

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

IN SHORT



Main Objectives

- Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 100,000 Afghan refugees in accordance with the Joint UNHCR/Government Programme for Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees.
- Help an estimated 30,000 mainly Iraqi Kurd refugees repatriate voluntarily to northern Iraq (or other areas) in safety and dignity.
- Continue to assist Afghan and Iraqi refugees; reduce dependency and foster increased self-reliance for refugees living outside the camps, pending voluntary repatriation.
- Ensure that refugees in need of protection are identified through a transparent and fair procedure.
- Develop new partnerships, in agreement with the Government, with national and international NGOs and specialised UN agencies, to enhance refugee care and raise awareness of refugee problems among institutions and in civil society at large.

Planning Figures

Population	Jan. 2000	Dec. 2000
Afghan Refugees	1,400,000*	1,300,000
Iraqi Kurd/Arab Refugees	570,000*	540,000
Total	1,970,000**	1,840,000

* Government estimate.

** Includes 84,500 Afghan and Iraqi refugees residing in 30 camps in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Sept. 99 data)

Total Requirements
USD 18,307,734





WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to host the world's largest refugee population, but with only a small proportion in camps. The majority are integrated in local Iranian communities and have benefited from a number of Government services and amenities for more than two decades. However, severe economic recession over the past few years and the protracted nature of the refugees' plight have put growing pressure on the Government to reduce assistance to them. Access to services and subsidies for basic commodities have gradually been cut back, making the refugees' position increasingly precarious, particularly outside the camps. Refugees can no longer work without proper documentation and school attendance among refugee children is falling.

An upsurge in fighting in the north of Afghanistan has made voluntary repatriation a high-risk option. Nevertheless, more than 2,000 Afghans have already officially repatriated in 1999.

An estimated 800 Iraqis leave the Islamic Republic of Iran spontaneously each week for northern Iraq. It is expected that this trend, prompted by economic difficulties as well as a call for return by the Kurdish local authorities, will continue in 2000.

Constraints

The absence of a legal framework to define the conditions under which NGOs can operate in the Islamic Republic of Iran still limits the presence of international and national NGOs. At an international NGO symposium held in Tehran in May 1999, the Government announced that a new law was under consideration to address that problem.

In the absence of a national law on refugees, the rights and responsibilities of refugees are left vague and assistance to them is provided on an ad hoc basis. The large number of refugees, many of them undocumented, and the scattered settlement pattern of that refugee population limits UNHCR's ability to assess material and protection needs directly.



STRATEGY

Protection and Solutions

An effective mechanism will be established to identify unregistered Afghan refugees and new arrivals currently considered to be illegal aliens and subject to deportation. This will mean joint status determination by UNHCR and the Iranian authorities of those Afghans who entered the country during the past seven years. These refugees have not yet been able to regularise their legal status in the country. Those found to be in need of protection will be permitted to stay in the Islamic Republic of Iran until the situation in their areas of origin makes voluntary repatriation possible. UNHCR will maintain a regular dialogue with the Iranian authorities on these issues. Training and capacity-building within the relevant official bodies is expected to raise awareness and support for refugee issues. Procedures for refugees will be streamlined and documentation standardised.

UNHCR will establish a procedure for the voluntary repatriation of Iraqi Kurd refugees to the north of Iraq. Return has to be voluntary, likewise the mode of transport and the type of repatriation assistance to be provided must be agreed by all parties concerned (the Government, UNHCR and the refugees themselves). Those Iraqi Kurds who do not wish to return to northern Iraq will be assisted until such time as they become self-sufficient.

In consultation and coordination with the Iranian Government, UNHCR will upgrade and expand the existing facilities in Khuzistan for the Iraqi refugees of Arab origin. This will ultimately solve the problem of overcrowding and the relocation of these refugees to the north will no longer be necessary. UNHCR will continue to help Iraqi Arabs repatriate if the repatriation is voluntary, and based on an informed decision taken in the knowledge that UNHCR cannot at present monitor their situation inside Iraq. This means that the number of Iraqi Arabs opting to repatriate is likely to be limited. Resettlement will be the preferred solution for refugees seeking family reunion, vulnerable refugees (such as women and children-at-risk) and refugees with specific protection problems.



UNHCR will work with the Government to establish a legal framework within which NGOs could operate in the Islamic Republic of Iran. UNHCR will continue to enter into long-term partnerships with other UN agencies caring for refugees.

Assistance

Under the joint Voluntary Repatriation Programme, UNHCR will provide Afghan refugees who decide to repatriate with a cash grant in local currency equivalent to USD 40 and a piece of plastic sheeting. (WFP will provide all returnees with 50 kgs of wheat upon arrival in Afghanistan). Iraqi refugees who decide to repatriate voluntarily will receive a cash grant of the equivalent of USD 30 and one plastic sheet.

For the refugees who remain in the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNHCR will provide a dual-track programme of assistance: to the non-camp population of Afghans and Iraqis, scattered in rural and urban centres; and to those in camps, through various planned activities.

