

Working with Partners

The **Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA)** is UNHCR Iran's main operational government counterpart. Additionally, tripartite Project Partnership Agreements exist with other partners including:

- **Governmental:** Ministry of Education (MoE), Literacy Movement Organization (LMO), Ministry of Health (MoH), State Welfare Organization of Iran (SWO), Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Iran Health Insurance Organization (IHIO)
- **National NGOs:** Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI), Society to Protect Children Suffering from Cancer (MAHAK), Society for Recovery Support (SRS), Rebirth Charity Organization (Rebirth), World Relief Foundation (WRF), Chain of Hope (COH); Pars Development Activists Institute (PDA), Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA), Kiyana Cultural and Social Group (KIYANA)
- **UN Agencies and International Organizations:** UNHCR coordinates with UN partner agencies, as well as NGOs and international organizations under the umbrella of the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). UNHCR continues to collaborate with its network of partners and to implement joint activities.

Main Activities

Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

The SSAR is a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy between UNHCR and the governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran that was launched in 2012 and aims at ensuring the protection of Afghan refugees, and finding solutions for them. The most recent quadripartite meeting between the three governments and UNHCR in June 2019 saw the SSAR extended until end 2021, underscoring that the SSAR's main objectives remain pertinent and relevant. The extension is based on the original SSAR Framework from 2012, and the key objectives of the SSAR in Iran remain focused around the three pillars of health, education, and livelihoods. UNHCR has developed a regional document to further clarify our strategic direction following the two-year extension of the Framework, in line with government priorities. The document is called 'Enhancing Resilience and Co-Existence through Greater Responsibility Sharing' and places emphasis on the need to invest in the self-reliance of refugees to enable conducive stays in host countries as well as sustainable reintegration once conditions in Afghanistan become suitable for return. The document also emphasizes the need for enhanced responsibility and burden-sharing by the international community, in line with what is outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees, which was affirmed at the UN General Assembly in December 2018. The upcoming, high-level, Global Refugee Forum (Geneva, December 2019) will be used to further underscore the need for enhanced responsibility-sharing and the quest for durable solutions.

Protection

- **Registration and documentation:** The Government of Iran is responsible for asylum-seeker registration and refugee status determination, and periodically renews refugee identification cards (Amayesh). Amayesh cards allow conditional freedom of movement and enable refugees to access basic services and obtain temporary work permits. The Amayesh XIV renewal exercise officially started on 28 May 2019. This year, the applications process has been extended to husbands and children of Iranian women who have participated in the headcount scheme and received LPs, as well as to those who have not participated in the previous two rounds of Amayesh and exceptionally received an LP. For the first time, individuals and households will be recorded in the new integrated BAFIA database: SIAM (Integrated Database of Immigrants and Foreign Nationals).

According to data provided by the government in 2015, over **951,000 Afghan refugees** hold a valid Amayesh card. In addition, some **450,000 Afghan passport-holders** with Iranian visas reside in the country including former Amayesh card-holders, who have obtained student visas to access higher education. In addition to individual passport-holders, the renewal of family passports was completed in early 2018, enabling families without individual passports to obtain one-year Iranian visas.

In 2017, the Government of Iran issued slips to more than **850,000 undocumented individuals** (mostly Afghans) who participated in a 'headcount exercise', targeting certain categories of undocumented individuals residing in Iran without a valid Amayesh card or an Iranian visa and national passport. The type of documentation to be issued as a result of the headcount exercise is yet to be decided by the government. In November 2018, the Government initiated a new headcount exercise targeting foreign nationals, working informally and formally in Iran, as well as their employers.

- Durable solutions:** UNHCR continues to facilitate the gradual and **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to their respective countries of origin through cash assistance for transportation to the Iran-Afghanistan border. However, conflict and instability in both countries contributes to only a modest number of refugees opting for voluntary repatriation. Thus far in 2019, 702 individuals (692 Afghans/10 Iraqis) were assisted to return, however 36% of these individuals intended to return to Afghanistan for to obtain national passports and Iranian student visas, to come back to Iran to pursue higher education¹. Regarding **resettlement** to third countries, in May 2019, 51 individuals (12 families) were submitted to the United Kingdom. 12 individuals (4 cases) were accepted by Sweden, 91 individuals (20 cases) were accepted by Australia and another 32 individuals (9 cases) were accepted by New Zealand. Also during the reporting period, 1 family (1 individual) departed to Australia and another 65 individuals (22 families) departed to Sweden.



