

IRAN

January-March 2023

The Islamic Republic of Iran is host to one of the largest and most protracted urban refugee situations in the world and has provided asylum to refugees for over four decades. In addition to the hundreds of thousands who crossed the border in 2021 and 2022 using both regular and irregular means, the country has been **host to millions of Afghans**.

In March, UNHCR launched the **2023 Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP)**, to support host governments to address humanitarian needs. It aims to ensure that no one is left behind and that the needs of Afghans and their host communities can be met. For Iran, the RRP targets **3.3 million**

Afghans of varying status (both refugees and asylum-seekers) and the host community.

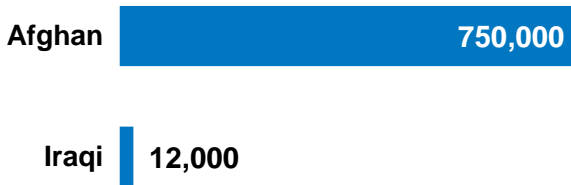
Meanwhile, Iranian borders remain officially closed, but Afghans continued making their way to Iran informally through unofficial border crossing points. According to evolving estimates by the Government of Iran, over **1,000,000** Afghans fled to Iran since January 2021.

Sustained international humanitarian support remains needed to help the Government of Iran maintain its inclusive refugee policies.

KEY POPULATION FIGURES

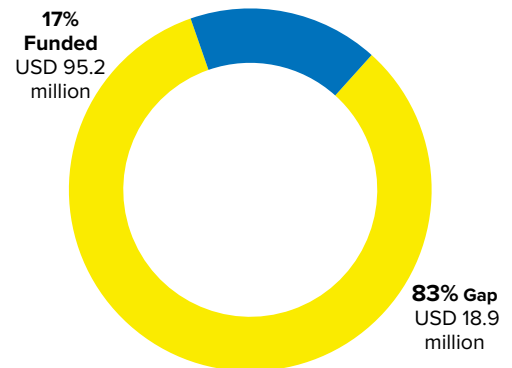
762,000 Registered Refugees


Based on the data received from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in December 2022.




USD 114.1 MILLION
NEEDED FOR IRAN IN 2023

As of 28 March 2023



 **99%** of registered refugees live in urban areas side by side with the local community.

 **1%** of registered refugees live in **20** refugee settlements in **12** provinces of Iran.

267,000 Afghan Passport Holder
360,000 Afghans with Resident Permit
2.6 Headcounted Afghans
500,000 Undocumented

In April 2022, the Government of Iran initiated a **headcount exercise** for the undocumented and newly arrived Afghans in the country. The exercise was concluded on 30 June 2022.

Registration and documentation

The Government of Iran is responsible for the asylum process, and annually renews refugee identification cards - *Amayesh* cards for Afghans and *Hoviat* cards for Iraqis. These cards give refugees conditional freedom of movement, access to basic services and eligibility for temporary work permits. The asylum space in Iran is shaped by documentation status. Whilst documented asylum-seekers and refugees have larger access to rights and services in Iran, undocumented asylum-seekers are at heightened risk of deportation. Therefore, advocating for regularization of undocumented Afghans through different documentation schemes is priority for UNHCR.

It is estimated that some **2,000** individuals continue to make their way to Iran daily. Based on UNHCR estimates, a large number of all new arrivals are returned by the government through border areas. Smaller percentages include people who will continue moving to Türkiye and the EU and those who chose to come to Iran for economic or family reasons before returning to Afghanistan on their own. UNHCR estimates that by the end of 2023, **82,000** new arrivals remained in Iran and need protection and assistance.

Durable solutions

In February 2023, UNHCR issued an update on its [Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan](#). As such, UNHCR does not promote returns to Afghanistan and only facilitates **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees who chose to return to their countries of origin. From January to end March 2023, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of **97** returnees to Afghanistan. This represents a **23** per cent increase compared to the **78** returns facilitated in the same period in 2022. Moreover, **8** per cent of the returnees were students who went back to Afghanistan to apply for a student visa and return to Iran.

While in 2021 UNHCR Iran received no quota for **resettlement** of Afghan refugees, in 2022 it worked with Member States providing resettlement quotas and the Government of Iran to resettle **3,092** refugees, given the increasing protection needs of refugees in Iran combined with the security situation in Afghanistan. From January to end March 2023, a total of **1,163** individuals (324 cases) were submitted to resettlement countries for resettlement consideration.

Cash-based interventions

UNHCR provides cash assistance to refugees and asylum seekers who are highly vulnerable, helping them address their immediate protection and basic necessities. As such, they can utilize the multipurpose cash according to their specific necessities, whether it is for food, accommodation, medical treatment, or other vital expenses. As of the end of March 2023, UNHCR had distributed cash aid to **3,108** households, supporting **15,000** individuals, and utilizing a budget exceeding USD **1** million.

