IRAN

May – June 2021

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In June, Iran was battling with its fifth wave of COVID-19. Movement restrictions, closures of non-essential businesses and health protocols continued to be enforced throughout the country. On 19 June, the Iranian Ministry of Interior announced Ebrahim Raisi as the President-elect, with 61.95% of the votes in his favour and a voter turnout of 48.8%, the lowest recorded to date. In April 2021, the US announced a plan to withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan by 11 September 2021, and by 22 June, 50% of the troops had already withdrawn. The Taliban thereafter made considerable gains in the country. UNHCR stepped up its contingency planning and preparations amid political developments in Afghanistan and the related expected increase in (internal and potentially cross-border) displacement.

**800,000 REFUGEES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>780,000</th>
<th>20,000</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>Iraqi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OVER 4M AFGHANS IN IRAN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>800,000</th>
<th>2.6 M</th>
<th>586,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>refugees</td>
<td>undocumented</td>
<td>passport holders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on the data received from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing. The Afghan/Iraqi breakdown is based on UNHCR’s estimations.

96% of refugees live in urban areas side by side with the local community

4% of refugees live in 20 refugee settlements in Iran

**POPULATION MOVEMENTS**

**VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION**

In 2021, 706 individuals had returned from Iran to their country of origin by the end of June, as part of UNHCR’s voluntary repatriation programme. UNHCR continued carrying out voluntary repatriations from its Dogharoun Field Unit.

**UNDOCUMENTED RETURNS**

Additionally, 364,000 undocumented Afghans have returned to Afghanistan since the beginning of 2021, an increase of more than 35% compared to the same period in 2020, potentially due to mainly losses in livelihoods linked with COVID-19 in Iran.

**RESETTLEMENT**

By the end of June 2021, 37 individuals had departed for resettlement to New Zealand (18), Norway (2), Sweden (8) and the UK (9). 10 resettlement cases (26 individuals) had been submitted to three countries, namely Finland, Norway and Sweden. During the same period 35 individuals were accepted by countries, namely Iceland (19), New Zealand (4), Norway (6) and Sweden (6).

At the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) that began on June 22, UNHCR presented the situation of resettlement in Iran, emphasizing the continuous reduction of quota allocated to Iran despite the increasing needs/vulnerabilities of refugees. UNHCR Iran currently has no quota for resettlement (down from the minimal 120 for 2020) – however, out of the 800,000 refugees in Iran, 22% are considered vulnerable and around 10% are estimated to have resettlement needs.

**ONWARD MOVEMENTS**

In the first half of 2021, 745 Afghan asylum seekers and migrants out of a total of some 3,800 individuals arrived in Greece - a decrease of nearly 80% from the prior year. Pushbacks at sea have likely contributed to the decrease in arrivals. UNHCR continues to publicly urge states to investigate all reported instances of pushbacks, and to cease such practices.
In the Western Balkans, some 3,245 Afghans are estimated to have arrived in the first half of 2021. 563 Afghans were estimated to have arrived in the Western Balkans in June 2021, which represents a slight increase in the average number of arrivals when compared to the previous five months—and significantly higher than in May 2021. A comparison with the same period in 2020 suggests a downward trend regarding new arrivals: some 5800 Afghan arrivals in the first half of the year, with nearly 1600 having arrived in June 2020 alone.\(^1\)

**PROTECTION**

**REGISTRATION/DOCUMENTATION**

In May 2021, the government announced the promulgation of an executive instruction on the implementation of the Amayesh 16 exercise. All eligible groups are required to approach Kefalat centres on the basis of preset appointments. In a positive development, the requirement of Tazkirah has again been suspended for this round of the exercise (as it has been a challenge for Afghans to receive this document due to delays from the Afghan Embassy).

The amended Nationality law was promulgated for implementation on 2 June 2020 by the Cabinet of Ministers and started being implemented in October 2020. UNHCR continues to provide support to refugees for application through legal consultations and advocacy with the Government. According to the Ministry of Interior, in May, 28,000 children below the age of 18 had filed applications for naturalization. This number represents 6,000 new applications since March 2021. Iranian nationality has so far been granted to 1,401 children born to Iranian mothers and foreign fathers. While the law does not give mothers and fathers equal rights to confer nationality to their children, it represents significant progress.

In May, two new E-Tazkirah centres opened in Esfahan and Shiraz, facilitating the access of Afghans who previously had to travel to other provinces to get their documents verified.

**CASE MANAGEMENT**

In June, 2,482 refugees contacted UNHCR via its receptions and hotlines. The main reasons for the approaches were to receive assistance (1,875), resettlement (204) and health reasons (142).

In June 2021, UNHCR offices collectively referred 197 cases to various NGOs/INGOs and charities for assistance. Cash assistance, legal/protection counselling, health and psycho-social assistance were recorded as the three main reasons for these referrals.

