

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

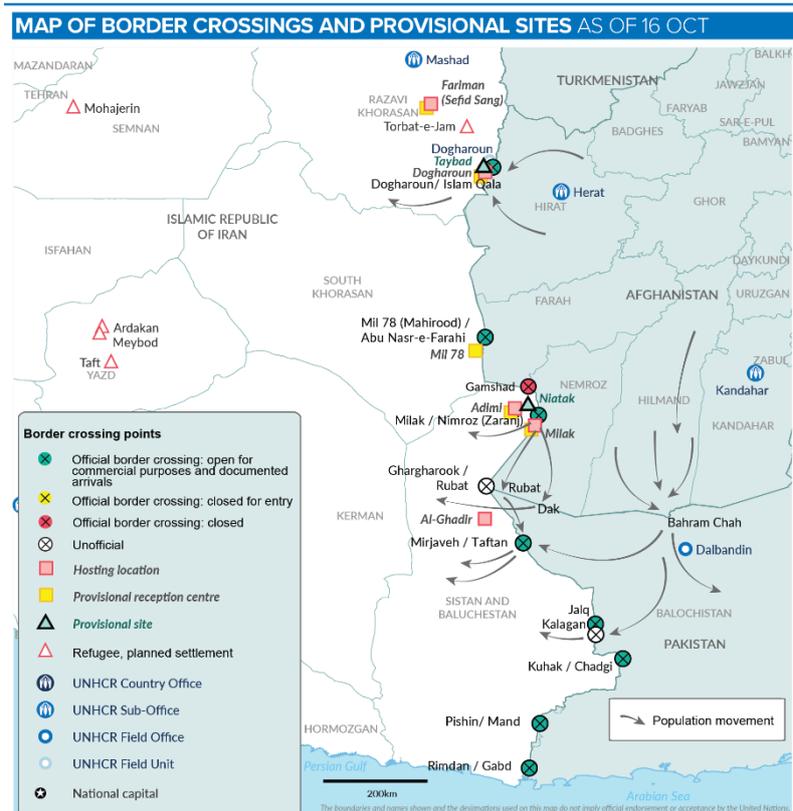
8 November 2021

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

682,891 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan in 2021, of which 21% are women and 59% are children.

Afghans continue to make their way to Iran irregularly through unofficial borders. UNHCR is aware of **21,389** Afghans who arrived in Iran from 1 January until 05 November, 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 Afghanistan security situation remains of high concern, with people describing parts of the country as being in “total chaos”.** Last week, the Deputy Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, Farhan Haq, [reported](#) ongoing violence resulting in casualties in Afghanistan: in Jalalabad, unverified pictures appeared online showing bodies swinging from a rope; residents also reported various targeted killings and video footage circulated of gunmen firing into a car, apparently killing its occupants, one of whom was identified by local journalists as a Taliban official. The Taliban have downplayed such incidents, saying that after decades of war, it will take time for the country to be completely pacified.
- The situation for women in Afghanistan remains worrying. On 6 November, the bodies of four women, including one of a women’s rights activist, were discovered in Balkh province in northern Afghanistan;** the three other bodies have not yet been identified, the Balkh Information Department Director, Mawlavi Zabihullah Noorani, stated. Since mid-August, women have held regular, nationwide protests against the Taliban, demanding that their rights be restored and protected, and since September, several female activists have been [reportedly](#) detained and tortured by Taliban members. On 4 November, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said Taliban rules were prohibiting most women from operating as aid workers in the country. “Permitting women aid workers to do their jobs unfettered is not a matter of agencies or donors placing

conditions on humanitarian assistance, but an operational necessity for delivering that assistance,” said Heather Barr, HRW’s associate women’s rights director.

