

# Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

2 November 2021

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

**681,332** people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan in 2021, equivalent to 100,707 families. Of the internally displaced people, 59% are children.

Afghans continue to make their way to Iran irregularly through unofficial borders. UNHCR is aware of **20,878 Afghans who arrived in Iran** from 1 January until 29 October, though the numbers are understood to be much higher.

**Official borders between Afghanistan and Iran remain closed for asylum seekers.** UNHCR continues its advocacy with the Government to open borders and allow individuals in need of international protection to get it.



## POLITICAL, SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- **The security situation in Afghanistan remains highly volatile.** On 30 October, at least three persons were killed when gunmen presenting themselves as the Taliban attacked a wedding in Nangarhar province, in eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, denied they were acting on behalf of the *de facto* authorities. On 2 November, another 25 people were killed and more than 50 wounded in an attack on Afghanistan's biggest military hospital in Kabul. While no one has yet claimed responsibility, it is suspected that the Islamic State may be behind the attack. [According to Colin Kahl, US under-secretary of defence for policy](#), the Islamic State in Afghanistan could have the capability of conducting "external operations", including attacking the US, in as little as six months. Kahl also suggested that al-Qaida in Afghanistan posed another and perhaps more complex problem, given its ties to the Taliban, adding that it could take al-Qaida "a year or two" to regenerate the capability to carry out attacks outside of Afghanistan.
- On 30 October, **the Taliban called on the United States and other countries to recognise their authority in Afghanistan.** In a joint [statement](#) at the closure of the Tehran-hosted regional talks on Afghanistan on 27 October, the foreign ministers of Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Russia highlighted that forming a broad-based political structure would be the only solution to the problems in the country. While urging for the protection of the fundamental rights of all Afghans, the foreign ministers also

called for a non-interference approach, reiterating the need for support of "national sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, and non-interference in its internal affairs". While so far no country has formally recognised the Taliban government, [senior officials from a number of countries, including Iran, have met with the \*de facto\* government's leadership](#) both in Kabul and abroad. Reportedly, the Taliban's diplomats have started working in Afghanistan's mission in Pakistan and the [European Union is planning to reopen its diplomatic mission in Afghanistan](#) in the upcoming month.

- During the aforementioned Iran-organised conference, the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, said that **Afghanistan is facing an "epic humanitarian crisis" that demands immediate action**. On 2 November, [UNHCR began airlifting winter relief items aid to Kabul](#): weighing 25 kg, each winterisation kit contains floorings, partitions, and other items to improve tent insulation against the cold. The kits also provide heat resistant protection to enable the installation of a stove. Additional winterisation support will reach 500,000 people before the end of the year.
- According to [reports](#) from the World Food Programme in Afghanistan, **commodity and fuel prices have skyrocketed** since June, with wheat increasing by 20% and cooking oil by 24%. A media report explored how, driven by widespread hunger and desperation, [cases of child marriage have been on the rise](#) across the country since August. Although marrying off children under 15 is illegal in Afghanistan, it has been practised in some of the more rural parts of the country. A month after Kabul's takeover, the UN Women Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia, brought attention to five key areas for action in Afghanistan. Among this was the need to "**put the humanitarian needs of women and girls at the heart of humanitarian response**" and "hold the Taliban to account for the statements that they have made about protecting women's rights".

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## DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- Since the beginning of the year, UNHCR identified **20,878 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran** (on behalf of 5,103 individuals who approached UNHCR's receptions). As of 31 October, out of the new arrivals approaching us directly, 1,158 families (consisting of 4,719 individuals), have been interviewed by UNHCR:
  - **61% were women** and 39% were men. **23% were female heads of households**, who are considered vulnerable as they may be more at risk to resort to negative coping mechanisms to provide basic needs for their families. **26% were girls below the age of 18**.
  - **72% of the interviews were conducted through UNHCR's hotlines**, while the rest took place at UNHCR's receptions. UNHCR continues to enhance Communicate with Communities (CwC) in person and through its social media accounts, to ensure new arrivals have access to reliable information.
- The number of newly arrived Afghans is much higher than reported by UNHCR, as many Afghans continue to cross into Iran undetected and irregularly. Different government officials at various times and events have unofficially stated that the number of new arrivals may range between 100,000-300,000. UNHCR continues to face challenges in monitoring arrivals and verifying figures, due to the absence of a centralized registration system and continued lack of comprehensive and sustained access to border areas. UNHCR's sub-office in Mashhad received reports on the **arrival of 1,000-1,200 persons daily in the past week**.
- On 31 October, an Iranian media [reported](#) that, as thousands of Afghans cross the borders to Iran, many may have "terrorism agendas". This is a worrying development in the narrative surrounding new refugee arrivals in Iran. **UNHCR continues to advocate for Refugee Status Determination and protection screening for new arrivals**, to ensure that those fleeing to Iran can have their claims assessed.
- On 27 October, the Iranian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN, Majid Takht Ravanchi, stated that the developments in Afghanistan have seen "several hundred thousand more refugees" crossing into Iran, without Iran having received "any added resources from the international community". Ravanchi added that the international response to the influx of asylum-seekers to neighbouring countries, including Iran, must be intensified. This message was echoed on 30 October by the Iranian Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, Zahra Ershadi, who, while addressing the UN General Assembly, stated that Iran is currently hosting more than 300,000 new Afghan asylum-seekers and that the country is unable to host the displaced populations any longer because of the economic downturn it has been experiencing. Ershadi further urged UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary repatriation and resettlement of refugees.

