

IRAN

July - September 2021

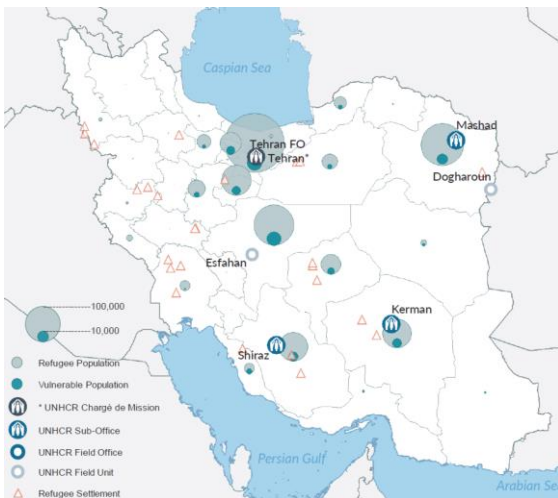
OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

July saw the US withdraw the vast majority of its troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban rapidly capturing districts throughout the country. By early August, the Taliban controlled most of the country, and on 16 August they entered Kabul, resulting in the de facto collapse of the Afghan Government. As such, Afghans continued making their way to Iran irregularly through unofficial border points. Based on direct approaches to our receptions, UNHCR is aware of 17,786 Afghans who arrived in Iran from 1 January until 25 September. The actual numbers are very likely much higher. Out of the newly arrived families that were interviewed by UNHCR, 100% fled due to the security situation in Afghanistan, with the majority reporting a need for access to livelihoods and documentation, as well as urgent need for food and shelter.



* 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, **806 individuals** had returned from Iran to their country of origin by the end September, as part of UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme. Of these, 800 were Afghans and 6 were Iraqis.

RESETTLEMENT

As of the end of September, **56** individuals had departed for resettlement to the UK (20), New Zealand (18), Sweden (12) and Norway (6). At present, the resettlement quota for UNHCR Iran in 2021 is **zero** (down from the minimal 53 for 2020). Out of the 800,000 refugees in Iran, 22% are considered vulnerable and around 10% are estimated to have resettlement needs.

NEW ARRIVALS

The situation in Afghanistan remains highly volatile. Over half a million of Afghans have been displaced in their country due to conflict and violence this year alone. UNHCR in Iran experienced an increase in the number of approaches by newly arrived Afghans in need of international protection. As of end September, UNHCR had identified **17,786 Afghans who newly arrived** in Iran and approached UNHCR directly at our receptions. However, the total number of new arrivals in Iran is said to be **significantly higher (100-300,000, according to various government estimates)**. 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.

DEPORTATIONS

Amid the new arrivals to Iran, UNHCR observes mounting fears of deportation amongst Afghans – especially those whose visa is about to expire or who are undocumented. Typically, Amayesh cardholders, who are considered de facto refugees by the Government of Iran, have been protected from deportation, and there is no indication that this has changed. UNHCR issued a **non-return advisory** for Afghanistan on 16 August 2021, which remains in place.

PROTECTION

MISINFORMATION AND APPROACHES TO UNHCR OFFICES

Late August and early September saw a **peak** in the number of persons approaching UNHCR offices, mainly to request resettlement or registration. Despite the ongoing pandemic, some UNHCR offices experienced daily gatherings of refugees – in the case of Field Office Tehran, up to **400-500** persons a day. This was largely linked to misinformation on resettlement and confusion around public announcements from some Member States of additional relocation opportunities for Afghan refugees. Offices conducted regular group counseling to the crowds outside of offices to address the misinformation, as well as liaised with Embassy counterparts to ensure aligned messaging. Moreover, the operation set up a **Help page**, to provide reliable and up-to-date information for refugees in general, as well as new arrivals specifically. Additional staff were also assigned to **hotlines** to directly address specific queries and concerns of the increasing number of individuals approaching UNHCR for support.

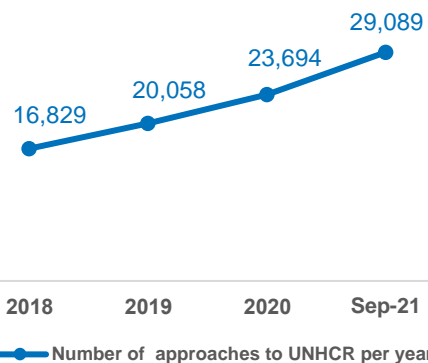
REGISTRATION/DOCUMENTATION

An amendment to Iran's Nationality law, which came into force in October 2020, allows children born to Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers to apply for **naturalization**. It was reported that 65% of the total number of applicants country-wide for the Iranian nationality came from Sistan & Baluchistan Province. UNHCR hired lawyers reported that 110 and 300 Iranian identity booklets to have been issued in Yazd and Kerman provinces respectively. One of the challenges faced by the applicants in obtaining the Iranian identify booklets is the cost for DNA tests, commonly used as a proof of lineage. UNHCR has confirmed its readiness to assist through cash-based interventions for extremely vulnerable cases.

