

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 100,000 Afghan and 5,000 Iraqi refugees.
- Ensure a transparent and fair procedure to identify persons in need of protection.
- Devote a larger share of programme resources to addressing the needs of refugees living outside camps.
- Improve programme delivery and impact, particularly through the increased involvement of NGOs.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Afghan Refugees

In addition to the Government estimate of over two million Afghan refugees living in the Islamic Republic of Iran, between 700 and 1,000 Afghans a day were entering the country during the first months of 2001 as a result of the deteriorating security situation and drought in Afghanistan. There was a sharp increase in the number of refugees turning up at UNHCR offices seeking assistance, protection and resettlement.

The Government introduced a new legislation (Article 48) in the context of its review of the third Five-Year Development Plan. The new legislation is part of a broader legal framework adopted in April 2000, which requires all foreign nationals currently residing in Iran and not benefiting from a work permit to leave the country unless they would face physical threats if returned to their country of origin.

The public debate concerning refugees continued to link unemployment, insecurity, drug trafficking and human smuggling with the presence of foreigners, particularly Afghans. The situation worsened when thousands of Afghans were dismissed from

work as the authorities tried to create new employment opportunities for Iranians. As a result of the widely published new legislation and the growing tension towards Afghans the number of spontaneous returns increased. A lot of returnees were recent arrivals who were unsuccessful in finding job opportunities. The Government encouraged them to return and allowed them to return with as much money as they wished and without any customs limitations. Simultaneously the Government announced that over 80,000 “economic refugees” have been returned – an operation in which UNHCR was not involved. At end June around 3,000 to 4,000 people opted to return spontaneously to Afghanistan. UNHCR has requested the screening of these Afghans before they are returned to enable UNHCR to determine if they are in need of international protection or if they can return in safety and dignity. UNHCR border monitoring teams reported that up to 82,000 Afghan men and 8,300 families had been deported from Iran. Many of these were not documented by the authorities and had stayed in Iran for less than a year. As the Government had assured UNHCR that the new legislation would be implemented in adherence to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the office has urged the authorities to suspend measures that might lead deportations or compel Afghans to return to unsafe areas. UNHCR has also proposed cross-border relief operations to show the public in the Islamic Republic of Iran that there is an international response to the displacement of Afghans.

The Government has indicated that they may legalise the stay of up to one million Afghans, who have been in the Islamic Republic of Iran for a considerable period of time, but that they wish to establish a screening mechanism for the remaining 1.5 million to determine their status. Those found to be refugees would be transferred to camps. This would represent a major change

as presently only 77,000 of all refugees live in camps.

As part of the implementation plan of Article 48, the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs started to identify and register documented aliens in 28 provinces of Iran in February. During the second phase of this exercise (11 April – 17 May), the so-called undocumented aliens were registered. Government statistics indicate that a total number of 2,563,827 persons were registered during the two phases, of which 2,355,427 were Afghans, 202,878 were Iraqis, and 5,522 were of other nationalities. Reportedly, some 8-10% of the aliens in Iran did not show up for registration. The data collected through this registration exercise will form the basis for finalising the plans for implementation of Article 48.

Delegations from Canada, Sweden, Denmark and Norway have visited Iran and accepted about 800 of the 1,300 Afghan cases submitted for resettlement. In identifying refugees for resettlement, priority was given to those in a particularly vulnerable position, such as female-headed households and persons belonging to ethnic or religious minorities.

Iraqi Refugees

The 48,000 Iraqi refugees comprise Iraqi Kurds who arrived during the 1970s, Feilli Kurds who have been denied Iraqi citizenship and deported from Iraq on the grounds of their Iranian origin, and Arab Shiites from the south of Iraq. During the 1980s as a result of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi authorities expelled a large group of persons from Iraq to Iran on the ground that they were not Iraqi citizens. The expellees consisted of a mixed group of Iranian citizens who were living and working in Iraq and of others whose ancestors had come to Iraq from Iran but have always considered themselves to be Iraqi citizens and did not have any clear link to Iran.

Among the first generation of expellees, some managed to prove an Iranian identity

card while others were issued with a green card similar to the residence card given to most Iraqis requesting asylum in Iran. At present, a number of these persons, who were not able to prove their Iranian ancestry, fear that they will be dramatically affected by the implementation of the Article 48 of the Third five-year Development Plan.

