

# Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

16 November 2021

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

**667,903** people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan in 2021.

**Afghan asylum-seekers continue to make their way to Iran.** UNHCR is aware of **22,086 Afghans** who newly arrived in Iran from 1 January until 12 November, though the numbers are likely to be much higher. Different government officials have unofficially stated that the number of new arrivals may range between 100,000-300,000.

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

MAP OF BORDER CROSSINGS AND PROVISIONAL SITES AS OF 13 NOV



## POLITICAL, SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- The security situation in Afghanistan continues to be extremely alarming.** On 13 November, an explosion hit a vehicle in Kabul resulting in the death of one person and the injury of several others. The explosion occurred in Dasht-e Barchi, a Kabul suburb that is dominated by the Shia Hazara community. The Afghan Journalists Centre stated that the person killed in the blast was a well-known Afghan journalist. One witness reported that the explosion occurred near a checkpoint manned by the Taliban, and that gunfire exchange was heard immediately afterwards. **On 12 November, another explosion hit a mosque in the Spin Ghar area of Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan (202 km east of Kabul), killing at least three persons and wounding 15 others.** No group has claimed responsibility of either attacks.
- The dire humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan are deeply affecting women and girls in the country.** UNICEF's Executive Director, Henrietta Fore, [expressed](#) concern on reports that child marriage in Afghanistan

is on the rise. “We have received credible reports of families offering daughters as young as 20 days old up for future marriage in return for a dowry.” Even before the latest instability, UNICEF’s partners in Afghanistan had registered 183 child marriages and 10 cases of selling of children over 2018 and 2019, in Herat and Baghdis provinces alone. The extremely dire economic situation is pushing more families deeper into poverty and forcing them to make desperate choices. UNICEF stated that it will work with religious leaders to ensure that they are not involved in the “Nikah” (the marriage contract) for young girls, and further urged the de facto authorities to prioritize the reopening of schools for all secondary school girls and allow all-female teachers to resume their jobs without any further delays.

- **Last week, [OCHA](#) reported that more than 3,000 families (approximately 22,260 people) were identified to receive winter support in Kandahar, Hilmand, Uruzgan and Zabul provinces in southern Afghanistan.** Cash assistance was also distributed to 1,358 vulnerable people in Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces in need of support for the upcoming harsh winter season. In north-eastern Afghanistan, a total of 8,855 vulnerable people including internally displaced returnees received cash assistance in Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar provinces. An additional 95,067 vulnerable people received food assistance as part of WFP’s seasonal assistance programme in Baghlan, Badakhshan, and Takhar provinces.
- **The UN has observed tentative improvements for female aid workers resuming access to work in Afghanistan.** The new interim Ministry of Interior in the country had provided letters to UN national and international staff (both males and females) indicating that security, access at check points, and freedom of movement are to be guaranteed at all times and in all locations across the country. Security and guard forces and officials are instructed to comply. UNHCR has requested all female staff to report for duty and the Protection Cluster has resumed all protection activities at the field level.
- On 10 November, the Resident Representative for UNDP in Afghanistan, Abdallah Al-Dardari, [stated](#) that **the country is “facing the worst humanitarian disaster” ever witnessed**, adding that 97% of the 38 million population are at risk of sinking into poverty. On 8 November, WFP also [reported](#) that almost 24 million people in Afghanistan, or 60% of the population, suffer from acute hunger. An estimated 3.2 million children under age 5 are also expected to suffer from acute malnutrition by the end of the year.
- **The United States (US) and Qatar signed an accord on Friday for Qatar to represent the US diplomatic interests in Afghanistan**, an important signal of potential future direct engagement between Washington and the Taliban after two decades of war. The agreement will come into effect on 31 December. The US, European countries and others have been reluctant to formally recognize the *de facto* Taliban authorities, but with winter approaching, many realize they need to engage more to prevent the deeply impoverished country from plunging into a humanitarian catastrophe.

