

Islamic Republic of Iran



Operational highlights

- Some 7,500 registered refugees repatriated to Afghanistan with UNHCR's assistance.
- The Tripartite Agreement between UNHCR and the Governments of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the repatriation of Afghan refugees was extended for a year, until March 2008.
- Some 900 Afghan and Iraqi refugees were resettled in third countries.
- Approximately 3,700 newly arrived Iraqi refugees were recognized on a *prima facie* basis, registered by UNHCR and provided with assistance.

Working environment

The Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted Afghan and Iraqi refugees for more than two decades. Since the start of large voluntary repatriation operations to Afghanistan in April 2002, some 1.4 million Afghan refugees have returned home, 856,000 of them with UNHCR's assistance.

Security in the south-east of the country continued to be of concern to the Government. The province of Sistan-Balochistan witnessed an increase in abductions, drug smuggling and violence directed at security forces. Consequently, the Government declared Sistan-Balochistan, as well as other provinces and districts, either partially or wholly off-limits to foreigners, including some 120,000 registered Afghan and Iraqi refugees. Furthermore, the authorities asked 84,000 registered Afghan refugees living in Sistan-Balochistan province to move to refugee settlements in other provinces or repatriate.

According to the results of a participatory assessment conducted with Afghan refugees, the deteriorating security situation and the lack of employment opportunities, education and health facilities in Afghanistan were the main impediments to returning. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, common concerns for Afghan and Iraqi refugees included the lack of job opportunities and the absence of residence and work permits, which also prevents refugees from obtaining health insurance coverage. The refugees also cited the low enrolment level of adolescent girls in public schools and the lack of literacy classes and adult education programmes.

Achievements and impact

Main objectives

UNHCR's main objectives in Iran were to facilitate voluntary repatriation; support the development and maintenance of an international protection regime; use resettlement as a strategic protection tool for durable solutions; and improve access to health and educational institutions for refugees.

Protection and solutions

Under the Tripartite Agreement framework, UNHCR and the Government organized the voluntary repatriation of some 7,500 registered Afghan refugees. A new return method called "Self-organized transportation" was introduced in 2007. Under this scheme refugees received an exit visa valid for 10 days, enabling them to travel legally to a border crossing where they were interviewed and their voluntary repatriation forms processed. Some 2,300 refugees returned home in this way. At the request of the Government, UNHCR also introduced a new mechanism to support voluntary repatriation. In 2007, all returning families received a cash grant to help them at the start of their reintegration in Afghanistan.

With the end of mass returns, and the Government's announcement that it would carry out an individual refugee status determination exercise for all remaining refugees, UNHCR agreed to help the Government re-register and profile the refugee population. At the request of UNHCR, the questionnaire was amended to allow the profiling of refugees into clearly identified categories.

Although the Government reassured UNHCR that no refugees would be deported, UNHCR reported some 60 deportations of registered refugees. The Office has sought

the readmittance of the deported refugees, but many cases remained unresolved.

With the understanding of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA), some 3,700 new Iraqi refugees were registered by UNHCR on a *prima facie* basis in Tehran, Ahwaz and Mashad. Some of these refugees were referred for specific assistance and subsequently for resettlement. However, the authorities did not provide them with a legal status and asked them to return to Iraq to renew their visas. As a result, an unknown number of Iraqis may have remained illegally in Iran.

Discussions continued between UNHCR and the Government on the possibility of sharing details of the national refugee status determination procedures and their implementation. It appears that cases of asylum-seekers who approached the relevant government authorities remained unprocessed.

Resettlement is considered an important burden-sharing tool in the case of Iran. UNHCR submitted 887 refugee cases to resettlement countries, 90 per cent of the target for 2007. The reduction of selection missions, notably from those countries that traditionally resettled refugees from Iran, diminished the number of departures. In parallel, the main resettlement countries focused on Iraqi refugees rather than Afghans, further limiting resettlement opportunities for this group. UNHCR held refresher sessions with BAFIA to improve resettlement procedures allowing for faster identification, screening and departure. BAFIA reiterated its commitment to issue visas to resettlement countries' selection teams.