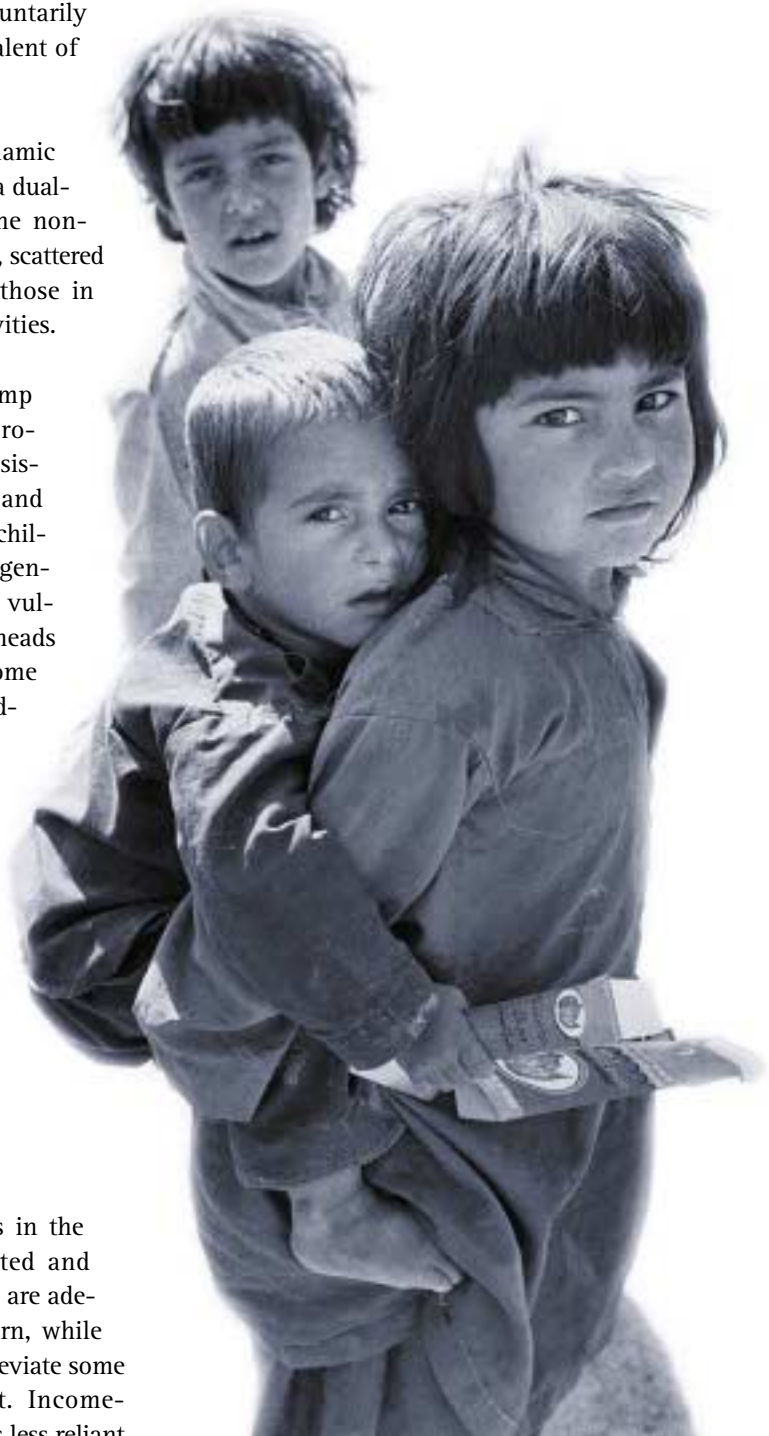
The main activities for the non-camp refugees will include: medical aid provided by the Medical Referral Unit; assistance to the Ministry of Education and Training for the education of refugee children in Iranian schools; and income generating and micro-credit projects for vulnerable refugees, particularly women heads of families. The aim is to achieve some degree of self-reliance to reduce dependency on UNHCR's and the Government's assistance.

Activities in refugee camps are designed to complete and upgrade the already existing infrastructure including water systems, roads and shelters. Services will also be provided in close collaboration with the Government and the refugee community to ensure adequate sanitation, health and education.

Desired Impact

UNHCR aims to ensure that refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran are protected and secure, and that their living conditions are adequate. The main medium-term concern, while searching for lasting solutions, is to alleviate some of the burden on the Government. Income-generating projects will render refugees less reliant

on outside aid and prepare them for reintegration should they decide to repatriate to Afghanistan. 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 undocumented refugees will be regularised.



ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management Structure

The Office of the Chief of Mission in the Islamic Republic of Iran is based in Tehran. There are seven field-based offices: Ahwaz, Dogharun, Kermanshah, Milak, Mashad, Orumiyeh and Zahedan. In 2000, a total of 99 UNHCR staff will be working in the country. This includes 15 international and 84 national staff. One Junior Professional Officer will also be deployed to the country programme.

Coordination

The Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Health, and Education and training are UNHCR's Government counterparts and implementing partners. Among UN agencies, WFP is UNHCR's main operational partner, providing food rations to the refugees in camps as well as for voluntary repatriation. IOM is responsible for arranging transportation to the border exit stations for Afghans and Iraqis repatriating.

The International Consortium for Refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran coordinates NGO activity in the country. The Grameen Bank is expected to become involved in the micro-credit project during 2000. UNFPA has launched a reproductive health and family planning project which also benefits refugees. UNHCR is actively involved in the on-going UN initiative for poverty alleviation in areas with a large presence of refugees.

Offices

Teheran	Mashad
Ahwaz	Milak
Dogharun	Orumiyeh
Kermanshah	Zahedan

Partners

Government Agencies

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 The Ministry of Health
 The Ministry of Interior (Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs)
 The Ministry of Education and Training (Bureau for International and Scientific Cooperation)

Other

International Consortium for Refugees in Iran
 International Organisation for Migration
 United Nations Population Fund
 World Food Programme

Budget (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	3,058,026
Community Services	254,099
Crop Production	36,615
Domestic Needs/ Household Support	3,230,493
Education	2,595,277
Food	44,000
Forestry	27,029
Health/Nutrition	1,896,903
Income Generation	898,441
Legal Assistance	557,600
Livestock	18,577
Operational Support (to Agencies)	643,066
Sanitation	378,461
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	1,184,758
Transport/Logistics	1,477,621
Water (non-agricultural)	316,460
Total Operations	16,617,426
Programme Support	1,690,308
Total	18,307,734