Through technical and vocational training courses young Afghan refugees in Iran develop in-demand, marketable skills. /UNHCR Iran. Behnam Moharrek

- Secondary movement:** Although the arrival of Afghan asylum-seekers to Europe has significantly subsided since the EU-Turkey deal was signed in March 2016, displacement and onward movement of Afghans continues, largely driven by different but ongoing socio-economic and political situations, including precarious security. In 2018 Afghans ranked as the fifth largest population arriving in Europe² and represented the second largest group of asylum-seekers in Europe after Syrians, followed by Iraqis.³ In the first three months of 2019, the arrivals of Afghans to Europe was the highest of all nationalities, consisting of 2,500 individuals; 15% of total arrivals (16,000 individuals). Syrians represented 6%.⁴
- Community-based approach:** UNHCR continues to reach out to communities and include them as equal partners in assessing, designing, and implementing activities and projects in cooperation with the government. These activities help to address issues identified and prioritized by communities themselves, e.g. out-of-school children, supporting peaceful coexistence with host communities, and engaging with vulnerable refugees including those living with disabilities. Experience has shown community-based projects to be high impact and low cost interventions that provide UNHCR with an opportunity to engage closely with refugee communities and to respond directly to the needs and priorities raised by communities themselves. Allowing refugees to take ownership of these activities is the pillar to their success. In 2018, 14 community-based and hygiene/sanitary projects were completed, while the implementation of another 7 projects continued into 2019. New community-based projects are under development in collaboration with refugee communities and government counterparts.
- Persons with Specific Needs (PSN):** UNHCR provides support to persons with specific needs through targeted cash-based and in-kind assistance, referral to governmental and non-governmental partners and inclusion in relevant programmes such as livelihoods. With the support of the State Welfare Organisation (SWO), assistance to persons with specific needs has been further enhanced, especially for the elderly and for persons with disabilities.
- Protection of women and children:** UNHCR provides support to women and children through a referral system with governmental and non-governmental partners.
- Legal support:** UNHCR, jointly with BAFIA, operates a Legal Services Project to provide legal assistance to refugees in Iran and to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. The project

¹ In 2018 a total of 1,984 refugees voluntarily repatriated (1,972 Afghans/12 Iraqis), 51% of whom were student returning on student visas.

² <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/68006>

³ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-2018-EU-Asylum-Trends-Overview.pdf>

⁴ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/69500>

is comprised of 16 Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) and 17 UNHCR Hired Lawyers (UHLs) across the country. In addition to participating in the DSCs, UHLs provide free legal advice and assistance to Afghan and Iraqi refugees. In 2019, UHLs assisted 1,761 individuals (1,725 Afghans / 36 Iraqis), and 1,078 individuals (1077 Afghans and 1 Iraqi national who exceptionally received legal services from DSC Qazvin) had their cases examined by the DSCs on a variety of issues, including family disputes, debts and other financial issues.

Education

UNHCR continues to support the efforts of the Government of Iran in providing access to formal primary and secondary education as well as non-formal education (literacy classes) for refugees.

- **School construction:** Throughout 2018 UNHCR supported the government through the co-funded construction of 8 schools in 6 provinces (additional to 11 schools in 2017), benefiting both refugees and host communities in areas where many refugees reside. UNHCR has continued to provide similar support in 2019 by co-funding the construction of 9 schools in areas where critical needs have been identified (8 provinces). UNHCR also supports transportation for a limited number of vulnerable students living in settlements who have to travel outside the settlement to attend school.
- **Literacy training:** UNHCR in partnership with the Literacy Movement Organization (LMO) is supporting the literacy training of 3,228 refugees at both literacy and transition levels.
- **Inclusive policies for the undocumented:** Following a decree by the Supreme Leader in 2015 stating that all Afghan children should attend school regardless of documentation status, the number of Afghan and Iraqi children enrolled in primary and secondary schools increased to over 474,651.⁵ Since 2015, some 103,000 undocumented children have enrolled in schools.⁶
- **Fee regulation:** In May 2016, the revision of regulations on the registration of foreign national students in Iran resulted in the removal of any refugee-specific tuition fees (70-90 USD per student) for primary and secondary education. UNHCR and the Government of Iran are monitoring the implementation of this revision.