Education

Since May 2015, all children in Iran have had access to primary and secondary education, regardless of their documentation status. Refugee, undocumented and foreign national children study side by side with Iranian school children and follow the same national curriculum:

- According to the Ministry of Education (MoE), the number of Afghan and Iraqi children enrolled in primary and secondary schools for the 2022-2023 scholastic year is **800,080** including **385,000** undocumented children. Worsening economic conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers, combined with a lack of enrolment capacity in schools, has hampered many Afghan children's access to education, resulting some 200,000 out-of-school children. In 2023, UNHCR is supporting the government by co-funding the completion of the construction of nine schools from 2022 for refugee and host community children in refugee-hosting provinces. The distribution of 21,590 tablets to support refugee students' remote learning started in late 2022 and is ongoing with an average of 87 per cent distribution countrywide.
- UNHCR also supports tertiary education for refugees through the DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship programme. In 2023, under the **DAFI scholarship programme**, some **470** refugee students will benefit from support with tuition fees and living allowances.

Health

UNHCR works with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME), to ensure that all refugees have access to these vital and lifesaving services. These joint interventions include medical referrals, prevention, and harm reduction services through individual and group counselling.

- **Primary healthcare:** Primary healthcare, which includes vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines, and family planning, is available for free for refugees and undocumented Afghans in health posts located in settlements and refugee-populated urban areas. In 2023, UNHCR is supporting the cost of some **207** essential health personnel in **26** health posts located in **11** settlements

and 15 refugee hosting districts in urban areas. In addition, UNHCR is also covering the procurement of essential medicine for these health centres. So far in 2023, UNHCR has procured USD 10 million worth medical equipment to support in MoHME in coordination with BAFIA, supporting these health posts.

- **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI):** As part of the agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in cooperation with MoHME, all registered refugees have access to the national health insurance scheme, similar to Iranians, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services at a subsidized rate. For the 9th cycle (25 Feb 2023 to 24 Feb 2024), UNHCR assists with the insurance premium for up to **95,000** of the most vulnerable refugees, including their families who suffer from special diseases¹.

Livelihoods

Enhancing refugees' livelihoods remains a priority for UNHCR, as it can help refugees become more self-reliant and self-sufficient. enabling them to meet the basic needs of their families and become less dependent on humanitarian assistance, and ultimately preparing them for their return to Afghanistan, when conditions become conducive. In 2023, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government and non-governmental partners is implementing a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees. These interventions include certified technical and vocational training in some **60** occupations, including welding, gas piping, repair of appliances, electrician, tailoring, leather crafts, baking and confectionery. which will benefit a total of **836** refugees and vulnerable host community members, as well as income generation projects which are expected to be rolled out later in the year.

Inter-Agency Coordination

Inter-agency coordination to deliver the 2023 **Refugee Response Plan (RRP)** for the Afghanistan Situation through the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) was launched in March 2023 and was strengthened under the framework of the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) led by UNHCR in Iran. The RRP 2023 involves 15 humanitarian and development actors with a total budget of USD 199 million (UNHCR budget: USD 14,176,529) targeting 3.3 million Afghans and Iranians from the host community. The RRP 2022 requested budget was USD 259 million (of which only USD 123 million was received) with a target population of 2.2 million. On 9 March, the UNHCR inter-agency teams convened an Inter-Sector Coordination Group meeting. During the meeting, participants identified specific priorities, shared updates, and discussed settlement relocations in the context of Niatak in Sistan and Baluchestan and Rafsanjan in Kerman provinces, exchanged views on how to action protection mainstreaming at the sector level (supported by the protection sector) and reflected on reporting processes/ modalities. In support of the RRP programme cycle, efforts have been ongoing to rollout the updated RRP monitoring and reporting system for 2023. This platform, developed in consultation with partners, includes some minor tweaks which build on lessons learned from 2022.

Working with partners

BAFIA, of the Ministry of Interior, is UNHCR Iran's main government counterpart. UNHCR is closely following developments regarding the establishment of the National Migration Organization- an entity superseding BAFIA. The development of the NMO- whereby new structures for migration and asylum system would replace the existing ones- has been subject of discussion at the Iranian Parliament for several years. The architecture of the NMO is likely to be larger and more complex compared the structure of BAFIA while the coordination role of humanitarian organizations will remain through NMO.

- **Governmental:** Ministry of Education (MoE), Literacy Movement Organization (LMO), Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME), Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Iran Health Insurance Organization (IHIO).
- **National NGOs:** Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), Rebirth Society, Society for Recovery Support (SRS), Pars Development Activists Institute (PDA), Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (LIA), KIYANA, Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC)
- **UN Agencies and International Organizations:** UNHCR coordinates with UN partner agencies, NGOs and international organizations under the umbrella of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). The SSAR is a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy between UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

¹ Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoHME.

UNHCR Presence



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Source: UNHCR as of July 2022.

314 National Staff

57 International Staff

Offices:

1 Country Office in Tehran

1 Field Office in Tehran,

3 Sub-Offices in Mashhad, Kerman and Shiraz

2 Field Units in Esfahan

and Dogharoun

Financial information

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to the operation in Iran, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programs with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds.

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some USD **18.9 million as of 28 March 2023**:

Germany 6.4 million | **EU** 4.7 million | **Switzerland** 1.4 million | **Japan** 1.2 million | **UN Programme On HIV/AIDS** 0.04 million

Donors of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to the 2023 global programmes:

Germany | Private donors Germany | Denmark | Switzerland | Netherlands | Sweden | Norway | Belgium | Ireland

For more information, please contact:

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Links:

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