Activities and assistance

Community services: UNHCR targeted the most vulnerable refugees and provided them with basic medical and social assistance through the Community Integrated Social and Medical Assistance Programme

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Total	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees ¹	Afghanistan	906,100	906,100	44	-
	Iraq	57,400	57,400	44	-
	Various	60	60	-	-
Asylum-seekers	Afghanistan	1,000	1,000	44	-
	Iraq	130	130	43	-
	Various	90	90	-	-
Returnees (refugees)	Various	10	-	-	-
Total		964,790	964,780		

¹ At the end of 2007, some 906,000 registered Afghan refugees were living in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including some 32,000 in six refugee settlements. The majority of the refugees live in cities and villages in Tehran, Khorasan, Esfahan, Fars and Sistan-Balochistan provinces. The Islamic Republic of Iran also hosted some 57,400 registered Iraqi refugees, approximately 5,000 of whom reside in 11 settlements.

(CISAMAP). Protection cases were also identified and addressed through this network. Standard operating procedures for sexual and gender-based violence were established and 12 victims of such violence assisted.

Domestic needs and household support: UNHCR provided a cash grant of USD 100 per person, up to a maximum of USD 500 per family, to all returnees. In addition, needy Afghan refugee families returning home received non-food items. Some 10,000 sanitary packages were distributed to Afghan refugee women, in both settlements and urban areas. Non-food items were provided to refugees in settlements and urban areas based on assessed needs.

Education: The majority of Afghan refugee children in Iranian cities and villages could attend Iranian primary and secondary schools, provided fees were paid. Access to Iranian education facilities in refugee settlements is free. UNHCR helped increase the capacity of a school attended by Iraqi refugee children.

Health and nutrition: Refugees could use national health institutions, provided treatment costs were paid. UNHCR supported refugees needing treatment for life-threatening illnesses or particular diseases. Through the CISAMAP programme, the Office screened some 10,000 Afghan and Iraqi refugees; some of those screened were referred to specialized institutions or helped with partial payments for their treatment. UNHCR and UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Health

and a national NGO to implement HIV and AIDS prevention programmes for Afghan youth.

Legal assistance: Dispute settlement committees, which were established to facilitate the repatriation of registered Afghan refugees by resolving legal and other disputes, were disbanded in June 2007. Some 700 disputes were registered and solved during the first five months of 2007. Thereafter, refugees continued to have access to UNHCR-hired lawyers for free legal aid. Some 3,400 people benefited from these services to resolve disputes related to payment of rent, wages, and others.

Operational support (to agencies): UNHCR helped BAFIA strengthen assistance to refugees and also gave it administrative support – particularly to ensure timely and objective audits. UNHCR conducted jointly with BAFIA six mass information campaigns to ensure that returnees were well-informed on the situation in Afghanistan before deciding to return. Some 20,000 *Return Bulletins*, 25,000 *Return Guides*, and 50,000 flyers on new return programmes were distributed. Announcements in Iranian newspapers, television and radio also kept Afghan refugees informed.

Sanitation: Assistance was provided to Refugee Councils in settlements to improve facilities.

Shelter and infrastructure: Refugee families were provided with construction materials to rehabilitate shelters in settlements.



UNHCR/IV. Tan

Afghan refugee children in Tehran.

Transport and logistics: Some 5,200 returning Afghans were transported in UNHCR's organized convoys, while another 2,300 individuals arranged their own transportation to the border. More than 200 Iraqi refugees were also assisted to return to Iraq.

Water: UNHCR initiated a modest programme to rehabilitate water systems in settlements in semi-arid areas where water quality was poor. Water pumps and accessories were procured to repair and maintain water systems and one well was rehabilitated.

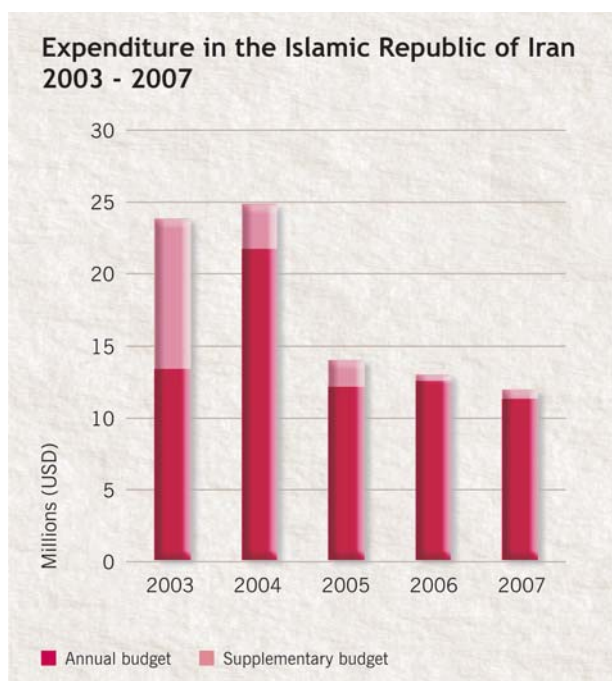
Constraints

UNHCR's programme is implemented directly by its offices or through local authorities or institutions affiliated with the Government. International NGOs would be allowed to engage in complementary activities using only their own funds. This requirement limited UNHCR's implementing capacity and obliged it to maintain a high number of staff. At times, UNHCR encounters restrictions on access to refugees in settlements and elsewhere.

