

# IRAN

April – June 2020

**101**

Refugees have voluntarily repatriated with UNHCR assistance from April to June, for a total of 334 so far in 2020

**90**

Refugees departed for resettlement so far in 2020

**480,000**

Afghan and Iraqi students enrolled in the 2019-2020 academic year

## POPULATION OF CONCERN

**979,410**

**Afghan**

**951,142**

**Iraqi**

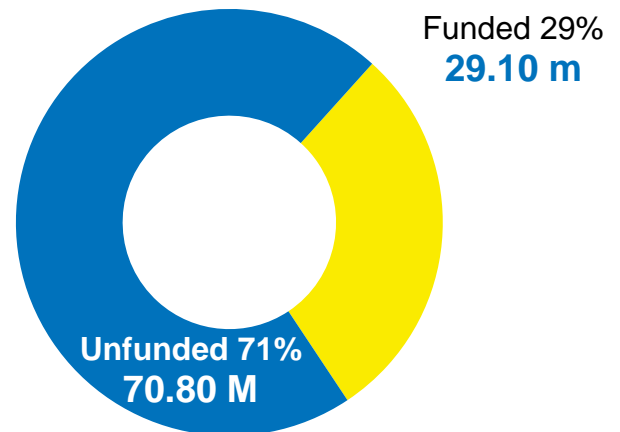
**28,268**

*Based on Amayesh IX statistics received from the Government of Iran in May 2015*

## FUNDING (2020)

**USD 99.9 million**

Requested for Iran



## UNHCR PRESENCE

### UNHCR Staff

#### & Affiliated Workforce:

**140** National Staff

**14** International Staff

### Offices:

**1** Branch Office in Tehran

**1** Field Office in Tehran,

**3** Sub-Offices in Mashhad,

Kerman and Shiraz

**2** Field Units in Esfahan

and Dogharoun



## Working with partners

The **Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA)** is UNHCR Iran's main government counterpart. Tripartite Project Partnership Agreements are being finalised with other partners, including:

- **Governmental:** Ministry of Education (MoE), Literacy Movement Organization (LMO), Ministry of Health (MoH), State Welfare Organization (SWO), Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Iran Health Insurance Organization (IHIO).
- **National NGOs:** Potential partners for 2020 include: Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI), Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), 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), and Kowsar scientific and cultural institute (KOWSAR).
- **UN agencies and International Organizations:** UNHCR coordinates with UN partner agencies, NGOs and international organizations under the umbrella of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).

## Main activities

### Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

The SSAR is a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy between UNHCR and the governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Launched in 2012, the SSAR provides a framework for cooperation between humanitarian and development actors to address the needs of Afghan refugees and the communities that host them. It is also the guiding regional policy framework for protecting and enabling solutions for Afghan refugees. The last quadripartite meeting between the three governments and UNHCR in June 2019 saw the SSAR extended until end 2021. The key objectives of the SSAR in Iran are focused on health, education and livelihoods.

A Support Platform dedicated to achieving the SSAR objectives was launched on 16 December 2019 as part of the first Global Refugee Forum. The Support Platform aims to reinforce the priorities of the SSAR and mobilize additional resources to promote and realize its three pillars – voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration, and assistance to host countries – while seeking to address the remaining gaps through reinvested, sustained and coherent humanitarian and development investments. On 6 July 2020, UNHCR and the three governments launched a portfolio of projects as part of the SSAR Support Platform, outlining key areas of focus and support needs for two years (2020-21).

### 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 give refugees conditional freedom of movement, access to basic services and eligibility for temporary work permits. This year, the pre-registration exercise of Amayesh XV has started and the eligible groups, which in this round also include those who missed out on four previous rounds, are required to approach BAFIA to update their information by **5 August 2020**.

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 now have student visas that allow them 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.

It is estimated that some **1.5-2 million undocumented Afghans** also live in Iran. In 2017, the Government of Iran issued slips to more than 804,000 undocumented individuals<sup>1</sup> (mostly Afghans) who participated in a 'headcount exercise,' targeting certain categories of individuals residing in Iran without a valid Amayesh card

<sup>1</sup> According to the Quadripartite Meeting held in mid-June 2019

or an Iranian visa and national passport. The type of documentation to be issued as a result of the headcount exercise is under negotiation. In November 2018, the Government initiated a new headcount exercise targeting foreign nationals working informally and formally in Iran, as well as their employers. UNHCR continuously engages with relevant parties to pursue this matter.

- **Durable solutions:** UNHCR facilitates the gradual and **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to their countries of origin. On 2 March, UNHCR temporarily suspended voluntary repatriation activities as a preventive measure to limit the exposure of staff, partners and refugees to COVID-19. The facilitation of voluntary repatriation resumed on 2 May 2020, only through Field Unit Dogharoun.

