

# Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

9 - 21 February 2022

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

**710,039** people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan since the start of 2021, of which 21% are women and 59% are children.

According to evolving estimates by the Government of Iran, approx. **500,000** Afghans have arrived in Iran in 2021.

Borders remain officially closed for asylum-seekers. The requirements of valid visas and passports are still being strictly applied and tighter border control measures are being enforced at unofficial border crossing points. **33,456** Afghans who arrived in Iran from 1 January 2021 to 17 February 2022 have approached UNHCR requesting assistance and protection.

The Government of Iran continues to systematically return Afghans in large numbers, despite UNHCR's non-return advisory. Last week, UNHCR in Afghanistan witnessed several hundred Afghans being returned at the border crossing point of Islam Qala.



## POLITICAL, SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- On 17 February 2022, WFP reported that hunger continues to rise in Afghanistan and that 95% of the population does not have enough to eat ([WFP Food Security Update](#)). It was reported that with each passing month, new waves of people are turning to drastic measures to feed their families:
  - Two-thirds of the population are now resorting to crisis coping strategies, such as consuming less preferred food, limiting portion sizes or borrowing food – a staggering 8% increase from the previous month and a sixfold increase since 15 August.
  - 66% of parents are increasingly restricting their own meals so their children can eat.
  - 81% of income-earning households experienced a significant decrease in income in January and 18% of households earned no income at all in January.
- On 8 February 2022, Ugochi Daniels, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Deputy Director-General for Operations, stated that "the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan is intensifying humanitarian needs and increasing displacement risks both inside the country, as well as across borders to countries in the region" ([UN News](#)). IOM stated that the trend of Afghans crossing the border into Iran and Pakistan is likely to continue

in the coming months. It warned that as needs continue to grow, failure to sustain and improve access to essential services, restore livelihoods, and effectively address the vulnerabilities of populations affected by the crisis, will cause a surge in displacement and migration. It concluded that without the funding to support a response – encompassing rapid humanitarian action and mid- to longer-term development planning – economic and social conditions in Afghanistan will continue to spiral downwards.

- **Approximately 170,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have now returned to their previous places of residence, as the security situation begins to somewhat stabilize across the country. 70% of IDPs returnees have done so to the southern and north-eastern regions.** Throughout Afghanistan, UNHCR and partners continue to undertake community projects in priority areas of return. This is to improve the reintegration of displaced people and to stabilize communities. Since the start of 2021, this includes a joint UNHCR and UNDP cash-for-work project, which has provided income for nearly 600 refugee returnees, IDPs and members of the host community in Kahdistan, Injil, Herat.
- **On 20 February 2022, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated at the Munich Security Conference that the risks of terrorism spillover out of Afghanistan show how adept terrorists are at exploiting power vacuums and subverting fragile states (ANI New Agency).** “Without determined action, the severe economic contraction, rising unemployment, and escalating humanitarian crisis will fuel despair and breed extremism,” he warned. **On 16 February 2022, Mr. Guterres told the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – a Eurasian regional group comprising Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan – that due to the worsening situation in Afghanistan, terrorism remains a constant threat to the security of the region and the entire world (UN News).** He said that regional and inter-regional cooperation, as well as cross-border law enforcement and judicial cooperation, are essential elements in the global response. He spotlighted closer cooperation between the UN and regional organizations – including the CSTO – as critical to defusing these evolving threats, preventing spill-over, promoting stability and ultimately save lives. “We are determined to strengthen this work together,” he stressed, adding that the UN is counting on support from its regional partners to achieve those goals.
- **The UK will co-host an upcoming United Nations virtual pledging summit to help address the growing humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan, which aims to raise the \$4.4 billion the UN needs to address the growing humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan (Gov UK).** The UK has committed £286 million to support Afghans in the last year. UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said “the conference is a critical moment for the international community to step up support in an effort to stop the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The scale of need is unparalleled, and consequences of inaction will be devastating.” Martin Griffiths, the UN’s Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, added that “we are very grateful to the UK for co-hosting this important event to mobilize international support for the humanitarian needs of Afghanistan. We welcome donors from around the globe to join together to save the lives and futures of Afghans. Every day of delay means more misery for the Afghan people. They need a lifeline.”