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## RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- The Government of Iran continues to return Afghans who are apprehended while trying to enter Iran, **despite advocacy by UNHCR to provide asylum to those fleeing conflict**.
- UNHCR's sub-office in Mashhad received reports that there has been an increase in the number of persons deported back to Afghanistan, **with 1,600 individuals deported per day in the last week**.

- On 16 August 2021, UNHCR issued a **non-return advisory** for Afghanistan, which remains in place. UNHCR is seeking further clarity and reiterating the principle of non-refoulement to the Government.

## REGIONAL REFUGEE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN (RRPRP)

- On 25 August, UNHCR launched the **Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (RRPRP)**. This is an inter-agency plan with 10 partners working on a coordinated response to potential outflows, by supporting the host countries of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This plan focuses on preparedness, limited emergency response, and expanded support to regular programmes. UNHCR is currently leading the development of the 2022 RRP with partners.
- Discussions are ongoing between UNHCR, partners and BAFIA representatives to **accelerate site construction**. It is expected that infrastructure work by agencies at the Niatak site will commence in January 2022, subject to authorization and agreements with BAFIA and partners, with it likely to be ready to host new arrivals by the beginning of April. Rehabilitation of certain facilities has begun, especially of health infrastructures. On 1-2 November, UNHCR and its NGO partner PDA went on mission to Zahedan and Niatak; among other protection and programmatic issues discussed with provincial BAFIA counterparts, UNHCR highlighted the need for the agency and its operational partners to have unimpeded access to the site, to be able to conduct project assessments and protection monitoring, once persons of concerns are moved to the site. The possible need for additional sites closer to the Pakistan border, through which many Afghans newly arriving in Iran are crossing from, was also discussed.
- In light of newly arrived persons moving towards urban centres, UNHCR is strongly advocating with BAFIA for a **complementary urban response**. This is also to avoid an encampment policy at the border and have a hybrid response, in line with UNHCR global policy. Activities being proposed for an urban response include cash-based assistance, as well as reinforcing UNHCR's regular activities like education and health support.
- In line with standing global arrangements, the Refugee Coordination Model has been activated in Iran under the leadership of UNHCR and in support of the Government of Iran, and regular sector working group meetings are taking place. UNHCR has instituted a biweekly bilateral Task Force meeting with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) to discuss the operational response for the new arrivals.

## NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLANNING

The Government of Iran informed UNHCR that, under a worst-case scenario, they anticipate that up to **500,000 new arrivals from Afghanistan could enter Iran over 6-months**. In case of an influx, new arrivals would reportedly be granted access to Iranian territory and settled in locations along the border. Shelter, health and food would be the priorities to cope with the Government's scenario.

Such contingency planning is a Government-led process. UNHCR continues to seek additional guidance and clarity on various issues, including the status that will be conferred to new arrivals and the process for receiving them.

**UNHCR coordinates the refugee response among international actors in Iran**, with 18 participating UN agencies and international NGOs under its leadership, in line with the globally-agreed **Refugee Coordination Model**. UNHCR and BAFIA convene on a regular basis, through an agreed-upon biweekly/bilateral meeting. Discussions are ongoing around options for more inclusive coordination.

## FUNDING NEEDS

The interagency regional funding needs are USD 299 million, including almost **USD 131 million for UNHCR alone**.

For Iran, interagency needs are **USD 135.9 million, including USD 58.8 million for UNHCR**. As of 18 October, 3 of the 10 agencies participating under the RRRP have reported receiving a combined USD 4.89 million, indicating that the RRRP is 4% funded. This analysis is based on partners reporting new funding; however, the actual funding is likely higher, as many partners have not yet reported on the funding they have most recently received.

**UNHCR Iran overall funding needs for 2021: USD 118.9 million**. As of 1 November 2021, UNHCR's overall programmes in Iran (regular and emergency programming) were **45% funded**.

## FUNDING UPDATE

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. Whilst interest in the current emergency is relevant and opportune, UNHCR wishes to also highlight ongoing regular programming needs which are severely underfunded.

### Earmarked contributions | USD

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some **15.3 million**

**European Union** 9.2 million | **Denmark** 2 million | **Finland** 1.79 | **Japan** 1.25 million | **Norway** 0.36 million | **Russian Federation** 0.1 million | **UNAIDS** 0.03 million

### Major softly earmarked contributions | USD

**Germany** 79.8 million | **Private donors Australia** 14.9 million | **Austria** 11.8 million | **Private donors Denmark** 5 million | **Denmark** 4.8 million | **Norway** 4.1 million | **Private donors United Kingdom** 3.8 million | **Private donors Germany** 3.4 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.6 million

Canada | Czech Republic | Iceland | Ireland | Jersey | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | New Zealand | Slovakia | Slovenia | Spain | Private donors

### Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions

**Norway** 80 million | **Sweden** 75.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 62.6 million | **United Kingdom** 40.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 31.9 million | **Private donors Japan** 27.7 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Italy** 15.7 million | **Private donors Sweden** 14.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

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