On 19 September, the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology confirmed plans for a new arrangement for Afghan students in Iran to obtain their **student visas**. Previously, Afghan refugees pursuing higher education in Iran typically had to travel to Afghanistan to exchange their Amayesh cards for a passport and student visa. Now, it is proposed that they can travel to Kish island to do so, due to the current situation in Afghanistan. As this new arrangement is yet to be implemented, **60% of voluntary repatriation** in the reporting period were **Afghan students** travelling to Afghanistan to obtain their student visa.

CASE MANAGEMENT

During the reporting period, calls by persons of concern to UNHCR hotlines requesting counselling and support continued. As of the end of September, **3,715** refugees contacted UNHCR via its receptions and hotlines. The main reasons for the approaches were to receive **assistance, resettlement and protection**.



By the end of September, UNHCR had renovated its refugee reception areas to make them COVID-19 compliant, so that offices could gradually resume **partial in-person reception** of refugees. Given that most of the approaches are still related to **resettlement requests** (both by new arrivals and the old caseload), group counselling was provided.

An online **awareness session** was organized by UNHCR on 1 July and attended by 20 refugee women. During the session, discussions were held about the challenges of online education for children and how to mitigate its associated risks.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

From July to the end of September 2021, **230** 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 **1043** individuals were also assisted by UNHCR hired lawyer (UHLs) from July to the end of September 2021. Due to the COVID-19 situation, UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely, including on how to obtain supporting documents, such as certificates of marriages and divorces.

UNHCR oversaw a workshop on Justice for Children Affected by Migration in Mashhad, held in partnership with the Iranian Judiciary. UHLs participated in this workshop and were briefed on the rights of refugee children stipulated in national and international law.

EDUCATION

Some **500,080 students** (out of which 470,000 are Afghans) have been enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic year in Iran, including some **185,000 undocumented** Afghans. The Government reported increased registration (some 50,000 new refugee and undocumented students) in Tehran region alone for enrollment in the new scholastic year.

The issuance of **Education Protection Papers** was extended for a limited period to the children of passport holders and undocumented Afghans who have been residing in Iran for the past year, allowing those children to remain in school. This is a positive development as, previously, only undocumented Afghan children whose families had been residing in Iran since 2015 would qualify. Proof of residence in Iran has been the main pre-requisite for the registration and can be verified through home lease contract, birth certificate, passport with entry stamp or testimony paper signed by neighbors and approved by the local mosques/authorities. Following the proof of one-year residency in Iran and registration in the government's database, children are provided with Education Protection Papers issued by Kefalat centers. The extended plan has facilitated the school enrolment of several hundred more undocumented Afghan children.

Between July to September, UNHCR continued to oversee the construction of schools in highly refugee populated areas. On 8 August, a **12-classroom school** in Esfahan, which was co-funded by UNHCR under a 2019 Ministry of Education Partnership Agreement, was inaugurated. At this school, a local non-governmental charity, called Saremieh, will provide educational space for girls at lower secondary level.

The distribution of **21,500 tablets** to vulnerable refugee students who faced challenges with remote learning is in final beneficiary identification phase and will soon be distributed to students in 18 provinces through BAFIA and in close coordination with the Ministry of Education. Moreover, UNHCR will assist eligible families to facilitate remote learning through multi-purpose cash assistance.

In 2021, a total of **1,000 children** and adolescents will receive literacy training provided by the UNHCR's governmental partner, the Literacy Movement Organization.

At tertiary level, **569 students** are supported through the DAFI scholarship. The DAFI program is being implemented in Iran through the Pars Development Actors Institute (PDA) and in 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 have continued countrywide, and refugees have been informed by UNHCR and our governmental counterpart to approach enrolment centers (Pishkan centers) to collect their insurance booklets. The insurance 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 mid-September 2021, a total of **94,632 refugees** had enrolled in the UPHI, out of which 83,672 (70% out of 120,000) refugees were vulnerable and special disease cases for which UNHCR pays the fee (and thus enrolled in the scheme free of charge). A total of 10,960 refugees also paid the UPHI premium fee and enrolled without assistance from UNHCR. In Iran, refugees have access to free of charge primary health care.

