will be extended to cover 160,000 persons. Provision will also be made to incorporate an additional 24,000 Afghan refugee students in the education scheme, allowing them to pursue their education free-of-charge in Iranian public schools.

In addition to ongoing health and education projects, further efforts will be made in collaboration with the Government, universities and specialised NGOs to conduct a comprehensive survey on the demographic and socio-economic situation of the refugee community, with specific focus on the factors of gender and age. To undertake the survey will be an achievement in itself as, despite the repeatedly confirmed need for a gender and age analysis of the refugee population in Iran, a comprehensive and reliable survey does not exist. This is principally due to restrictions to UNHCR's access to the refugee community and delays in establishing partnerships with specialised competent NGOs to conduct such a survey.

## Desired Impact

To ensure that the refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran are adequately protected and secure and that their living conditions meet satisfactory standards. UNHCR and the Government will continue to address the situation of the undocumented Afghans and it is also hoped that UNHCR's ability to assess the protection and material needs of refugees will be improved and that the legal status of many of the undocumented refugees will be regularised. Income-generating schemes, especially targeting the vulnerable and for families headed by women will continue and will help prepare them for

reintegration – should they eventually decide to repatriate to Afghanistan.

## ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Management Structure

The Regional Co-ordinator for the Afghanistan situation, who was appointed in autumn 2001 and who is based in Islamabad, will oversee all country operations in the region. In 2002, a total of 92 UNHCR staff will be working in the country. The team comprises 13 international staff, including one Junior Professional Officer, and 79 national staff.

### Co-ordination

The Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and Health and Education are UNHCR's main government counterparts. The Office will also maintain its long-term partnerships with other UN agencies such as WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and UNDCP.

The United Nations Team in Iran co-ordinates activities and shares information regularly. UNHCR will continue to participate actively in the inter-agency thematic working groups e.g. co-operation with NGOs, gender and development, HIV/AIDS prevention, and poverty alleviation and creation of job opportunities in Sistan-Baluchistan – one of the poorest provinces in Iran, which is severely affected by the presence of refugees. UNHCR's catalyst role in bringing together UN Specialised Agencies in refugee assistance programmes could reduce the growing perception of refugees as a burden associated with the social and economic difficulties of the host community.

IOM will continue to be active in voluntary repatriation and resettlement programmes funded by UNHCR. WFP will continue to provide food assistance for the refugees in camps, as well as limited assistance for the most vulnerable groups in the newly established settlements. The already successful "oil for girls' education" project for some 5,000 primary school children will further be developed and extended in the spontaneous settlements. Joint UNHCR/UNFPA programmes on reproductive health/family planning activities for four Afghan refugee-impacted areas will be expanded. UNICEF has undertaken assessments on a number of refugee issues, including the conditions of working children in spontaneous refugee settlements and urban refugee children. Specific projects will be developed to ensure the welfare of refugee children. Targeted drugs-awareness campaigns among refugees will be developed in collaboration with UNDP, while UNOCHA will continue to provide mine-awareness courses to repatriating refugees. In addition, UNHCR is maintaining working relations with the

Iranian Red Crescent Society and with a number of NGOs. Subject to confirmation of adequate funding by its partners, UNHCR will participate in the establishment in Tehran of a Regional Centre for Migration and Refugee Studies.

### OFFICES

Teheran
Ahwaz
Dogharun
Mashad
Milak
Zahedan

### PARTNERS

<b>Government Agency</b>
Ministry of Interior (BAFIA)
<b>NGOs</b>
International Consortium for Refugees in Iran
Iraqi Refugee Aid Council
<i>Médecins sans Frontières</i>
Ockenden International
Society for the Protection of Vulnerable People

### BUDGET (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	2,379,812
Community Services	570,902
Domestic Needs	3,089,957
Education	1,886,927
Forestry	4,778
Health	2,897,079
Income Generation	1,775,000
Operational Support (to Agencies)	2,259,800
Sanitation	320,073
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	5,763,622
Transport/Logistics	2,554,500
Water	540,162
<b>Total Operations</b>	<b>24,042,612</b>
Programme Support	1,512,835
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,555,447</b>