---

## DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- According to evolving estimates by the Government of Iran, approximately 500,000 Afghans have arrived in Iran in 2021. UNHCR continues to face challenges in monitoring new arrivals and verifying figures. This is due to the absence of a centralized registration system in Iran and continued lack of comprehensive and sustained access to border areas. Instead, UNHCR is using available indications from various sources to estimate the number for 2021-22. Bearing in mind that a large number will likely be deported, other individuals moving to Iran for livelihoods or family reasons, and a small number may move onwards towards Turkey, **UNHCR estimates that 274,000 Afghan new arrivals will remain in Iran – 166,000 in 2021 and 108,000 in 2022.**
- **On 14 February, Reuters reported on people smugglers more than doubling fees for some routes as they benefit from the exodus of those fleeing from the Taliban. This follows reporting in October 2021 from the Geneva-based Mixed Migration Center which showed an increase in Afghans using smugglers to flee Afghanistan (MixMigrationCentre).** The report described smugglers now charging Afghans an average of \$140-\$193 to reach Pakistan via the border town of Spin Boldak, up from \$90 a year earlier. Average fees for Iran via the smuggling hub of Zaranj are \$360- \$400, compared to about \$250 previously. Charges vary

depending on the length and difficulty of the route, the wealth and ethnic background of the person making the journey, whether they have contacts, and the number of people demanding bribes. An expert at the Mixed Migration Centre said smugglers were usually part of well-established organized criminal networks. However, with Afghanistan hammered by an economic crisis and severe drought, farmers desperate for money to feed their families have also become involved in the smuggling business.

- Since the start of 2021 and so far in 2022, UNHCR has **identified 33,456 Afghans** who newly arrived in Iran (and approached UNHCR receptions through **8,264 heads of households**). As of 8 February 2022, out of these new arrivals, UNHCR had **interviewed 2,888 families** (which consist of **11,209 individuals**) for protection concerns. Of these, the following was reported:
  - The average family size is 3.9.
  - 47% are children and 56% are adults.
  - 16% are infants aged 0-4 years old.
  - 28% are children aged 5-17 years old.
  - 90% fled Afghanistan due to the general security situation, 43% because of specific security threats, and 30% because of discrimination.

---

## RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- Afghans who are apprehended while trying to enter Iran continue to be returned to Afghanistan despite UNHCR's non-return advisory and advocacy for those fleeing conflict to be provide asylum. Through the analysis of available data and information, **UNHCR estimates that 65% of all newly arriving Afghan asylum seekers are deported from Iran by the Government.**
- **On 8 February 2022, it was reported that according to officials from the Herat Department of Refugees and Repatriations in Afghanistan, nearly 100 Afghan refugees have been killed by Iranian Security Forces in the last six months (ToloNews and Latestly).** The report noted the body of a 16-year-old boy, Sohrab, which recently arrived in Herat from Iran. The teenager's relatives said he had been shot and killed by Iranian soldiers in Isfahan after crossing the border irregularly to find work. In addition, the report highlighted that over 460 Afghan refugees were also "beaten at the border when they wanted to cross into Iran", according to Jailani Sharifi, Nursing Director of Nimruz Hospital. "There are people who have been beaten, their arms and legs have been broken," said Mawlawi Abdulhai Manib, Head of the Refugees and Repatriation Department of Herat. **In the past weeks, several extremely disturbing but unverified videos posted to social media show severe abuse being carried about by the Iranian police against Afghan asylum seekers in Iran.** These videos appear to show Afghans being beaten or extorted for money. UNHCR's counterparts in BAFIA Sistan & Baluchistan confirmed they have not received such reports and have also categorically denied that such incidents are taking place at the border. UNHCR is following up to try to verify these videos.
- **According to UNHCR Afghanistan, mass returns of Afghans from Iran, organised by the Government of Iran, are still being witnessed.** UNHCR Iran is concerned regarding these returns, given that Iran's asylum system remains inaccessible and most Afghans coming to Iran, are not having their international protection needs assessed, which means that these returns are likely to be forced. Once the Afghan returnees cross into Afghanistan, they are received by the Afghan Department of Refugee Returns (DORR), which processes them, records their details and then allows IOM to provide first aid and food. As reported by UNHCR colleagues in Afghanistan based on their interaction with partners on the ground, there is evidence that in Iran the Afghan returnees have been badly treated by the Iranian border security forces. Following receiving immediate assistance, DORR then arranges their transfer, via bus, to the center of Herat; from there, IOM tries to facilitate their return to their communities but some likely try again to cross into Iran. UNHCR in Afghanistan is also reporting that large numbers of people are still attempting to cross into Iran. UNHCR in Afghanistan is stepping up its direct engagement at the border and another visit to Islam Qala will be conducted in the new few days.

