

Islamic Republic of Iran



Main objectives

In 2005, UNHCR's main objectives were to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees in safety and with dignity; to provide effective protection and assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers; and to promote the establishment of a comprehensive framework by which to manage the presence of Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Impact

In 2005, 289,600 Afghans returned home from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Of these, more than 63,600 were assisted by UNHCR while some 226,000 returned of their own accord. Some 5,200 Iraqis were also assisted by UNHCR to return home. These figures represent the lowest number of returnees since the start of the Afghan repatriation programme in 2002. This trend of return may be influenced by the better living conditions in the Islamic Republic of Iran in comparison with Afghanistan, lack of reintegration opportunities in Afghanistan and the prevailing serious security concerns in Iraq.

The tripartite agreement between the Governments of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR (known as the "Joint Programme"), which provides the framework for the repatriation programme for Afghan refugees, was extended until 20 March 2006. UNHCR worked closely with the Iranian authorities to safeguard the voluntariness of returns and to mitigate restrictive measures curtailing residence in the Islamic Republic of Iran. UNHCR successfully negotiated a school fees reduction of up to 80 per cent for Afghan children for 2005/2006.

At the beginning of 2005, UNHCR temporarily suspended the processing of resettlement submissions and introduced anti-fraud procedures. The suspension was lifted after March 2005, and 11,000 resettlement applications were received. About 1,200 refugees were recommended for resettlement to a third country. About 80 per cent of the cases accepted for resettlement were women at risk.

The progress made on age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming was reviewed through consultations with refugee communities and implementing partners to identify gaps and opportunities. The consultations

resulted in the implementation of pilot projects on HIV/AIDS education, community services initiatives and prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. A joint WFP-UNHCR programme to provide incentives for female children to attend school (known as "Oil for Education") was successfully implemented. Some 19,000 vulnerable urban refugees received financial support, mainly to address health-related needs.

Working environment

The context

A re-registration exercise was carried out by the Iranian authorities in 2005. Preliminary results indicated that there were some 914,000 Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran at the end of the year. The majority of Afghans in the country have lived there for a very long time and some have social ties and successful economic activities, which are beneficial to the host community. Children make up half of this population. Afghan refugees live primarily in Tehran (27 per cent), Khorassan and Sistan-Baluchistan. The country is also a host to some 54,000 Iraqi refugees. All refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran received new registration cards from the authorities, valid until 23 August 2006.

Constraints

Throughout the country, access to refugees and to deportees remained limited.

The Government does not yet have a national mechanism for refugee status determination. Iranian law requires asylum-seekers to register their claims with the Government within a week of arrival; failure to do so renders their presence illegal. The countrywide clampdown on undocumented migrant workers sometimes resulted in the wrongful arrest of documented Afghan refugees. Although UNHCR screening teams were able to differentiate documented and undocumented Afghans at the border exit points, such access was restricted.

UNHCR continued to implement its programmes directly or through governmental departments and ministries, as there were very few experienced NGOs with which to collaborate. State regulations required international NGOs to be approved by the Bureau for Aliens and

Foreign Immigrant Affairs at the Ministry of Interior (BAFIA) and be wholly self-funded before they could cooperate with organizations such as UNHCR.

Funding

The Afghan and Iraqi repatriation programmes continued to receive support from the donor community. This enabled implementation of protection activities, repatriation, screening and essential life-preserving interventions in the health sector. UNHCR maintained a high level of donor interest through diplomatic missions, and established new relationships with non-traditional donors.

Achievements and impact

Protection and solutions

UNHCR focused on promoting and maintaining the voluntary character of repatriation. The number of arbitrary arrests and deportations declined considerably in 2005. The Office was able to secure the release of detained refugees when informed in time and also managed to intervene against measures banning refugees from living in specific areas and imposing discriminatory municipal taxes.

UNHCR's target in 2005 was to assist the repatriation of some 200,000 Afghan refugees. However, documented Afghans who chose to remain in the country were able to do so. Returnees consisted mainly of families. Repatriation was coordinated through 11 voluntary repatriation centres established throughout the country and two border exit stations in the eastern provinces. Special attention was given to women, children and older refugees through various mechanisms, including through individual interviews by female UNHCR staff, and medical screening.

The Office designed a mass information programme to ensure information-sharing with refugees on the repatriation programme and on developments in the country of return. These included cross-border visits by the Afghan communities, "come and talk" visits, mass information centres, biweekly return bulletins, updated brochures detailing repatriation procedures, posters and flyers.

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Total in country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Afghanistan	662,400	662,400	44	46
	Iraq	54,000	54,000	43	43



Afghan (Pashtun) refugee children in Iran's poorest province, Sistan Balochistan. *UNHCR / J. Redden*

Activities and assistance

Community services: UNHCR provided health care to vulnerable refugees in need of specialized medical attention. Others who required emergency assistance, e.g. after loss of household items, accidental fires etc., received non-food items including warm clothes, blankets and cooking utensils.

Domestic needs and household support: Jerry cans, mattresses, blankets, kitchen sets, tents and wheelchairs were procured from the emergency stockpile and distributed as necessary.

Food: Returning refugees who spent a night at a border exit station were provided with food items.