In early June, the transfer values for providing ‘relief of disability’ items (wheelchair, hearing aid, prosthesis, etc) were updated (increased) to ensure a more meaningful and impactful intervention, given the widespread inflation rate in Iran over the past years. Relief of disability support is provided as a complementary intervention to Multi-Purpose Cash (MPC), in order to mitigate the risk that families may deprioritize the needs of persons with disabilities, if targeted support is not provided.

UNHCR’s reception and counselling of refugees remained largely virtual, through phone and email, due to COVID-19. However, key protection activities, such as interviews of critical protection cases (typically CP, GBV, VolRep and RST cases), were conducted in-person on a case-by-case basis. For some refugees, remote case management is an opportunity to be able to reach UNHCR without having to spend time and money on travel, exposing them to COVID-19, however face-to-face counselling continues to be considered the preferred mode of interaction by many.

UNHCR Iran continues to monitor the COVID-19 situation across all provinces where we are present, and is developing guidance on how to expand in-person interaction with persons of concern based on the local COVID-19 conditions in different provinces. In the meantime, offices are using the guidance on remote case management for child protection and gender-based violence to remotely yet adequately address at-risk cases when required.

**LEGAL ASSISTANCE**

From May to the end of June 2021, 200 individuals had their cases examined by 16 Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs), as part of a joint UNHCR-BAFIA initiative to provide legal assistance to refugees in Iran, to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. A total of 682 individuals were also assisted by UNHCR-Hired Lawyers (UHLs) from May to the end of June 2021. Due to the COVID-19 situation, UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely.
EDUCATION

As per information shared by the Government of Iran, some 500,000 students (including 470,000 Afghans) have been enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic year in Iran, including some 138,000 undocumented Afghans. In Iran, UNHCR supports the efforts of the Government in providing access to formal primary and secondary education to all children, regardless of documentation.

UNHCR offices across the country continued to report that refugee students face challenges in accessing remote lessons due to a lack of internet connectivity and of smartphones/tablets, as schools continue to remain closed due to COVID-19. To mitigate these challenges, UNHCR procured 21,500 tablets for students. UNHCR is currently following up on the distribution of these tablets by the Government before the commencement of the scholastic year in September.

At tertiary level, UNHCR will continue its support to refugee students through DAFI scholarship programme, which offers qualified refugee students the possibility to earn an undergraduate degree. In 2021, some 569 university students will receive scholarship support. The DAFI programme is being implemented in Iran through a national NGO partner the Pars Development Actors Institute (PDA) and in close coordination with the Government of Iran.

HEALTH

For more information on UNHCR’s COVID-19 response in Iran, please consult the UNHCR Iran COVID-19 Update.

Since the start of the 7th cycle of the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) in February 2021, enrolments continued countrywide, and all vulnerable refugees who were eligible for a free UPHI booklet - the fee for which is paid by UNHCR - were informed by UNHCR and our governmental counterpart to approach enrolment centers (Pishkan centers) to collect their insurance booklets. The insurance booklet allows refugees to access secondary and tertiary healthcare at affordable cost through more than 1,000 public hospitals countrywide, similar to Iranian nationals. Refugees enrolled in UPHI only have to pay 10% of franchise fee for their COVID-19 treatment and hospitalization and 30% franchise fee for para-clinical services in all Ministry of Health affiliated hospitals and those contracted with Iran’s Health Insurance Organization. By June 2021, a total of 79,082 refugees had enrolled in the UPHI, out of which 72,389 (60% out of the 120,000) refugees were vulnerable and special disease cases. In Iran, refugees have access to free of charge primary health care.

LIVELIHOODS

Between May to June 2021, 2,563 individuals had received multipurpose cash support from UNHCR, out of a total of 18,175 individuals who will benefit from this assistance in 2021. The multipurpose cash assistance helps households to meet their basic needs with choice and dignity. Other cash supports included cash for refugee focal points, cash for relief of disability, cash for resettlement, and cash for voluntary repatriation, where a total of 243 individuals were assisted.

In 2021 UNHCR continues to provide direct multi-purpose cash and cash for basic needs for COVID-19 through its offices. It also collaborated with BAFIA Provincials to provide vulnerable households with cash cards. Between May to June, some 3,782 affected by the pandemic and its consequences were assisted. In addition, through a partnership agreement with the Iraqi Refugees Aid Council (IRAC) organization, multi-purpose cash will be provided to 120 Iraqi households in Tehran, Qom, Ilam and Khuzestan provinces for which assessments are ongoing.

As most resources have already been exhausted by families, resorting to negative coping mechanisms, many have started selling household items to make ends meet. In Mashhad, more than 10 families reported having sold some household items since the start of the pandemic.