---

## THE REGIONAL RESPONSE PLAN (RRP) AND HUMANITARIAN REPORTS PLAN (HRP) 2022

- **On 11 January 2022, UNHCR and OCHA launched the HRP and RRP.** The HRP aims to assist 22.1 million people in Afghanistan, requiring **USD 4.4 billion** and the coordination of 158 dedicated humanitarian organizations operating in Afghanistan. The RRP targets 5.7 million persons of concern in the neighboring

countries of Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, in coordination with 40 partners and requires **USD 623 million**. The humanitarian and refugee response plans combined require over **USD 5 billion** in international funding in 2022.

- **For Iran in 2022, the RRP is targeting 2.2 million persons of concern, including Afghans of varying status and host communities, with 16 partners involved, and requiring USD 259 million.** This includes approximately USD 69 million on health and Nutrition, USD 42.5 million on Shelter and NFIs, USD 35.1 million on WASH, USD 27.5 million on education, USD 27.3 million on protection, USD 27 million on livelihoods and resilience, and USD 22.2 million of food security.
- **The construction of the Niatak site is ongoing and recently a meeting was held with the BAFIA consultant, UNHCR and other partners on technical issues.** The latest reporting from 9 February 2022, shows that:
  - One batch of 206 tent platforms is 97% completed and a second batch is 79% completed.
  - For transitional shelters, the first batch of 36 shelters is 32% completed, the second is 44% completed and the third is 0% completed.
  - The boundary wall is 48% completed and the landscaping, which involves removing debris, demolishing the old boundary wall, and construction of main roads is 15% completed.
- **The joint field visit to Fariman to assess potential site development with BAFIA, UNHCR and Heads of Agencies, which had been postponed for 20 February 2022, has once again been postponed.** BAFIA has said it will revert to UNHCR and partners with two possible dates soon. UNHCR is following up on scheduling this field visit with no further delay.

## FUNDING NEEDS

The total [interagency regional funding needs](#) under the RRP in 2022 are:

- o **USD 623 million.**
- o Including almost **USD 263.7 million for UNHCR** alone.

For Iran, under the RRP in 2022, interagency needs are:

- o **USD 259 million.**
- o Including **USD 119.4 million for UNHCR.**

## FUNDING UPDATE

As of 15 February 2022, UNHCR's **overall programs in Iran** (regular and emergency programming) were **32% funded**.

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 programs 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 **USD 31.4 million**.

**Germany** 16.9 million | **Italy** 5.6 million | **European Union** 4.25 million | **Republic of Korea** 0.68 million | **UNAIDS** 0.009 million

### SOFTLY EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

**Netherlands** 4 million

Norway | Private donors

### MAJOR UNEARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions:

**Sweden** 77.6 million | **Norway** 72.5 million | **Netherlands** 37.2 million | **Denmark** 35.6 million | **Germany** 27.6 million | **Switzerland** 18.4 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Ireland** 11.8 million

Algeria | Armenia | Bulgaria | Canada | Estonia | Finland | Iceland | Liechtenstein | Lithuania | Luxembourg | Monaco | Montenegro | Peru | Qatar | Republic of Korea | Singapore | Thailand | Turkey | Uruguay | Private donors

### For more information, please contact:

**Farha Bhoyroo**

External Relations Officer

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