Health

- **Primary Health Care (PHC):** UNHCR complements the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to provide quality PHC services to refugees, including vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines and family planning in health posts located in refugee populated areas. UNHCR also supports MoH in PHC infrastructure including construction and rehabilitation of health posts. 27 health posts are receiving specific support for essential health personnel from UNHCR. Other joint UNHCR interventions planned will include medical referral, harm reduction services and Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) targeting people with disabilities.
- **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI):** As part of a breakthrough agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO) and in close cooperation with MoH, for the fifth consecutive year since 2015 all registered refugees residing in Iran can enrol in a health insurance package similar to Iranian nationals, which covers both hospitalization and para-clinical services (medicine, doctor's visits, radiology etc.). For 2019-2020 UNHCR is covering 100% of the insurance premium fees for up to 92,000 of the most vulnerable refugees including refugees who suffer from special diseases⁷ and their families, while the remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium themselves, during four enrolment windows throughout the year. Premium payers benefit from 12 months coverage from their date of



Refugees enquire about extending their insurance coverage under the Government of Iran-led insurance (UPHI) scheme / UNHCR Iran.

⁵ Figures provided by the Government of Iran as of June 2019

⁶ Figures provided by the Government of Iran as of November 2018

⁷ Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoH.

enrolment. In addition to improving the healthcare of refugees, the insurance scheme provides social protection benefits and offers potential protection dividends by reducing the risk of high out-of-pocket health expenditures and negative coping mechanisms related to economic vulnerability, particularly where surgery or hospitalisation is required.

Livelihoods

In recent years there has been a positive shift in the Government of Iran's view towards enhancing refugees' various livelihoods opportunities, recognising that refugees should be empowered to earn a decent living and be able to positively contribute to the society in which they live. Over time, engaging refugees in skills and livelihoods opportunities will prepare them to find a sustainable, durable solution to their situation - either in their own country or elsewhere.

UNHCR supports both direct and joint interventions with partners at three different levels (policy, organisation, and individual/community) to enhance refugees' financial, human, and social capital and to promote self-reliance and economic empowerment.

- Employment/income generation:** UNHCR collaborates with the Government of Iran and non-governmental partners to implement a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions targeting some 1,893 refugee households, aiming to enhance income and employment generation. These projects include technical and vocational training, establishment of home-based enterprises, and income and employment generation. After successfully piloting the Revolving Fund project (micro-enterprise loans) in Esfahan in 2015, UNHCR is planning to reinstate this project in cooperation with the Government of Iran.



Some successful refugee entrepreneurs assisted by the Government of Iran and UNHCR are now employing Afghans and Iranians in their businesses. /UNHCR Iran

- Business start-ups:** As part of its projects of direct implementation, UNHCR provided business start-up/business development equipment for income generating activities for some 114 beneficiaries in 2018, and intends to pursue similar interventions during 2019. UNHCR is also looking into possible cross-border initiatives for when the security situation in Afghanistan is more conducive for return. These aim at linking the knowledge and skills of refugees in Iran with job opportunities in Afghanistan, while providing them with information on the conditions in Afghanistan.

Cash Based Intervention

UNHCR implements cash-based interventions (CBIs) directly and through partners, including multi-purpose cash assistance to assist extremely vulnerable refugees to meet their immediate protection needs and basic needs with choice and dignity. CBIs are used to facilitate access to higher education and healthcare; to support shelter and livelihoods needs; to support persons with disabilities; to provide transportation in the case of voluntary return; and to assist in covering documentation and transportation needs prior to resettlement. UNHCR leads a Cash Working Group between INGOs, UNHCR, and WFP to harmonize approaches and maximize cooperation between all CBI actors in the country. UNHCR's approach to CBIs is guided by the principle of financial inclusion, which seeks to ensure that refugees can benefit from access to the same national financial channels and mechanisms as Iranians.

