

Islamic Republic of Iran

Main Objectives

- Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees.
- Protect refugees and asylum seekers unable or unwilling to return in the near future.
- Work towards the legalisation of refugees' rights and, together with other relevant agencies, support the Government in devising a legal framework for immigrants and labourers which would grant refugees the right to work and access to health and education services.
- Further improve programme delivery and implementation in co-operation with the Government and implementing partners.



Planning Figures

| Population | Jan. 2003 | Dec. 2003 |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Afghan Refugees ¹ | 2,000,000 | 1,500,000 |
| Iraqi Refugees | 200,000 | 200,000 |
| Total | 2,200,000 | 1,700,000 |

¹ Government estimates.

Working Environment

Recent Developments

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to host one of the world's largest refugee populations, having provided a home to nearly six million refugees over the past decade. In 2002, events in Afghanistan ushered in the prospect of sustainable repatriation of this large refugee group, and more than 260,000 Afghans returned to their homes. Over 200,000 received assistance from UNHCR in the form of transportation, food and relief items as envisaged by the tripartite agreement signed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan and UNHCR. A further 60,000 went back home with no assistance from UNHCR, in many cases before the assisted repatriation programme was put in place in April 2002.

Small numbers of Iraqis also volunteered for repatriation in 2002. Both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq are anxious to solve the refugee problem, through the return of Iraqi refugees to Iraq and Iranians to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The repatriation of nationals of the Islamic Republic of Iran is therefore, likely to continue in 2003 (barring a major emergency in the region).

Constraints

The public still regards refugees as a social and economic burden and the Government is under considerable pressure to find ways to reduce the refugee population. This pressure has on occasion challenged the co-operative spirit that has traditionally prevailed in relations between the

Government and UNHCR. For example, several hundred Afghans (mostly single men) were deported from the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2002, on the grounds that they were not in possession of the required papers, following a general registration exercise undertaken in 2001. The deportations were described as consequent upon legislation passed in 2000 requiring all foreigners living in the Islamic Republic of Iran to hold valid work permits. The legislation states that foreigners without a work permit must leave the country unless they face “physical threats” in their country of origin.

Another constraint is the lack of experienced international NGOs able to respond flexibly to complex situations. Only three international NGOs have significant programmes in the Islamic Republic of Iran, owing to the absence of a legal framework defining the conditions under which NGOs can operate.

Strategy

Protection and Solutions

The present planning assumption is that up to 500,000 Afghans might opt to return home with the assistance of UNHCR in 2003. To facilitate their repatriation, UNHCR has set up eleven repatriation centres. It provides logistical support and informs the refugees about the situation in returnee areas in Afghanistan. UNHCR also monitors the repatriation process to make sure that the refugees are returning voluntarily. Similar protection and assistance will be given to those Iraqi refugees who opt to return home.

However, many Afghans have been in the Islamic Republic of Iran for the past 10 to 20 years, and are now fully integrated into the Islamic Republic of Iranian society. The current challenge therefore is to think about durable solutions for those who do not want to return. UNHCR hopes to be able to help the Government design a legal framework for their continued residence. Issues to be addressed include the right to work, access to education and health services and other basic civil rights (citizenship, marriage, and registration of children). UNHCR and the Government will also establish a joint screening mechanism and provide

training to Government personnel to help them distinguish between refugees and immigrants. UNHCR also plans to launch information campaigns aimed at refugees to ensure that they know of, and can access, the screening process. UNHCR also aims to establish a resettlement unit to improve its capacity to process and resettle eligible cases.

Assistance

Assistance efforts will focus on supporting the repatriation of Afghans. In this connection, UNHCR will train women in areas such as literacy and health to help prepare them for life back in Afghanistan. UNHCR will also provide transportation, food and relief items.

The Office will also continue to provide limited assistance to the three per cent of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s refugee population (both Afghan and Iraqi) who live in camps, notably in the areas of education, sanitation and health. About 13,470 children in camps (17 per cent of all children) attend schools, while a further 160,000 refugee children attend schools outside the camps. UNHCR is expediting the completion of seven primary schools in order to get even more refugee children into education. UNHCR will also provide assistance for non-formal education.

To address the health needs of the urban refugee population UNHCR plans to expand its Medical Referral Units (MRU). The MRUs provide health services to those refugees who do not live in the established refugee camps, and are primarily used by those with life-threatening illnesses. They enable UNHCR to gain access to refugees, who might not otherwise contact UNHCR. The requirement for medical assistance has become more urgent lately, since the cost of medical treatment has increased at a time when large numbers of refugees have lost their jobs.

Desired Impact

UNHCR estimates that it will be able to facilitate the return in safety and dignity of up to 500,000 Afghans. The protection and security of those refugees who remain in the Islamic Republic of Iran will depend on the establishment of a legal frame-



Afghan refugees in Solarmankani registration centre in Tehran register for voluntary return. UNHCR / P. Kessler

work and the success of the joint screening process. The assistance programmes will ensure that the most needy refugees receive medical care and that refugee children have access to education.

Organisation and Implementation

Management Structure

While all issues related to the voluntary repatriation and initial reintegration of Afghan refugees are co-ordinated by UNHCR's Regional Office in Afghanistan, the UNHCR Representative for the Islamic Republic of Iran is responsible for the country programme.

Co-ordination

UNHCR activities are implemented in collaboration with the Government, notably with the Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Health and Education. The office maintains its long-term partnerships with other UN agencies such as WFP, UNIDP, UNDCP, UNFPA, and UNICEF. It also co-operates with the Iranian Red Crescent Society and with a number of NGOs, as well as with IOM.

| Offices |
|-----------|
| Teheran |
| Ahwaz |
| Dogharoun |
| Mashad |
| Milak |
| Zahedan |

| Partners |
|--|
| Government Agencies |
| Ministry of Interior |
| Ministry of Education |
| NGOs |
| Adventist Development and Relief Agency |
| Family Planning Association of the Islamic Republic of Iran |
| Faragir Jonoub Training Institution |
| International Consortium for Refugees in Iran |
| Iraqi Refugee Aid Council |
| Literacy Movement Organisation |
| <i>Médecins Sans Frontières</i> |
| Ockenden International |
| Pooya Education Research Society |
| Society for the Protection of Vulnerable People. |
| Society for the Protection of Children Suffering from Cancer |
| Vocational Training Centre, Zahedan |
| World Relief Foundation |

| Budget (USD) | |
|--|-------------------|
| Country | Annual Programme |
| Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination | 2,742,205 |
| Community Services | 1,067,730 |
| Domestic Needs | 539,699 |
| Education | 2,857,843 |
| Food | 0 |
| Forestry | 207,332 |
| Health | 3,849,711 |
| Income Generation | 250,000 |
| Legal Assistance | 1,162,800 |
| Operational Support (to Agencies) | 605,628 |
| Sanitation | 489,808 |
| Shelter / Other Infrastructure | 823,110 |
| Transport / Logistics | 219,500 |
| Water (non-agricultural) | 249,839 |
| Total Operations | 15,065,205 |
| Programme Support | 1,671,177 |
| Total | 16,736,382 |