Despite several advocacy meetings arranged with various governmental entities and UNAIDS, efforts to include refugees in the National AIDS Policy remained inconclusive.

Financial information

UNHCR's programme budget in Iran was adequately funded. The trend in the expenditure level remained stable over the past three years.



Organization and implementation

Management

The UNHCR operation in Iran was managed by the Office of the Representative in Tehran, with three sub-offices in Ahwaz, Mashad and Zahedan and two field offices in Orumieh and Dogharoun. There were a total of 141 staff members, of whom 21 were international and 120 national.

Working with others

The working relationship with the main government counterparts, the Ministry of the Interior (BAFIA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was constructive at all levels. In addition, UNHCR worked with the ministries of Health and Education. UNHCR also looked into the possibility of working with national charity organizations, particularly with five local organizations working to help female heads of households, older refugees, children and people with disabilities.

Overall assessment

Despite the voluntary repatriation scheme using new return methods, refugee-organized transport and cash grants to returnees, the target of 20,000 returnees was not reached. This shows that the period of mass returns is over, and that the Afghan refugees still in the Islamic Republic of Iran would prefer to stay there in order to avail themselves of basic services in a secure environment. This persisting low trend of voluntary repatriation in the past few years, however, calls for a thorough assessment.

Given the few opportunities for resettlement, UNHCR will have to focus on measures such as vocational and life-skills training and community-based activities to prepare refugees for an eventual return home when conditions in Afghanistan permit. UNHCR will therefore review its assistance programmes, specifically in the education and health sectors.

The Office improved its relations with government counterparts. Regular meetings were held to discuss issues such as registration, the off-limits areas policy and participatory assessments. The current registration exercise will prove useful in profiling and thus reviewing UNHCR's interventions for refugees in Iran.

Partners

Government agencies: Ministry of the Interior / Bureau of Aliens and Foreign, Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education and Training - Bureau of International and Scientific Cooperation, Ministry of Health

NGOs: Iraqi Refugees Aid Council (IRAC), Society for Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer

Others: UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP

Budget, income and expenditure (USD)

	Final budget	Income from contributions	Other funds available	Total funds available	Total expenditure
Annual budget	11,455,653	2,624,893	8,827,492	11,452,385	11,330,581
Iraq Operation SB	884,782	0	632,241	632,242	632,241
Total	12,340,435	2,624,893	9,459,733	12,084,627	11,962,822

Note: Supplementary programmes do not include seven per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR. Income from contributions includes contributions earmarked at the country level. Other funds available include transfers from unearmarked and broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects			Previous years' projects
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual and supplementary budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	4,295,896	15,555	4,311,451	0
Community services	495,903	96,203	592,106	0
Domestic needs and household support	151,943	19,532	171,475	0
Education	0	36,599	36,599	496,421
Health and nutrition	2,323,645	152,922	2,476,567	535,080
Legal assistance	271,231	4,565	275,796	102,388
Operational support (to agencies)	371,535	6,918	378,453	194,885
Sanitation	18,768	5,040	23,807	0
Shelter and infrastructure	43,118	161,668	204,787	12,655
Transport and logistics	612,035	1,951	613,986	127,399
Water	52,336	12,220	64,556	0
Instalments with implementing partners	37,906	119,068	156,974	(1,468,828)
Sub-total operational activities	8,674,315	632,241	9,306,556	0
Programme support	2,656,266	0	2,656,266	0
Total expenditure	11,330,581	632,241	11,962,822	0
Cancellation on previous years' expenditure				(60,512)
Instalments with implementing partners				
Payments made	729,200	217,399	946,599	
Reporting received	(691,294)	(98,331)	(789,625)	
Balance	37,906	119,068	156,974	
Previous years' report				
Instalments with implementing partners				
Outstanding 1st January				1,864,694
Reporting received				(1,468,828)
Refunded to UNHCR				(182,841)
Currency Adjustment				(89,212)
Balance				123,812