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Islamic Republic of Iran

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Contents

Background ................................................................................................................................................. 1

Geographical Spread ................................................................................................................................. 2

The Interim Strategic Plan (I-CSP) ........................................................................................................... 3

Funding and contributions .......................................................................................................................... 8

2020 Nobel Peace Prize ............................................................................................................................. 10
Background
The World Food Programme, the leading humanitarian organization fighting hunger worldwide and the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate reopened offices in Iran in 1987. Since then, the organization has played a crucial role in supporting Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers residing in the country. Iran currently hosts one of the world's largest and protracted urban refugee situations in the world. The initial wave of Afghan asylum seekers arrived following the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 with a second major influx occurring at the height of Taliban control over Afghanistan between 1994 and 2001. Iraqis sought refuge in Iran in the ‘80s and ‘90s, during the first and second gulf wars.

Since 2003, when relative peace was established in Afghanistan, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has promoted the repatriation of Afghans to their homeland; meanwhile, the Government has continuously stressed the financial burden of refugees on Iran's economy and has expressed the need for greater international assistance to reduce this strain. Due to poor living conditions and heightened insecurity in Afghanistan since 2008, the overall rate of returnee refugees has steadily declined to less than 2,000 returnees per year.

According to the latest figures communicated by the Government in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing, 800,000 refugees live in Iran, of which 780,000 are Afghans and 20,000 are Iraqis. It is estimated that 96% of refugees in Iran live in cities, towns, and villages side by side with the Iranian host community, while 4% live in 20 settlements across Iran.

Although repatriation is universally regarded as the most durable solution for refugee situations, the Government and United Nations are committed to support refugees until such time the situation becomes conducive for safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees to their homeland.

The Need for WFP Assistance
Various factors have made it increasingly difficult for the most vulnerable refugees to make ends meet. Nationwide subsidies that also benefited refugees were phased out in 2010 and financial aid measures that have been introduced to vulnerable Iranians are not available to refugees. Increased cost of living has further exacerbated levels of food insecurity for the most vulnerable refugees, making WFP assistance all the more crucial to the poorest of the poor who are housed in settlements.
Geographical Spread

20 settlements under WFP assistance are scattered across 13 provinces spanning from northwest to central, southwest and northeast of the country. A round trip monitoring visit to all the settlements covers more than 10,500 kilometers.

Progress so far / Achievements

Over the past 34 years, WFP has continuously strived to improve food consumption of vulnerable refugee households through monthly food distributions to refugee families.

WFP has also made great strides in reducing the gender gap and empowering young girls through education incentives since 1999, with its “oil for education” scheme. Through this project, WFP incentivized families to send their girls to school in return for four bottles of vegetable oil that the girls took back home after each month of regular attendance, contributing to the household economy while receiving an education. Data indicates that more than 80 percent of school-aged girls are now enrolled and attending school regularly, which marks a significant progress from baseline data of 30 percent enrolment of girls in schools at the beginning of the project over two decades ago.

In close consultation with the government counterparts, refugee communities and donors, in 2018, WFP shifted from its traditional way of distributing food to a predominantly cash based distribution modality. Through consultations with stakeholders, the best formula for refugees in Iran was identified as a combination of unconditional cash assistance through bankcards and continued wheat flour distribution. This combination method offers refugees freedom of choice to buy food items and diversify their food intake while ensuring that bread is available to refugees as in the past.
The Interim Country Strategic Plan (I-CSP)

In November 2020, WFP framework of operations in Iran, the “Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018-2020)” was extended for an additional two years until 2022 to align it with both the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2017–2022) and the country's 6th National Development Plan (2016–2022). During this extended period, WFP will continue to contribute towards improving livelihoods and food security of the most vulnerable refugees in settlements within the framework of the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), which was agreed upon by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. WFP has been an active member of the SSAR since its inception 2012.