LIVELIHOODS

UNHCR commenced the implementation of livelihood programmes in July by providing technical and vocational training to **1,968** refugees through a partnership with the Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO) in 18 provinces. UNHCR also supported refugees' access to **189 income-generating** opportunities through partnership agreements with three national NGOs, namely PDA, ILIA and Kiyana.

In addition to the above, UNHCR has planned **15 livelihood projects** which will provide wage-earning opportunities through establishing / expanding small businesses or capacitating vocational centres. Out of these, 8 projects are being implemented while the rest are under discussion with the Government.

From July to September, **3,247** individuals had received **multi-purpose cash** support from UNHCR, out of a total of 18,175 individuals who will benefit from this assistance in 2021. The multi-purpose cash assistance helps families to meet their basic needs with choice and dignity.

In August 2021, UNHCR signed a Partnership Agreement with IRAC organization to provide multi-purpose cash to 120 vulnerable Iraqi households residing in four provinces of Tehran, Qom, Khouzestan and Ilam.

SHELTER

Paying for rent has been one of the major difficulties faced by refugees in Iran. Given losses of income linked to the pandemic and the absence of job opportunities, many refugees are in debt, with several months of **unpaid rent** putting them at risk of eviction.

To ensure an effective response to increasing needs, stemmed from the developments in Afghanistan following Taliban's takeover of the country and the consequent arrivals of Afghan nationals into Iran, UNHCR is repositioning emergency shelter, Core Relief Items (CRIs), COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), food packages and hygiene kits for an estimated population of **50,000**. The high rate of inflation inside Iran remains a challenge for local sourcing, while current economic sanctions pose a bigger challenge in regard to international sourcing strategies.

We are collaborating with the government to establish and upgrade two transit/reception sites and potentially two camps in eastern border areas of Sistan and Baluchistan, Khorasan Razavi and South Khorasan. A **shelter strategy** is currently under discussion, with priorities including interventions related to basic site preparation and construction of WASH facilities and water network.

SOLUTIONS STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES (SSAR)

Within the framework of the SSAR, UNHCR supports the Government of Iran in implementing inclusive refugee policies. 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.

- In light of the emergency in Afghanistan, which is also affecting refugee-hosting neighbouring countries such as Iran, the SSAR Support Platform will play an increasingly crucial role in galvanizing sustained international support – not only in terms of immediate and longer-term assistance, but also in terms of advocacy and durable solutions.
- The Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform, composed of 13 states and entities and chaired by the European Union, has met in this regard on 1 October, at global level. On 22 September 2021, UNHCR and EU representatives (as the chair of the Core Group) virtually met with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA) to update them on the Core Group Work Plan and to give the opportunity to the government to present their needs and expectations with regard to support for refugees directly to the EU. **An Iran-level meeting will be planned before the end of 2021** to follow-up on global discussions and adjust the Core Group's priorities as needed.

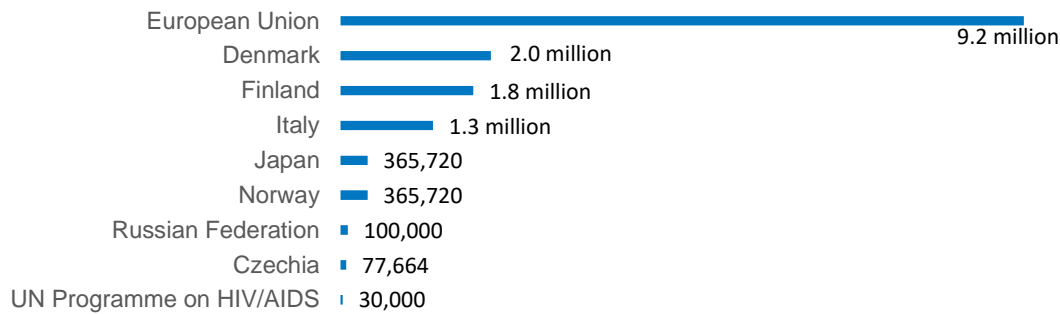
Financial information

As of 05 October 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 **42.8 million**



UNHCR is thankful to the Government of Germany for its support through the 'Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative' (DAFI scholarship programme) which supports 569 students in Iran.

Softly earmarked Contributions | USD

Germany 33.3 million | **Private donors Australia** 13.4 million | **Austria** 11.8 million | **Private donors Denmark** 4.9 million | **Denmark** 4.8 million | **Norway** 4.1 million | **Private donors Germany** 3.4 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2 million

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

Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

Norway 80 million | **Sweden** 66.9 million | **Private donors Spain** 62.6 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 28.5 million | **United Kingdom** 28.4 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Private donors Japan** 23.6 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Italy** 14 million | **Private donors Sweden** 13 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

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