UNHCR facilitates voluntary repatriation for Afghan refugees who wish to return to their home country, once it is established that their return is voluntary, safe, dignified and durable. Since 2002, UNHCR Iran has supported nearly 1 million refugees to return to Afghanistan. However, as the situation in Afghanistan remains fragile, only a small number of Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran have shown willingness and ability to return to their home country. For as long as they have to remain in Iran, UNHCR supports the host government in providing Afghans with health, education and livelihoods opportunities. Individuals who are healthy, educated and have marketable-skills are typically more likely to return to their country of origin and feel capable of rebuilding their lives. Nonetheless, ultimately, a longer-term, political solution for Afghanistan’s protracted crisis is the only way to ensure safe, sustainable and voluntarily return of refugees.

Covid-19 had a clear impact on the low VolRep trend due to internal movement restrictions, fear of spreading the disease/contagion during travel and better access to health services in Iran. Those who nevertheless opt to repatriate have seen their livelihoods severely impacted in Iran and/or are willing to reunify with family members in Afghanistan.

UNHCR facilitates the return of Afghan students from Iran to Afghanistan to obtain student visas to pursue their studies back in their country of asylum.

UNHCR helps returnees with specific needs including unaccompanied or separated children and elderly persons.

Students excluded, the age distribution for men and women combined:
- 0-17: 39%
- 18-59: 39%
- 60+: 8%

In March 2021, there was also one Iraqi refugee who repatriated from West Azerbaijan to Erbil.

Sources: UNHCR Iran. Updated: May 2021. Contact: Patricia Delis-Gomez, Protection Officer, delis@unhcr.org; Farha Bhoyroo, Communications Officer, bhoyroo@unhcr.org.