

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

27 September 2021

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

663,969 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan since the start of 2021, of which 80% are women and children. This year, UNHCR has reached 369,943 IDPs with **life-saving support**.

Afghans continue to make their way to Iran in an irregular manner through unofficial border points. 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 interviewed by UNHCR, **75% reported having crossed into Iran through unofficial borders**.

Official borders between Afghanistan and Iran remain closed for asylum seekers, while borders are open for commercial purposes and foreign-national passport-holders with valid visas for Iran.



SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- Concluding a three-day visit to Afghanistan (12-15 September), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, **appealed** for more support, saying that “**the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains desperate**.” The World Health Organization warned on 22 September that Afghanistan’s health-care system is “on the brink of collapse”, as a lack of funding has left thousands of health facilities struggling to buy medical supplies and pay their staff. According to reports from UNAMA, teachers, nurses and other civil servants have not received a salary for months, while **prices of food items and other basic commodities have skyrocketed**.
- On 23 September 2021, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, stated that **the UN Security Council is united in seeking a stable Afghanistan** and an inclusive government, where humanitarian aid can be distributed to vulnerable populations.

- There have been reports that **women-owned businesses**, especially restaurants and cafes, have remained closed by the Taliban in Kabul. “Women have been progressively excluded from the public sphere, prohibited from appearing without a male guardian and face increasing restrictions on their right to work,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said at the UN General Assembly on 21 September. Additionally, the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said during a panel discussion on **supporting a future for girls’ education in Afghanistan**, held on the margins of UNGA, that ensuring all Afghan girls can be educated must be “a zero condition” for the Taliban, before international recognition of their de facto authority can be considered.
- On 24 September, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) **issued two general licenses** to support the continued flow of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- From 1 January to 25 September, UNHCR identified **17,786 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran** (based on 4,282 heads of households who approached UNHCR directly at our receptions). Amongst them, 587 families (consisting of 2,448 individuals) were interviewed, of which:
 - **47%** were children and **60%** were female.
 - **41%** were Hazara and **37%** were Tajik.
 - **24%** were female-headed households.
 - **84%** report having no legal registration status in Iran, while others have valid visas (6%) and other types of documents.
 - The majority of new arrivals reported their need for access to livelihoods and documentation, as well as **urgent need for food and shelter**.
- Additionally, as per information received by Iran’s Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA), **218 Afghans** (88 in Khorasan Razavi and 130 in Sistan and Baluchistan) are being hosted by the government.
- However, **the number of newly arrived Afghans are understood to be much higher** than reported by UNHCR as many Afghans continue to cross into Iran undetected and, for fear of being apprehended by authorities, do not make themselves known to the government or UNHCR. UNHCR continues to face challenges in monitoring arrivals and verifying figures, due to the absence of a centralized registration system and continued lack of access to border areas.
- Iran already hosts some **4 million Afghans** (refugees, undocumented, and passport-holders) and has maintained inclusive policies for over 40 years, despite its own economic challenges.

RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- According to BAFIA, the number of undocumented Afghans who are apprehended while trying to enter Iran, are detained in Sistan and Baluchistan and thereafter deported has reportedly **decreased** from 1,500 per day last week to about 1,000 per day during the reporting week. The reason for this may be the increasingly **restrictive measures of the Taliban**, who are reportedly preventing Afghans without proper documentation from exiting Afghanistan’s southern border with Pakistan, which is commonly used for entering Iran. However, this represents a mere fraction of new arrivals, who in larger numbers are succeeding in making their way past border areas and towards urban centres.
- During the reporting period, UNHCR’s field office in Dogharoun facilitated the **voluntary repatriation** of a number of Afghans, the majority of which were refugee students who were travelling to Afghanistan to exchange their Amayesh cards for a passport and **student visa**. BAFIA recently announced that, due to the volatile situation in Afghanistan, refugee students could make this change in documentation in Kish island (south of Iran), although this has seemingly not yet been implemented.
- UNHCR issued a **non-return advisory** for Afghanistan on 16 August 2021, which remains in place. UNHCR reiterates its call for a bar on returns of Afghan nationals, including asylum seekers who have had their claims rejected. UNHCR is seeking further clarity and reiterating the principle of non-refoulement to the Government.

APPROACHES TO UNHCR OFFICES

- By the end of September, **the number of persons approaching UNHCR offices** decreased to 30-50 compared to approximately 400-500 Afghan persons of concern who were approaching UNHCR premises in late August and early September. This decrease can be attributed to the wide-scale information-sharing by UNHCR offices, partners, and consular sections of Embassies, addressing the misinformation regarding resettlement.
- UNHCR's [help page](#) for Afghans who recently arrived in Iran is updated regularly. Embassies are encouraged to further share UNHCR's [announcement](#) on what services are available to undocumented Afghans, as they deem necessary.
- UNHCR continues to advocate for States to **include Afghan refugees in Iran in any resettlement programming**, including as a tool to reduce the number of vulnerable refugees attempting secondary movements. In 2022, 80,000 refugees in Iran will need resettlement (10% of the refugee population). UNHCR can best support those most in need of resettlement if countries provide flexible criteria for resettlement (i.e., not only focusing on women and girls). Resettlement is a tangible sign of international responsibility-sharing, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

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 11 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.

- The worst-case contingency planning figure is of **515,000** new Afghans displaced across borders over six months, with **150,000** arrivals in Iran.
- During the reporting period, a mission was underway in Sistan and Baluchistan to the Niatak site by UNHCR, UNICEF, NRC, PDA (local NGO) and BAFIA representatives, as follow up to previous assessment missions. A **shelter** strategy is currently under discussion, with priorities including interventions related to basic site preparation and construction of WASH facilities and water network. UNHCR and NRC will be supporting the development of 8 blocks each (16 out of a total of 28 planned) this year. Development of more than **8 blocks this year** would, for UNCHR, be dependent on additional funding. Simultaneously, advocacy continues for enhanced responses to the needs of the increasingly large number of new arrivals in urban settings.
- 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 of USD 299 million, including almost **USD 131 million for UNHCR** alone.

For Iran, interagency needs are of USD 135 million, including **USD 58.9 million for UNHCR**.

UNHCR Iran overall funding needs for 2021: **USD 118.9 million**.

FUNDING UPDATE

As of 13 September 2021, UNHCR's **overall programmes in Iran** (regular and emergency programming) were **31% 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 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 **14.3 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

Private donors **Australia** 6.1 million | **Germany** 3.6 million | **Japan** 2.9 million
Canada | Luxembourg | Norway | Spain | Czechia | 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** 49.7 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 25 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Private donors Japan** 17.6 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Private donors Italy** 12.3 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million | **Private donors Sweden** 10.6 million

Algeria | Armenia | Australia | Austria | Bulgaria | Canada | Costa Rica | Cyprus | Estonia | Finland | Holy See | Iceland | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | Malta | Monaco | Montenegro | Morocco | New Zealand | Peru | Philippines | Portugal | Republic of Korea | Russian Federation | Saudi Arabia | Singapore | South Africa | Thailand | Turkey | Uruguay | Private donors

For more information, please contact:

Farha Bhojroo

External Relations Officer

bhojroo@unhcr.org, +98 9121327183 (mobile and WhatsApp)

Alexandra Stenbock-Fermor

Associate Donor Relations Officer

stenbock@unhcr.org, +32 498 013153 (mobile), +44 7549 62 55 02 (WhatsApp)