Health and nutrition: UNHCR continued its medical and social assistance programme for refugees through the Community Integrated Social and Medical Assistance Project. Assistance in meeting medical expenses was extended to some 19,000 seriously ill refugees. An additional 10,000 refugees were referred to various hospitals. Health services were also provided at the border exit stations for those repatriating to their home country.

Legal assistance: Article 17 of the "Joint Programme" expands the remit of dispute settlement committees so as to solve legal disputes that would otherwise prevent the repatriation of Afghan refugees. Five new dispute settlement committees were formed in various provinces during the year, bringing their total number to 12. Lawyers representing refugees' interests in the dispute settlement committees also provided legal advice.

Operational support (to agencies): UNHCR undertook public information and mass information activities. The information centre in Zahedan was expanded and refugees were recruited to work in the centres at Zahedan and Kerman. Operational support was provided to cover their coordination and facilitation activities. BAFIA carried out these functions for UNHCR- and non-UNHCR-funded activities for refugees.

Shelter and infrastructure: Border exit stations and voluntary repatriation centres were established and maintained to provide adequate services to repatriating refugees. This included provision of shaded areas, reception and toilet facilities, and loading areas.

Transport and logistics: Free transport and logistical support was provided to Afghan and Iraqi refugees returning to their homes with their belongings.

Organization and implementation

Management

The UNHCR operation was managed by the Representation in Tehran, sub-offices in Ahwaz, Kermanshah, Mashad and Zahedan, and field offices in Orumieh and Dogharoun. The sub-office at Kermanshah was closed at the end of 2005. There were 26 international and 158 national staff members.

Working with others

UNHCR continued to work closely with the main government partner, BAFIA. BAFIA is a party to the sub-agreements concluded with two governmental agencies and six NGOs. The Office organized a number of public awareness events, in particular a joint photography exhibition, inaugurated by the High Commissioner, on the history of cooperation between BAFIA and UNHCR. A joint mission undertaken with the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization monitored the implementation of the mine-awareness programme conducted by the Iranian Red Crescent Society. The Office also participated in the coordination of activities with the UN Country Team and held regular consultations on refugee-related issues with WFP, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA and IOM.

Overall assessment

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran maintains that voluntary return for Afghan refugees is the preferred solution. The "Joint Programme" was therefore renewed until March 2006. More efforts are required to help returnees to reintegrate in Afghanistan. UNHCR continued its assistance programme to vulnerable Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

While voluntary repatriation remains the preferred option for the majority of the remaining Afghans, other durable solutions may need to be identified for some of Afghans who may not be able to return home. The Iranian Government recognizes that population movements to and from Afghanistan are complex and warrant comprehensive solutions. Although the Government has not provided for regularized migration from Afghanistan, it has acknowledged the need to discuss the issue with its counterparts in Afghanistan.

Offices

Tehran

Ahwaz
Dogharoun
Kermanshah (closed in December 2005)
Mashad
Orumieh
Zahedan

Partners

Government agencies

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Interior - Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA)

NGOs

Assisting Marsh Arabs and Refugees
Ansar Relief Institute
Iranian Red Crescent Society
Iraqi Refugees Aid Council
Pooya Educational Research Association
Society for Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer

Others

Employees' Cooperative of the Ministry of Interior
UNAIDS
UNDP
UNFPA
UNIC
UNICEF
WFP
WHO

Budget, income and expenditure (USD)
Annual and supplementary programme budgets

	Final budget	Income from contributions ¹	Other funds available ²	Total funds available	Total expenditure
Annual programme	13,435,615	4,628,266	7,452,102	12,080,368	12,080,368
Supplementary programme ³	2,708,423	14,975	1,802,765	1,817,740	1,817,740
Total	16,144,038	4,643,241	9,254,867	13,898,108	13,898,108

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 Iraq Operation.

Note: The supplementary programme 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			Prior years' projects
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total	Annual and supplementary programme budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	4,524,152	629,112	5,153,264	0
Community services	418,622	0	418,622	48,552
Domestic needs and household support	16,905	105,420	122,325	61,416
Education	0	0	0	22,390
Food	155	1,979	2,134	0
Forestry	0	0	0	9,925
Health and nutrition	1,550,648	0	1,550,648	213,498
Legal assistance	304,059	0	304,059	181,645
Operational support (to agencies)	252,501	33,702	286,203	142,972
Sanitation	0	0	0	32,260
Shelter and infrastructure	63,302	245,322	308,624	248,033
Transport and logistics	1,508,643	520,820	2,029,463	2,131,876
Water	0	0	0	43,393
Instalments with implementing partners	743,739	127,232	870,971	(3,135,960)
Sub-total operational activities	9,382,726	1,663,587	11,046,313	0
Programme support	2,697,642	154,153	2,851,795	0
Total expenditure	12,080,368	1,817,740	13,898,108	0
Cancellation on prior years' expenditure				(74,331)
Instalments with implementing partners				
Payments made	2,223,745	305,204	2,528,949	
Reporting received	(1,480,006)	(177,972)	(1,657,978)	
Balance	743,739	127,232	870,971	
Prior years' report				
Instalments with implementing partners				
Outstanding 1 January				3,556,392
Reporting received				(3,135,960)
Refunded to UNHCR				(325,103)
Currency adjustment				(95,329)
Balance				0