Building on more than three decades of experience in assisting refugees in Iran, WFP has introduced a new cash component in its ICSP, to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of its assistance and provide refugees with an opportunity to diversify their dietary intake and exercise freedom of choice for the composition of their food basket. The ICSP also supports empowering refugees and increasing their self-reliance through livelihood opportunities with a special focus on women.

The Strategic Plan will continue its efforts to eliminate the gender gap by focusing more intensely on supporting and encouraging young girls to regularly attend school.

Activities of the Interim Country Strategic Plan (I-CSP) 2018-2022

This five-year Strategic Plan with the overall budget of USD 33,597,169 million, will achieve its intended objective ensuring that food insecure refugees in Iran are able to meet their basic food and nutrition needs, through three activities:

Activity 1. Provide unconditional food assistance to food insecure refugees:

The new transfer modality covers 80 percent of the daily food needs for food insecure male-headed households and 100 percent of the needs for female-headed households by providing them with in-kind wheat flour and cash for food through ATM debit cards. By introducing cash, refugees will have purchasing power and freedom of choice of food items which in turn will boost the economy of the settlements as majority of the shops where refugees source their food are run by refugees themselves.

In 2020, WFP introduced School Feeding for all refugee students in school through distribution of healthy snacks. A combination of milk, nutritious biscuits and nuts to ensure that no child attends school on an empty stomach.

Activity 2: Provide conditional support to refugees, especially to refugee women and girls, to incentivize and facilitate educational and livelihood

At the end of each scholastic month, primary and secondary level girl students who regularly attend school will receive a monthly allowance of cash in debit cards issued in their own name as an incentive to learn and build their capacity.

World Bank studies have shown that a woman's income can rise by 10 to 20 percent for each year of schooling. Furthermore, keeping refugee girls in school decreases the possibility of marrying them off at an early age. Many of the girls who completed their education have gone on to become health workers in settlements, contributing to their communities while also helping to elevate the image of women in the Afghan society.

WFP also supports a variety of livelihood activities for refugees to help improve their self-reliance and generate income for the families, as long as they are in Iran, and ensure they have a sustainable means of income upon their return to their homeland once the situation is conducive for a safe and voluntary return.

Welding workshops, bakeries and Tailoring workshops, greenhouses, fish farming and bag making are a few of the livelihood opportunities WFP has made available to refugee men and women.
Activity 3: Provide support to the Government on emergency preparedness and response:

Although WFP's intervention in Iran is focused mainly on assisting refugees, the organization has the operational capacity to support the Government and people of Iran in an emergency response should the need be felt in case of a major natural disaster that would exacerbate the capacity of the Government to respond.

In 2019 and 2020, Iran was lashed by torrential rains, which caused massive flooding in most of Iran's 31 provinces. In response to flash flooding in 2019 and 2020, WFP delivered mixed commodities in the form of family emergency food packages worth USD $1,500,000 to the affected people in 6 provinces through the Iranian Red Crescent Society. These 30 kilogram emergency food packs catered to the food and nutritional needs of at least 143,000 persons for one month in Khuzestan, Lorestan, Sistan & Baluchestan, Ilam, Kohgilouyeh & Boyerahmad provinces.

Supply Chain Arrangements

Cash:

Cash based transfers require robust and well-developed financial and Information Technology infrastructure, which is available in Iran. Settlement authorities regularly update the beneficiary list and once data is verified by WFP cash entitlements are transferred at the beginning of each month to the debit cards issued in the name of the head of households. Similarly, the cash education incentive is transferred upon receipt and verification of girls’ attendance records in schools.

In-kind:

Wheat flour is procured locally from local suppliers/millers. Local purchase ensures short lead-time and quick delivery mitigating potential deterioration of food quality as a result of long transit or storage time for imported commodities.

WFP purchases wheat flour from a roster of suppliers through a competitive process. WFP appointed superintendents conduct quality and quantity controls of the commodity prior to delivery to settlements to ensure the wheat flour conforms to WFP specifications and regulations of the Iranian Institute of Standards. Using WFP's end-to-end supply chain management system and the Logistics Execution Support System, wheat flour purchases are tracked from the point of loading until final distribution.