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## DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- **Since the beginning of the year, UNHCR identified 22,086 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran** (on behalf of 5,449 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:
  - **83% of new arrivals did not have a registration status in Iran** and have crossed irregularly, while a combined 6% are valid visa/family passport holders.
  - **94% of the population live in urban settings**, usually sharing accommodation with Afghan relatives who have been living in Iran for years. This causes concern regarding the sharing of congested spaces and COVID-19 precautions not being considered, as well as lack of privacy.
  - **Children represented 43% of the population (more than 2,000 children), with 25% being girls under the age of 18.** In many cases, families will have no choice but to resort to negative coping mechanisms to deal with poor living conditions. These may include child marriages and child labour. UNHCR is working with the government to agree on an urban response, where new arrivals would be able to benefit from cash and food assistance and livelihood training to help them meet their basic needs.
- UNHCR’s sub-office in Mashhad in Khorasan Razavi province has been informed by BAFIA in the province that **some 50,000 Afghans have already arrived and are staying in the province**. The number of newly arrived Afghans is much higher than reported by UNHCR, as many 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.
- On 10 November, the Iranian Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, during the Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan hosted by India, said that his country is funding 96 per cent of the “costs and expenses” of refugees living in Iran, while “only four per cent have been paid by relevant international organisations”. Underscoring the possibility of a new wave of refugees entering Iran, Shamkhani said: “if we ever face a new wave of refugees, although, against our will, we may not be able to accept them

due to the unjust sanctions imposed on our people. If other countries and responsible international organizations do not assist us, we will not be able to discharge this responsibility alone and wittingly or unwittingly all the countries, particularly Western countries, would be adversely impacted by these refugees”.

## RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- On 10 November, the Iranian Minister of Interior, Ahmad Vahidi, **warned the international community that if the economic situation of Afghanistan is not solved, the world will see another wave of migration.** “If these migrants do not stay in Iran, where will they go. They will go to the borders. We have returned some people from the border with Turkey,” Vahidi said.
- 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.** Through the analysis of available data and information, **UNHCR estimates that over 3,000 Afghans are being returned daily to their country by Iran.** 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 14 November, the Turkish Daily Sabah news outlet reported that **a 145 km wall was recently completed along the Ağrı-Iğdır section of Turkey's eastern border with Iran.** It stated that the wall “has proven successful” in preventing irregular migrants and smugglers, and particularly terrorists, from entering the country. The article added that the Turkish security forces can instantly detect individuals attempting to irregularly enter Turkey from Iran through an “Integrated Security System” while they are still on the other side of the border. It claimed that the Turkish security forces detected 1,693 irregular migrants approaching the border in 85 incidents in the region in the last month and had prevented them from entering the country.

## 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, with planning assumptions assuming 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. The 2022 RRP development is advancing, with a total budget of USD 255.2 million having been agreed with 15 partners, covering 8 sectors.
- 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.
- Last week, construction at the Niatak site commenced with the levelling of ground. A tender process was initiated for the selection of contractors for the site that will undertake different tasks. The surrounding external walls for the site will be reconstructed as the current structure is not deemed safe by engineers. The settlement will consist of around 400 UNHCR family tents and the remaining (around 900) will be brick houses. Once ready, the site will be able to accommodate some 6,500 individuals.

## 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 112.1 million**. As of 16 November 2021, UNHCR's overall programmes in Iran (regular and emergency programming) were **53% 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 **20.2 million**

**European Union** 9.2 million | **Japan** 3.85 million | **United Kingdom** 2.69 million | **Denmark** 2 million | **Finland** 1.79 | **Italy** 1.77 | **Japan** 3.85 million | **Norway** 0.37 million | **Qatar Airways** 0.17 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 | **Private donors Spain** 3.6 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Germany** 2.8 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.8 million

Canada | Czech Republic | Iceland | Ireland | Jersey | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | New Zealand | Poland | 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** 69.3 million | **United Kingdom** 40.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 35.3 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Japan** 27.7 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Private donors Italy** 17.6 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Sweden** 14.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

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