Shelter and Infrastructure

In an effort to improve refugees' access to essential services (including shelter, water, domestic energy, sanitation, and community halls), through a bipartite agreement with BAFIA, UNHCR supports critical infrastructure needs in the most refugee-populated settlements and urban areas.

Emergency Preparedness and Response (Contingency Planning)

UNHCR is working closely with BAFIA and other partners on refugee emergency preparedness and response, including the facilitation of capacity building and preparedness workshops. A scenario-based Contingency Plan (CP) for the Afghanistan situation remains in place in preparation to respond to a possible sudden influx of 100,000 arrivals to Iran.

For non-refugee emergencies, UNHCR continues to play an active role in the UN Country Team/Disaster Management Team towards emergency preparedness for natural disasters in Iran (mainly earthquake scenarios), and chairs the Protection Working Group for Preparedness.

Iran Flood Response

Towards end March and into April 2019, floods swept 25 of Iran’s 31 provinces, affecting some 12 million people, including refugees and foreign nationals. In coordination with BAFIA, UNHCR donated blankets, sleeping mats, jerry cans and kitchen sets to support government-led relief efforts which benefited some 4,000 households (15,000 individuals).

UNHCR also supported flood-affected communities in the highly refugee-populated province of Golestan through the construction of a school and health post; 12 months rental coverage for 35 Afghan families; and livelihoods support for 21 Afghan flood-affected households.



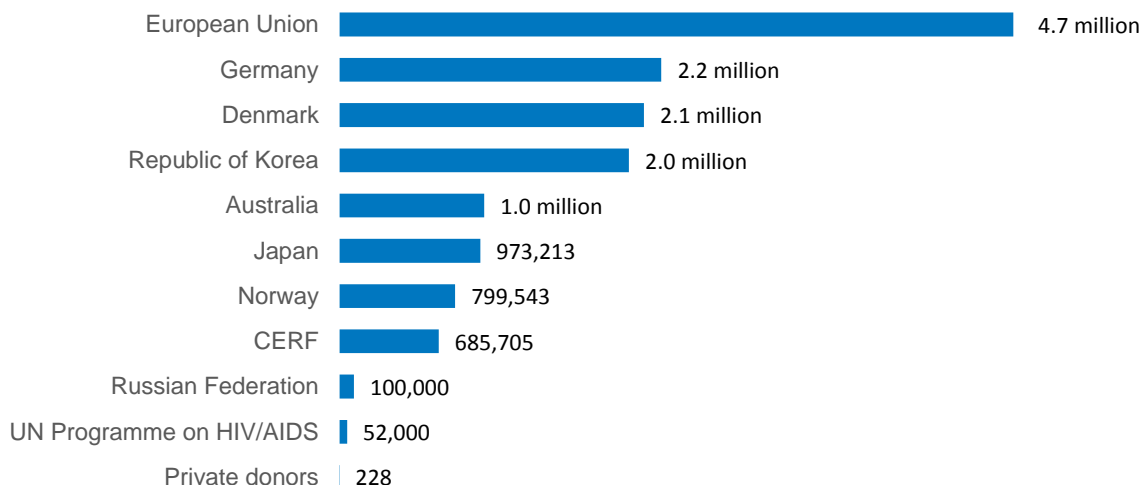
UNHCR’s air freight of emergency relief items lands in Tehran to support national actors responding to flood affected areas in Iran. Hossein Eidizadeh/April 2019

Financial Information

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to this operation 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 **14.59 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 278 students in Iran.

MAJOR UNEARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

Sweden 90.4 million | Norway 44.5 million | Netherlands 37.5 million | Private donors Spain 33 million | United Kingdom 31.7 million | Germany 26.7 million | Denmark 24.4 million | Private donors Republic of Korea 17.3 million | Switzerland 15.1 million |

External Relations

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