

Executive Committee Summary

Country Operations Plan 2003 : IRAN

Context and Beneficiary Populations

According to the latest statistics provided by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (GIRI) and based on a registration carried out in 2001, there are 2,355,427 Afghans, 202,878 Iraqis and 5,522 other nationalities in Iran. The government refers to the group as 'Foreign Nationals'. This number does not include an estimated 8-10% who failed to register.

The majority of the Afghans and Iraqis reside in provinces bordering their country of origin or in major urban centers. Nearly 80,000 (or approximately 3%) live in 29 camps around the country. Some forty percent of the Afghans in Iran are known to live in and around Tehran. Many Afghans took refuge in Iran during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan or in the 1980s during and after the Soviet troop withdrawal. Several hundred thousand came the last three years due to the continued persecution, political and ethnic strife, and drought.

There are three distinct groups of Iraqi refugees in Iran. The largest group is Kurdish ethnicity from the three provinces of northern Iraq who arrived during the 1970s. The other groups, who arrived during the Iran-Iraq war (1980 – 1988), include the Feili Kurds (Shiites) who were denied Iraqi citizenship on the ground of their Iranian origin despite their residence in Iraq for several generations and the Arab Shiites from the central and southern Iraq.

UNHCR's Role and Policy Issues

UNHCR started its operation in Iran during the early 1980s, initially assisting Afghans and later expanding to assist Iraqi refugees. Various challenges in the countries of origin have undermined the possibility of large-scale repatriation movements and moreover frequently resulted in refugee influxes from both countries.

Continued presence of UNHCR in Iran is critical to provide protection and durable solutions. Radical changes in Afghanistan during 2001 offer the opportunity for a durable solution to the refugee problem. Provided the Afghan Transitional Administration creates a secure environment, UNHCR plans to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of several hundreds of thousands of Afghans from Iran during 2003.

In the course of 2003, durable solutions will also have to be found for Afghans who are unable to return home. UNHCR looks to work with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to identify opportunities for refugees in need of continued international protection. Where there is an unsatisfactory legal limbo now as regards to their civil rights (marriage, registration of children), labor rights, access to education etc, renewed legislation designed by Iranian policy makers may address this problem.

The strengthened relations between Iran and Iraq will likewise provide an impetus for the voluntary repatriation of Iraqi refugees. Both countries are anxious to find solutions.

Where voluntary repatriation is now a low-key, low level affair, it is likely to gain momentum during 2003. UNHCR expects monitoring and other activities to benefit Iranian returnees and will prepare to promote voluntary repatriation from Iran to Iraq.

UNHCR Iran will continue its capacity-building activities with the Ministry of Interior's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs, including preparedness capacity. UNHCR will also continue its outreach protection work and assistance programmes, focusing on the most needy – in this case the jobless, female-headed households, the elderly and the sick. Small-scale community-based projects for women, and other needy groups will begun in 2002 will continue in 2003.

Recently begun environmental activities will also continue in 2003. Projects such as tree planting, improvement of sanitation, drainage and water supply in camps and communities with high concentrations of refugees will be expanded. UNHCR Iran will look into possible joint funding of environmental projects with other UN Agencies in Iran.

Political Context

Iran has sustained its commitment towards refugees. The country has provided refuge to over 6 million Afghans and Iraqis over the last twenty years, and has allowed most of them to live in the place of their choice – mainly in and around the cities - and to work. Indeed, refugees have contributed towards the economic development of the country in last two decades. Despite signs of fatigue, donors have continued to support protection and assistance for refugees in Iran through UNHCR.

UNHCR's advocacy for refugees is hindered by the ongoing domestic debates such as unemployment, insecurity, drug trafficking and human smuggling, all of which are associated with the presence of foreigners, and in particular Afghans. These debates and attitudes permeate the political spectrum and may influence generous government policies.

In April 2000, the government introduced legislation – Article 48 of the Third Five Year Development Plan - requiring all foreign nationals not benefiting from work permits to leave the country - unless faced with a “physical threat” upon return to their home countries. The legislation prompted some Iranian employers to reduce the refugee employees. This trend continued in 2002. The recent changes in Afghanistan in late 2001, the strong Iranian wish to see Afghans return, and the increasingly adverse economic conditions in Iran for refugees may foster mass repatriation in 2003 – provided the economic and security situation in Afghanistan continues to improve.

As observed above, it is realistic to expect that some Afghans may wish to remain in Iran. In 2003 UNHCR will be asked for its guidance regarding the ‘residual caseload’ and their status.

Security Situation

The security situation in the country is expected to remain stable in 2003. Iran is a potent regional political leader and its importance cannot be underestimated especially in the volatile regional political environment.

Protection Issues

The evolution of the situation in Afghanistan has opened the possibility of sustainable repatriation. In the next couple of years, UNHCR will pursue the regional objective to advocate and facilitate an environment that permits safe and sustainable voluntary repatriation.

The Joint Programme implemented with the GIRI in 2000 set the stage for a two-pronged approach for Afghans in Iran - assisted repatriation for those who wish to return home; and screening of those who claim to be unable to return. UNHCR seeks an agreement with the government on the screening of Afghans in deportation detention and others who may be unwilling to return to Afghanistan. This will enable the Office to identify those who are in continued need of international protection.

UNHCR Iran expects to facilitate the return of up to 500,000 Afghans in 2003. For those who continue to require it, UNHCR will continue to provide international protection whilst ensuring women and children benefit equally as men. ANCHOR will maintain a modest resettlement program to benefit those with protection problems and other vulnerable groups.

