



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Country: Islamic Republic of Iran

Planning Year: 2004

Executive Committee Summary

Country Operations Plan 2004 : IRAN

(a) Context and Beneficiary Population(s)

(a.1) Overview of Beneficiary Population

UNHCR estimates that there are some 1.2 million Afghans in Iran: a registration carried out by the Government in 2001 recorded 2.3 million Afghans, 202,000 Iraqis and 5,522 other nationalities. The authorities maintain that not all Foreign Nationals registered, estimating that the total figure should be some 8 to 10% higher.

Iran's refugee population is one of the highest in the world. However, since the signature of the Tripartite Agreement (Joint Programme agreement on the voluntary repatriation of Afghans) between Afghanistan, Iran and UNHCR, on 4 April 2002, and through the Spontaneous Repatriation organized by the Government, some 376,247 Afghans were repatriated in 2002. Over 600,000 have repatriated at the time this COP is written.

More than 1,000 Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) repatriated in 2002. More are expected to return in 2004.

Most Afghans and Iraqis reside in provinces bordering their country of origin and in major urban centres. Only 77,980 or approximately 3% live in 29 camps around the country. Some 40% of the Afghans in Iran are known to live in and around Tehran. Most of the Afghan refugees now in Iran took refuge during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, up to the end of the Najibullah regime in 1992. Several hundred thousand, however, came during the last three years (before the fall of the Taliban Government) due to the continued persecution, political and ethnic strife, and drought.

Some of the Iraqi refugees are Kurds from the three provinces of Northern Iraq who came to Iran during the 1970s and later. Others are Feili Kurds (Shiites) who were denied Iraqi citizenship on the grounds that they were of Iranian origin, despite the fact that they had lived in Iraq for several generations. A third group of Arab Shiites had fled from Central and Southern Iraq. The Feili Kurds and the Arab Shiites entered Iran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) and after the Gulf War in the early nineties.

(a.2) UNHCR's Role and Policy Issues

UNHCR commenced its operation in Iran in the early 1980s, providing care and maintenance assistance and protection to Afghans and then Iraqi refugees. It is to be hoped that the situation in Iraq will soon stabilise and that Iraqi refugees will be able, like Afghans, to return to homes they have not seen for many years. It is also hoped that conditions inside Afghanistan will improve significantly (particularly in terms of security and reconstruction) making repatriation an increasingly attractive alternative to life in Iran.

Whilst the focus of UNHCR's operations concerning Afghans will continue to concentrate on repatriation, the Office will also need to focus on finding solutions for Afghans who will or cannot go home.

In 2004, UNHCR will continue its outreach protection work and selected assistance programmes, focusing on the most needy – in this case those who have lost their jobs, female-headed households, the elderly and the sick.

(a.3) The Context

Over the past 20 years, Iran has provided refuge to several million Afghans and Iraqis. Most have been allowed to live where they choose – mainly in and around the cities - and to work (albeit in professions and trades not attractive to most Iranians). The refugees have thus contributed towards the economic development of the country in last two decades.

Donors have continued to support UNHCR's protection and assistance work in favour of the refugees in Iran. It is vital that the international community acknowledge the burden Iran has shouldered in accommodating these people.

In April 2000, the government introduced legislation – Article 48 of the Third Five Year Development Plan - requiring all foreign nationals not in possession of work permits to leave the country. This led many employers to dismiss refugee workers.

(a.4) Protection Issues

Over the next two years UNHCR will focus on the most desirable durable solution to the Afghan refugee situation - voluntary repatriation. As long as conditions in Afghanistan remain precarious, UNHCR will limit its action to facilitating the repatriation of those Afghans who wish to return.

It will also support the repatriation of Iraqis who wish to repatriate from Iran.

Screening of Afghan deportees will continue in 2004.

UNHCR will continue to provide protection to Afghans who do not repatriate. UNHCR will maintain a modest resettlement programme to benefit those with protection problems and other vulnerable groups.

(a.5) Linkage with other Countries

Continued improvements to the situation in Afghanistan will determine the pace and sustainability of repatriation. Relations with Afghanistan are clearly key. It is expected that contacts between the governments of Iran and Afghanistan will continue to increase through 2004.

The repatriation operation is carried out in close consultation with UNHCR offices and governments not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

(a.6) Capacity and Presence of IPs

BAFIA (Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs) 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.

There is a shortage of experienced Non-Governmental Organizations - both local and international. Only three international NGOs have significant assistance programmes: another three run smaller operations.

The government has developed considerable expertise in responding to emergencies (such as large refugee influxes, earthquakes). The Iranian Red Crescent is the main arm of the government's disaster response, but is not equipped to operate effectively in a complex environment.

There are about a dozen local NGOs, of which only a few are firmly established. Even these are not operational on a national scale. They are not multi-disciplined, and lack the financial and practical capacity to be major players in crisis response.

(a.7) Presence and Role of Other UN Agencies

Many UN agencies are present in Iran, including WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNDCP, UNIC and WHO. UNHCR is, however, by far the largest agency, making up over 50% of the local and international staff of UN Agencies in Iran. Co-operation with UNDP and other UN agencies remains good and effective.

(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

For the last few years, UNHCR's work in Iran has been guided by four major objectives. The objectives for 2004 are :

- Facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees
- Ensure that refugees who are unable or unwilling to return to their countries for protection reasons may continue to enjoy the protection and asylum status offered by the Iranian authorities
- Promote the development of a legal framework which addresses the management of the situation of asylum-seekers and refugees in Iran

The repatriation centres opened under the Joint Repatriation programme in 2002 will continue in 2004. OCM Tehran will adjust staffing levels according to the level of activity required.

The total budget for 2004 will be reduced drastically. The Office will focus primarily on the voluntary repatriation of Afghans and Iraqis and on working to remove obstacles to repatriation in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Protection activities targeting refugees in Iran will also remain a priority.

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Afghan refugees	
Main Goal(s):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and facilitate voluntary repatriation of Afghans in safety and dignity. 	<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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify refugees and persons in need of protection among foreign nationals currently in Iran or arriving in the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint screening mechanism established; • Re-registration system overhauled; • New documentation issued.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the work of the Legal Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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. 	Assistance provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water, sanitation, shelter • Support to education • Medical support • Micro-credit schemes • Establishment of rural health centers, school libraries for primary schools; • Training for refugee women, including literacy, health, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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"> • Ensure basic care and maintenance; • Delivery/distribution of food; • Maintenance of water and sanitary systems; • Equipping and staffing of health posts as well as provision of drugs/ medicines; • Provision of textbooks, school supplies and equipment to primary schools in the camp.

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Iraqi refugees	
Main Goal(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Iraqi refugees in safety and with dignity. 	<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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the work of the Legal Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	Assistance provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • water, sanitation • Support to education • Medical support • Micro-credit schemes; • Establishment of rural health centers, school libraries for primary schools; • Training for refugee women, including literacy, health, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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"> • Ensure basic care and maintenance; • Delivery/distribution of food; • Maintenance of water and sanitary systems; • Equipping and staffing of health posts as well as provision of drugs/ medicines; • Provision of textbooks, school supplies and equipment to primary schools in the camp.