Increase in prices of basic food items such as milk, bread and cheese continues to be the main reason for families to reduce their food intake to two or even one meal per day which has adverse impact on the growth of children and adolescents. Families with similar problems were assessed by UNHCR and referred to charities or were considered for multi-purpose cash if eligible.
CONTINGENCY RESPONSE

In view of the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan, between May-June 2021 UNHCR took a number of steps to scale-up emergency preparedness efforts.

Firstly, following the activation of a level 1 (and subsequently level 2) emergency, UNHCR Iran activated the Refugee Coordination Model. As part of this, a dedicated strategic coordination group, the Refugee Emergency Coordination Group (RECG) was established comprising of UN agencies who are part of the UN Crisis Management Team and key NGOs who contribute to the Inter-Agency Contingency Plan. While UNHCR’s preference remains inclusive coordination under the leadership of GIRI/BAFIA and continues to seek clarity from the government on their preferred arrangements, UNHCR has (with the support of BAFIA) taken the lead on coordinating preparedness efforts among international partners. In addition to the establishment of the RECG, UNHCR oversaw the activation/strengthening of 7 sectors (including Logistics and Supply). UNHCR is leading/co-lead 4 of these: Protection, Shelter-NFI (and CM), Health and Logistics and Supply. UNHCR has worked with other agencies to strengthen coordination capacity across all sectors. As of end of June, all the sector working groups were active. The sector working groups are taking the lead on the implementation of the Inter-Agency Contingency Plan, specifically overseeing the implementation/follow-up of key preparedness actions and coordinating inter-agency response capacities.

In addition, between May and June, UNHCR stepped-up engagement with BAFIA on emergency preparedness. In the process, the government indicated that Afghans fleeing Iran would be permitted to enter Iran. As of the end of June, UNHCR accompanied BAFIA central to Sistan and Baluchestan to conduct an assessment of two provisional sites identified by BAFIA to host Afghans: Niatak and Kalendin.

Internally, UNHCR also continued to accelerate preparedness, specifically through the prepositioning of additional supplies. By the end of June, CRI kits, tents and COVID-19 hygiene items for 10,000 persons had been prepositioned inside Iran. This includes sufficient stock for 1,000 persons in Niatak, to help facilitate a timely response.

As part of preparedness and emergency response, the office dispatched the following items to field locations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item description</th>
<th>Dogharoun</th>
<th>Sub-office Kerman</th>
<th>Niatak</th>
<th>BAFIA Sistan and Baluchestan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene pack</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Tent</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarpaulin</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry can</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanket</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping Mat</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>6,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen set</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas Stove</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water tank (5000 ltr)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOLUTIONS STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES (SSAR)

Within the framework of the SSAR, UNHCR supports the Government of Iran in implementing inclusive policies towards refugees. The SSAR also facilitates coordinated protection approaches among partners, consensus-building on international protection priorities, dialogue and partnerships in support of the Afghan refugee situation.

The key Core Group priorities agreed for Iran for 2021 are the following:

- Advocacy and support for Iran’s inclusive policies towards Afghans, notably in the areas of education and skills training, healthcare, and livelihoods, including through investments in Iran’s national systems.
- Dialogue between the Government of Iran and Core Group on documentation/regularization. This includes support for the ongoing collaboration between Iran and Afghanistan on issuance of civil documentation to undocumented Afghans in Iran (e-Tazkera and e-passport).
- Advocacy for expanded resettlement opportunities for Afghan refugees in Iran.
These priorities are complemented by two additional ones, namely:

- Discussion on regional regulated labour migration with the Government of Iran.
- Piloting a possible programme on return of qualified refugees, in close coordination with Afghanistan, in line with UNHCR Iran’s Voluntary Repatriation strategy.
FUNDING UPDATE

As of 22 June 2021

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 programmes with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds.

**Earmarked contributions | USD**

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some **13.26 million**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Amount (USD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>1.9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>365,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Programme On</td>
<td>30,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Donors mentioned in the graph are the "main earmarked" donors.*

UNHCR is thankful to the Government of Germany for its support through the ‘Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative’ (DAFI scholarship programme) which supports 472 students in Iran.

**Softly earmarked Contributions | USD**

**Private donors Australia** 4.8 million | **Canada** 3.7 million

Norway | Spain | Private donors

**Major unearmarked contributions | USD**

**Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.**

Norway 80 million | Sweden 66.9 million | Netherlands 36.1 million | Private donors Spain 35.4 million | Denmark 34.6 million | Germany 26 million | France 20 million | Private donors Republic of Korea 17.9 million | Switzerland 16.4 million | Ireland 12.5 million | Belgium 11.9 million | Private donors Japan 10.9 million


For more information, please contact:

Farha Bhoyroo  
External Relations Officer  
bhoyroo@unhcr.org, +98 21 89349112

Links:

Website: [https://www.unhcr.org/ir/](https://www.unhcr.org/ir/)  
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