Following a decree by the Government of Iraq granting amnesty to Iraqi nationals who left the country illegally, a slow repatriation movement started in 1999. The repatriation continued and in 2001, 97 Iraqi Kurds who chose to return to northern Iraq received a special subsistence allowance prior to their departure. UNHCR also assisted 386 Iraqi Arabs to repatriate and provided them with a repatriation package consisting of a small amount of cash and plastic sheeting.

Assistance Activities

The dialogue with the authorities regarding the establishment of a framework, under which NGOs could be involved in the implementation of UNHCR's programmes continued. The issue is complex as the Government does not allow UNHCR to fund international NGOs and insists that national NGOs should contribute to the project costs, which limits their ability to work with UNHCR.

The most critical problem facing refugee children who do not live in camps is the severe shortage of classrooms throughout the country. UNHCR agreed to construct seven schools with 32 classrooms in the major refugee affected provinces, Teheran, Khorasan and Sistan-Baluchestan. This will enable the Government to guarantee continued free access to education for some 200,000 Afghan and Iraqi refugee students. UNHCR also procured supplies for the camp-based schools that provided education for some 8,000 Afghan and Iraqi refugee children.

UNHCR's Medical Referral Unit rendered medical assistance to a total of 4,685 refugees while 2,719 were rejected, as they did not meet the strict eligibility criteria. In addition, 65 refugee children suffering from cancer received medical treatment and counselling and 30 Afghan refugee women registered for the reproductive health course to be held later this year. In the camps, 26 health post received basic medical supplies and equipment.

UNHCR developed a micro-finance scheme targeting 1,000 vulnerable urban refugee families or groups. So far 520 Afghan refugees have been selected and given small loans.

Legal assistance was given through a committee, which provides mediation in disputes between Afghan refugees and Iranian nationals. This is a preventive measure to make sure that physical protection problems do not arise. Of the 981 cases that were pursued, 876 were solved to the satisfaction of both parties.

UNHCR worked on the infrastructure in 7 Afghan and 22 Iraqi refugee camps and is constructing new shelters for 1,700 refugees currently living in tents. The water supply network and sanitation facilities were upgraded to overcome the problems of cumulated waste in all camps. The water in the camps was purified with chlorine powder to prevent water-borne diseases.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Number of Afghans whose voluntary repatriation was facilitated.	No Afghans repatriated with UNHCR assistance, while 30,540 returned spontaneously.
Number of Iraqis whose voluntary repatriation was facilitated	483 Iraqis repatriated
Number of people provided with legal assistance and counselling	981 cases of disputes processed, 876 cases settled.
Number of resettlement submissions	Cases comprising 1,300 persons submitted, while 800 were accepted for resettlement in third countries.
Number of refugees who do not live in camps who had access to in-patient medical/surgical care	A total of 7,404 refugees were screened, of which 4,685 were assisted.
Presence or absence of water-borne diseases in refugee camps	No water-related disease detected among the camp populations.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY– DECEMBER

The four main objectives guiding the work of UNHCR in The Islamic Republic of Iran remain valid, with the exception of the voluntary repatriation. UNHCR will continue to negotiate a joint screening mechanism with the Government to determine who is in continued need of international protection. UNHCR will also prioritise its activities to ensure assistance to those in need of international protection. Furthermore UNHCR will:

- Continue to re-orient programmes towards the majority of refugees living outside established camps;
- Improve its programmes through decentralised programming and implementation in co-operation with the authorities and other partners such as non-governmental organisations;
- Disseminate information on refugee issues through a document on UNHCR "definitions and rules" and the finalisation of a comparative study of the 1951 Convention and Iranian rules and regulations.
- Finalise a Refugee Law Dictionary (English/Farsi), and create a database on country of origin information
- Ensure the process of identifying and documenting the persons in need of protection through an accessible, fair and transparent procedure is started

- Continue to negotiate with the Government to find alternatives to the deportations and measures that compel Afghans to return.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available¹	Total Funds Obligated
APB	17,619,929	16,324,531	9,152,939	6,732,843

¹Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.