Linkage with other Countries

Protection and assistance in Iran, including durable solutions, are linked intricately with Afghanistan and the neighboring countries. To ensure safe and sustainable return, a conducive return environment must continue to be strengthened in Afghanistan.

Activities and repatriation exercise are carried out in close consultation with Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular as well as with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in general. Assistance packages for repatriation are coordinated to avoid duplication and discrepancies. Protection issues are coordinated to ensure that repatriations are voluntary, and that refugees are informed of the security situation in the different areas in Afghanistan.

Capacity and Presence of IPs

BAFIA is UNHCR's major governmental interlocutor and implementing partner. Associated in implementing UNHCR's projects are the Ministry of Health in medical activities and the Ministry of Education and Training in education and training activities. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Ockenden and Global Partners are the only three international NGOs with significant assistance programmes. Refugee influxes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters have given the government experience in disaster and crisis response. The Iranian Red Crescent is the main arm of the government's disaster response.

Currently the government has made strides to provide a favourable environment for local NGOs. UNHCR has been able to increase the number of NGOs in its 2002 programme activities and will seek to expand their role further in 2003. It will continue to encourage the participation of NGOs in refugee assistance and will invest in capacity building.

Presence and Role of Other UN Agencies

Iran has a good presence of UN Agencies including WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNDCP, UNIC and WHO. UNHCR is by far the largest, making up almost 50% of the local and international staff of UN Agencies in Iran. UNHCR is also the only agency that has offices outside Tehran. Cooperation with UNDP and other UN Agencies remains strong and effective.

Programme Goals and Objectives

UNHCR objectives for 2003 include:

- Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees;
- Ensure access to a legal status in Iran for those persons in need of continued international protection;
- Within the context of Article 48, work towards the legalization of refugees' rights;
- Improve programme delivery and implementation in cooperation with the Government and implementing partners, targeting women, girls and vulnerable groups; and in line with the voluntary repatriation.

The eleven repatriation centers introduced in 2002 are likely to remain throughout 2003 and perhaps well into 2004, proportionally staffed with international and national UNHCR staff. For protection reasons and effective operational requirements, some key international staff will be in place as the operation progresses.

Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: <u>Afghan</u> refugees	
<p>Main Goal(s): To facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees; To ensure the effective protection of Afghan refugees/asylum-seekers; To address the essential needs of Afghan refugees in the country, especially women, children and vulnerable groups both in and outside the camps, while seeking to improve programme delivery and impact, in particular through increased involvement of NGOs and host Government.</p>	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and facilitate voluntary repatriation of Afghans in safety and dignity. • Identify refugees and persons in need of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics support, repatriation grant, food & non-food items provided for the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. Training provided to newly recruited staff and implementing partners on voluntary repatriation. • Joint screening mechanism established;

<p>protection among foreign nationals currently in Iran or arriving in the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the work of the Legal Committee. • Provide resettlement for eligible cases. • Provide material support to the most needy among the refugees recognized through the screening mechanism as well as complementary community services to address, in a non-discriminatory fashion, the needs of both refugees and local populations in refugee affected areas. • Ensure that all camp-based beneficiaries will have access to food/potable water, appropriate level of primary health care, in particular mother and child care, as well as ensuring access to primary education to school going age children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-registration system overhauled; • New documentation issued. • Extension of the mandate of the Legal Committee and Legal Adviser; • Legal assistance and representation provided to the refugees; • Involvement of Legal Adviser under the supervision of the Office of the Chief of Mission. • A Resettlement Unit, and related posts, established; • Liaison established with the embassies of resettlement countries. • Assistance provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water, sanitation - Support to education - Medical support/insurance - Micro-credit schemes • Establishment of rural health centers, school libraries for primary schools; • Training for refugee women, including literacy, health, etc. • Ensure basic care and maintenance and delivery/distribution of food; • Maintenance of water systems; • Equipping and staffing of health posts as well as carrying out of immunization campaigns for children; • Provision of school supplies and equipment to primary schools in the camp.
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Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Iraqi refugees	
<p>Main Goal(s): To facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Iraqi refugees; To ensure the effective protection of Iraqi refugees/asylum-seekers; To address the essential needs of Iraqi refugees in the country, especially women, children and vulnerable groups both in and outside the camps, while seeking to improve programme delivery and impact, in particular through increased involvement of NGOs and host Government.</p>	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Iraqi refugees in safety and with dignity. • Support the work of the Legal Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and ensure that: Iraqis return spontaneously and on a voluntary basis; • Assistance provided comparable to that for the Afghan repatriations. • Extension of the mandate of the Legal Committee and Legal Adviser; • Legal assistance and representation provided to the refugees; • Involvement of Legal Adviser under the supervision of the Office of the Chief of Mission.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resettlement for eligible cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Resettlement Unit, and related posts, established; • Liaison established with the embassies of resettlement countries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide complementary community services to address, in a non-discriminatory fashion, the needs of both non-camp refugees and affected local populations. • Ensure that all camp-based beneficiaries will have access to food/potable water, appropriate level of primary health care, in particular mother and child, as well as ensuring access to primary education to school age children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - water, sanitation - Support to education - Medical support/insurance - Micro-credit schemes; • Establishment of rural health centers, school libraries for primary schools; • Training for refugee women, including literacy, health, etc. • Ensure basic care and maintenance and delivery/distribution of food; • Maintenance of water systems; • Equipping and staffing of health posts as well as carrying out of immunization campaigns for children; • Provision of school supplies and equipment to primary schools in the camp.