- On 2 November, Waheedullah Hashimi, the Director of External Programmes and Aid at the Taliban’s Ministry of Education, announced that **the de facto Afghan government will “soon” begin allowing older girls back into schools**, while also urging the international community to help fund this. He added that “no women teachers had been laid off”, and that this was “a positive message to the world that we are working on a mechanism. We are not working on deleting them from our schools and universities”. On 5 November, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, **announced** that 10 out of the 14 girls-only schools run by the Maarif Foundation – a Turkish state-funded organisation which runs 80 schools overall in the country – have been reopened. According to Cavusoglu, he had held talks with the Taliban Interim Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amir Khan Muttaqi.
- Health facilities in parts of Afghanistan have shut down and, in the capital, hospitals are functioning without electricity or water supply.** More than 2,000 health facilities have been forced to close since the Taliban takeover, according to the Red Cross, and in those hospitals that are still accepting patients, most staff have not been paid their salaries for months and patients are forced to buy their own medication, a difficult prospect during an economic crisis. That said, according to the Taliban’s Acting Public Health Minister, Dr Qalandar Ebad, the new government has agreed to launch a four-day polio vaccination programme. Vaccination teams have been unable to work in parts of the country for much of the past three years, meaning that since 2018, an estimated 3.3 million children have missed out on a polio vaccination. It is estimated that 10 million Afghan children aged under five will be targeted by this programme, which appears to be aimed at showing the de facto authorities can cooperate with international agencies.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- Since the beginning of the year, UNHCR identified **21,389 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran** (on behalf of 5,244 individuals who approached UNHCR’s receptions). Out of the new arrivals approaching us directly, 1,324 families (consisting of 5,281 individuals), have been interviewed by UNHCR:
 - Hazaras (41%) and Tajiks (38%)** made up the highest ethnicities approaching UNHCR’s receptions.
 - 46%** of newly arrived Afghan asylum-seekers who contacted UNHCR **are currently in Tehran**, followed by Khorasan Razavi (21%) and Isfahan (14%). This underscores the need for an out-of-camp, urban response, which is being discussed by UNHCR with the Government of Iran.
 - 45% indicated they crossed into Iran through the Milak border** with Afghanistan in eastern Iran. UNHCR had provided food items, bottled water and other core-relief items to BAFIA in Sistan and Baluchistan to be distributed to new arrivals at the border.
 - Only 8% reported having a valid visa for Iran**, confirming that the vast majority of Afghans coming to Iran to seek asylum are doing so irregularly through unofficial border points.
 - 9% indicated that they had previously been deported** to Afghanistan from Iran, but to make their way back to Iran in search of asylum.
 - Access to shelter remains the highest need** of new Afghan asylum-seekers (50%), followed by documentation (48%), livelihoods (46%) and food (26%). With a harsh winter looming and prices of rent having seen a sharp increase in Iran in the past months, UNHCR is worried many of the most vulnerable individuals will be left homeless, increasing their vulnerability.
- UNHCR also knows of **601 Afghans** who have been apprehended while attempting to cross into Iran and are currently being held by the Government of Iran in Al-Ghadir, in Sistan and Baluchistan province, and in Sefid Sang, in Khorasan Razavi province. **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.
- In Tehran, it is noted that, while *Amayesh* cardholders and other persons of concern with other types of documentation tend to mostly approach UNHCR through our hotlines, new arrivals continue to largely approach the office in person. **UNHCR is further enhancing Communicating with Communities** to ensure that asylum-seekers have readily available relevant information on the safest ways to contact UNHCR and the services available.

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.** According to information received by government counterparts in Sistan and Baluchistan, since July 2021 and to date, there has been a 53% increase in the number of arrests of new arrivals. UNHCR understands that the vast majority of these

individuals have been returned to Afghanistan, while we continue to advocate to receive access to new arrivals to better understand their protection needs.

- **Road accidents in border areas involving newly arrived Afghans have been on the rise.** UNHCR's Hired Lawyers have been advocating with government authorities to halt the deportation of Afghans involved in these accidents who are in hospital. While the lawyers have managed to obtain a positive judicial order to halt their deportation, the ruling is not always followed through by border authorities.
- 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.

ONWARD MOVEMENTS

- **On 6 November, Turkish border forces apprehended at least 149 Afghan refugees along its borders with Iran.** Turkey has recently increased its security measures at its borders to prevent an influx of refugees coming from Iran. Human rights groups have protested the conditions that Afghans face when crossing the borders. "We call on regional as well as other countries - if you don't help us and the migrants, refrain from taking actions that are against international law," said Lal Gul Lal, the Chairman of the Afghanistan Human Rights Organization. An Afghan civil rights activist, Fariddin Fedayee, also expressed that it is unfortunate how regional countries have acted violently toward Afghans.
- **A graphic video circulated on social media that allegedly showed smugglers assaulting young Afghan refugees** between the Iranian-Turkish border. The incident has yet to be verified with no information available regarding the nationalities of persons appearing in the video.

REGIONAL REFUGEE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN (RRPRP)

- On 25 August, UNHCR launched the **Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (RRPRP)**, an inter-agency plan with 10 partners, focusing on preparedness, limited emergency response, and expanded support to regular programmes. UNHCR is currently leading the development of the 2022 RRP, which will take a needs- and area-based approach to support not only new arrivals from Afghanistan but also existing refugee populations (Amayesh cardholders), undocumented Afghan populations and host communities. The 2022 RRP planning assumptions assume a steady and ongoing flow of new arrivals into Iran from Afghanistan (with an expectation that, although the situation in Afghanistan is likely to further deteriorate, there will not be an observable mass influx into neighbouring countries), with borders likely to continue to be tightly managed.
- With regards to site planning, UNHCR has submitted a letter on the expansion and rehabilitation of two sites to host new arrivals including Taybad City and Torbat-e-Jam in Khorasan Razavi province. The letter is currently on hold as BAFIA expressed that the sites may not be applicable for rehabilitation work due to excessive costs. UNHCR is discussing ways forward and possible sites that can alternatively be used to host new arrivals. Rehabilitation work for the Niatak site (to host new arrivals), Mil-78 and Dougharoun sites (both of the latter to be used as reception/transit sites) are ongoing.
- 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.

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 135.8 million, including USD 58.9 million for UNHCR**. As of 8 November, 3 of the 10 agencies participating under the RRRP have reported receiving a combined USD 23.7 million, indicating that the RRRP is 17% 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 **17.5 million**

European Union 9.2 million | **United Kingdom** 2.68 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** 15.9 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 | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Germany** 2.8 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.6 million

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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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For more information, please contact:

Farha Bhoyroo

External Relations Officer

bhoyroo@unhcr.org, +98 912 132 7183 (mobile and WhatsApp)

Alexandra Stenbock-Fermor

Associate Donor Relations Officer

stenbock@unhcr.org, +98 912 135 4232 (mobile and WhatsApp)