

The Islamic Republic of Iran

Main Objectives

- Conclude a tripartite agreement with the Governments of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran to lay down the aims, criteria and modalities of UNHCR-assisted voluntary repatriation.
- Facilitate the voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity of some 400,000 Afghans during the course of 2002.
- In close co-operation with the authorities, UN agencies and NGOs, provide transport and basic material assistance to returning refugees.
- Offer skills training in income-generating activities to help Afghan refugees improve their lives in the country of asylum and to prepare them for their eventual repatriation to Afghanistan.
- Promote the establishment of a joint refugee status determination procedure, which would allow UNHCR to participate in the screening of Afghan asylum-seekers.
- Support refugee-hosting communities through limited assistance in the sectors of water, sanitation, health, nutrition and education.

**TOTAL REQUIREMENTS:
USD 10,831,895**

PLANNING FIGURES

Population	January 2002	December 2002
Afghan Refugees	1,500,000 ¹	-
Afghan Refugees Repatriating	400,000 ²	-

¹According to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, there are 2.3 million Afghan refugees in the country.

²The planning figure will be revised to reflect the rapidly changing situation.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

The events since 11 September 2001, and in particular, the change of rule in western Afghanistan, have had an impact on the refugee situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, preparing the ground for a possible large-scale return of Afghan refugees to their home country. The number of refugees returning spontaneously and without UNHCR assistance rose sharply towards the end of the year and stabilised at an average rate of some 700 returns per day during January 2002. At the same time, the situation in Afghanistan remains volatile and obstacles to voluntary repatriation as well as to a further refugee influx in the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot be ruled out.

Pending further stabilisation of conditions inside Afghanistan, UNHCR will facilitate the voluntary repatriation of those refugees who have made an informed decision to go home, but will not actively promote return. Meanwhile the Office will continue to protect and assist refugees in the country of asylum and maintain its preparedness for possible new arrivals.

Constraints

The volatile situation in Afghanistan inevitably complicates operations in the Islamic Republic of Iran and inside Afghanistan, and requires UNHCR to maintain a maximum level of flexibility to respond to the rapidly changing conditions on the ground. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which has been hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations for more than two decades, is growing increasingly reluctant to continue to do so indefinitely, and is demanding that a solution to the problem be found. Another constraint is the absence of a legal

framework defining the conditions under which non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can operate, which limits the presence and activities of international and national NGOs. The emergency after September 2001, however, has brought some positive changes in this regard.

STRATEGY

Protection and Solutions

The overall objectives of UNHCR's Iran programme for Afghans are: 1) to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 400,000 Afghans during the year; and 2) to continue to provide protection and assistance to Afghan refugees in the country. These two objectives are intricately linked, for, in step with the ongoing repatriation, the nature and focus of the latter objective will have to be adjusted to reflect the changing situation.

UNHCR, together with the authorities of Afghanistan and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is in the process of concluding a tri-partite agreement outlining the conditions under which voluntary return is to take place. The actual repatriation operation will be closely co-ordinated with relevant government departments and with UN sister agencies and NGOs. While surveys are being conducted to gather information and establish a profile of refugees wishing to repatriate, the Office is also undertaking mass information activities to ensure that refugees are able to make a free and informed choice regarding their return. UNHCR offices in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and in other countries hosting Afghan refugees will seek to provide harmonised and timely repatriation assistance.

Linked to the repatriation, greater emphasis will be placed on the rehabilitation of areas with large populations of Afghan communities in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Furthermore, assistance will be provided to Afghan

communities and individuals, to help them solve potential legal issues. In addition, UNHCR will continue to pursue third country resettlement of refugees who meet the relevant criteria. At the same time, the Office will maintain its ongoing advocacy efforts for the establishment of a refugee status determination procedure for new arrivals of Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Access to such a procedure forms a vital element of refugee protection, and is the only way to ensure that no individuals of concern to UNHCR face refoulement.

Assistance

In support of the repatriation operation, the Office will initially establish 10 voluntary repatriation centres as well as way-stations for temporary accommodation during the movement. Ready-made food will be provided to the returnees at these sites. Returnees and their belongings will be transported from the voluntary repatriation centres / way-stations to one of the border exit stations. In addition to limited material assistance while in transit, returnees will receive mine awareness training and have access to medical assistance as necessary.

For those refugees who intend to return to Afghanistan in the medium-term, UNHCR will offer training activities. The emphasis will be on capacity-building/skills training in areas such as agriculture, poultry farming, carpentry, building construction and other professions, in order to ensure an economically sustainable repatriation. Women will be particularly targeted in these income-generating projects. They will be able to learn and enhance useful skills, thus improving their lives in the country of asylum as well as increasing their prospects for a successful return and re-integration. UNHCR intends to conduct all training projects in a way that promotes inter-ethnic co-existence.

Working towards the enrolment of all Afghan children in schools in Iran, UNHCR will co-operate closely with the Iranian Ministry of Education, in addition

to providing support to a growing system of informal schools, established mainly by Afghans. Assistance will also include vocational training courses, scholarships for students at the secondary-level, and targeted measures to encourage school attendance among girls. In all, up to 200,000 children and adolescents are expected to benefit from UNHCR activities in the education sector.

To improve conditions in refugee-hosting areas, new latrines will be built, garbage collection services expanded and water supply systems upgraded. In co-operation with the Ministry of Health, UNHCR will provide health services to Afghan refugees, most notably through its Medical Referral Units (MRUs). Apart from rendering vital medical assistance to refugees, this programme also helps to raise awareness among the refugee community and enables UNHCR staff to have direct contact with beneficiaries.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management Structure

The country operation will be managed by the Office of the UNHCR Representative for the Islamic Republic of Iran and the UNHCR field offices, in close co-ordination with UNHCR Headquarters, the UNHCR Chief of Mission in Kabul (Afghanistan), and other offices in the region.

Co-ordination

The Office will maintain its long-term partnerships with other UN agencies, as well as government counterparts, and will participate actively in the United Nations Country Team and the inter-agency thematic working groups. UNHCR will continue to play a catalyst role in bringing together UN agencies in refugee assistance programmes, whereas the International Organisation for Migration will have a supporting role in voluntary repatriation and

resettlement programmes in close co-ordination with UNHCR. The World Food Programme will continue to provide food assistance.

OFFICES

Teheran
Ahwaz
Dogharun
Mashad

Orumiyeh
Zabol
Zahedan

PARTNERS

Government Agency

Ministry of Interior/Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA)
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Health

NGOs

To be determined.

BUDGET (USD)

Activities and Services	Supplementary Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,107,397
Community Services	10,000
Crop Production	0
Domestic Needs	1,291,080
Education	0
Food	907,495
Forestry	0
Health / Nutrition	232,554
Income Generation	0
Legal Assistance / Protection	1,912,686
Operational Support (to Agencies)	650,000
Sanitation	143,000
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	196,901
Transport / Logistics	3,133,502
Water	223,780
Total Operations	9,808,395
Programme Support	1,023,500
TOTAL	10,831,895