Partnerships (Implementing partners)

As per previous years, WFP will continue to implement its project in close partnership with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iran.

WFP's partner for livelihood activities in agricultural sector in the settlements is the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) who became a signatory to the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees SSAR in 2016.

WFP together with UNHCR and BAFIA conducts regular process and post distribution monitoring visits to all settlements to ensure that refugees have access to cash and can purchase adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain their food security at an acceptable level at all times. WFP also monitors wheat flour distributions to ensure that storage, handling and distribution of this commodity is in line with WFP guiding principles.
Emergency Operations

COVID-19 response:

Iran reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 infections on 19 February 2020. By early March, the country was in the throes of a full-fledged pandemic. The number of confirmed cases and fatalities skyrocketed, making Iran one of the hardest hit countries in the region.

With global shortages of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and closed borders in Iran and many other countries worldwide, lack of PPEs posed a major challenge for health workers fighting the pandemic on the frontlines.

Refugees were also at risk of potential exposure to COVID-19 infection. The spread of COVID-19 posed an increased risk in refugee settlements being a relatively confined community, furthermore loss of income for already vulnerable communities such as refugees could lead to the deterioration of food security and nutrition situation in settlements.

WFP Iran received a generous contributions of USD 7 million from the Government of Japan and USD 1.1 million from the Government of Germany to support its COVID-19 emergency response operation.

These contributions enabled WFP Iran to purchase more than 3,000,000 PPEs for Iranian Red Crescent Society’s (IRCS) staff and volunteers who are part of the COVID-19 national task force fighting the pandemic on the

frontlines, and also to augment WFP’s assistance package to vulnerable refugees living in settlements in Iran. Through ad-hoc top-up distributions and adaption of lentils and vegetable oil to their food baskets during the pandemic.

WFP’s partner in times of emergency is the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) with which WFP has stand-by agreements to respond to natural disasters since 2002.
Funding and Contributions

Since WFP has no independent source of funds, all contributions whether cash or in-kind must be accompanied by the cash needed to move, manage and monitor WFP food assistance, or “full cost recovery” concept. WFP’s funding comes from Governments, Private Sector and individuals.

Individual Donations

With the new cash-based transfer modality in place, a beneficiary could receive his or her daily nutritional requirements with the investment of only 25 cents (US Dollar) per day. WFP encourages Iranian citizens and corporations to get involved and support WFP’s efforts in building a world without hunger.

All donations—large or small—have the power to make a difference. Online payment gateways, mobile banking, SMS payment, and ATM transfers are available in Iran to facilitate individual donations to WFP.

Celebrity Partners

Throughout the years, many Iranian artists, sports figures, and influencers have pledged their support to WFP Iran by lending their voice to the voiceless hungry poor of the world, speaking openly about issues related to food security and joining WFP in its global fight against hunger in many public events and campaigns for WFP Iran.
2020 Nobel Peace Prize

In October 2020, the Norwegian Nobel Committee decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize to WFP "for its efforts to combat hunger, for its contribution to bettering conditions for peace in conflict-affected areas and for acting as a driving force in efforts to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict."

WFP has been working on the frontlines of emergencies for more than 50 years, bringing hope to millions caught in conflict. Many of the people we help are fleeing violence, leaving their whole lives behind.

The link between hunger and conflict is a vicious circle. Where there is conflict, there is hunger. And where there is hunger, there is often conflict.

When fighting drives large numbers of people from their homes, their land and their jobs, they are more likely to go hungry. But the opposite is also true. Food shortages can fan the flames of social tensions and fuel injustices, which may ultimately trigger or exacerbate conflicts.

Worse still, despite its prohibition under international humanitarian law, the use of starvation as a weapon of war is still widespread.

Food security, peace and stability go together. Without peace, we cannot end world hunger; and while there is hunger, we will never have a peaceful world.

We in WFP are very proud to have been acknowledged with this prestigious award and will continue to strive for a world with Zero Hunger.