However, due to persevering conflict and instability in both countries of origin, only a modest number of refugees are opting for voluntary repatriation. From April to June 2020, only 101 individuals (101 Afghans and 0 Iraqis) were assisted to return, a significant decrease compared to 233 individuals in Q1. Of these, 2 individuals indicated that they were returning to Afghanistan to obtain national passports and Iranian student visas, after which they planned to come back to Iran to pursue higher education. In the same period in 2019, a total of 475 refugees had voluntarily repatriated (473 Afghans and 2 Iraqis), including 93 students, 20% of whom indicated their intention to return to Iran on student visas.

Regarding **resettlement** to third countries, UNHCR Iran's 2020 resettlement quota was reduced to 120 individuals, offered by the UK (100) and Iceland (20). In the second quarter of 2020, 34 individuals were submitted to two resettlement countries – the UK and, through UNHCR HQ, to Norway.

During the first three months of 2020, 90 individuals departed to resettlement countries: 4 individuals departed to New Zealand, 70 individuals departed to Sweden, 7 individuals departed to the UK and 8 individuals departed to Australia. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, most international flights stopped operating to and from Iran and therefore, flights were cancelled for several families. There is still no indication of when the flights will resume and families will manage to depart.

- **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. Afghans made up 16% of all arrivals to Europe through the Mediterranean route from January to April, compared to 30% of arrivals during the first two months of the year. Afghans remained the largest group of new arrivals this year<sup>2</sup>. Most Afghan arrivals in Europe known to UNHCR in 2019 and 2020 arrived and were registered in Greece. However, smaller numbers of Afghans move irregularly from Greece or Bulgaria through the Western Balkans northwards. From January to May 2020, Afghans were the second most common citizenship to claim asylum in Europe (16,375 first time claims), after Syrians<sup>3</sup>. Additionally<sup>4</sup>, 170,000 Afghan refugees and asylum seekers reside in Turkey, as a transit country for migratory routes to Europe<sup>5</sup>.
- **Community-based protection:** Key ways that UNHCR Iran engages with communities are through community-based projects, awareness raising sessions and focus group discussions. These activities help address issues identified and prioritized by communities themselves, e.g. out-of-school children, peaceful coexistence with host communities, and vulnerable refugees, including those living with disabilities. Experience has shown that community-based projects are a main tool to closely engage with refugee communities, responding directly to the needs and priorities identified by persons of concern. Allowing refugees to take ownership of these activities is the pillar to their success. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based activities proactively continued through remote awareness raising, remote child protection and SGBV case management, and information sharing on precautionary measures.
- **Persons with specific needs:** UNHCR provides support to persons with specific needs through targeted cash-based and in-kind assistance, referrals to governmental and non-governmental partners, and inclusion in relevant programmes such as livelihoods.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR Situation Portal for the Mediterranean Situation, figures are rounded to the nearest ten; figures for May regarding Afghans not yet available

<sup>3</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database>

<sup>4</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/103?sv=41&geo=0>

<sup>5</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/74423>

- **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 to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. The project is comprised of 16 Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) and 16 UNHCR Hired Lawyers (UHLs) across the country for this reporting period. UHLs also provide free legal advice and assistance to Afghan and Iraqi refugees. From April to June 2020, UHLs assisted 694 individuals (684 Afghans, 9 Iraqis and 1 Bangladeshi); 144 individuals (Afghans) had their cases examined by the DSCs on family disputes, debts and other financial issues. In the first quarter of the year, UHLs assisted 818 individuals (813 Afghans, 3 Iraqis and 2 Bangladeshi) and 266 individuals (Afghans) had their cases examined by the DSCs. Due to the COVID-19 situation, DSC sessions across the country were mostly postponed and UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely. However, since the modality of counselling for UHLs has been switched to remote counselling, the number of phone consultations increased from 160 in Q1 to 662 in Q2.

### Education

UNHCR continues to support the efforts of the Government of Iran in providing access to formal primary and secondary education to all children, regardless of documentation, as well as non-formal education (literacy classes).

- **School construction:** In 2020, UNHCR will support the Government by co-funding the construction of 11 schools in refugee-hosting provinces. Throughout 2019, UNHCR co-funded the construction of 12 schools.
- **Literacy training:** In 2020, UNHCR will continue to collaborate with the Literacy Movement Organization by supporting the literacy training of 3,365 children and adolescents at both literacy and transition levels (3,228 refugees in 2019), to allow them to go on to be included in the formal national system.
- **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 480,000.[1] Since 2015, some 130,000 undocumented children have enrolled in schools. However, for the 2020-2021 scholastic year, the Government of Iran has indicated that only certain undocumented Afghan students (e.g. those who had previously been enrolled in school, those whose families participated in the 2017 headcount exercise, and those born to Iranian mothers and foreign fathers whose citizenship is still pending) will be able to continue their schooling.
- **Fee regulation:** Following the revision of regulations for the registration of foreign nationals in May 2016, “refugee-specific” fees of USD 70-90 were removed. In 2020, based on the newest education circular, families holding government-issued identification documents including passport, residence permit, Amayesh XIII or XIV, laissez-passer, or Refugee Booklet, will be able to approach schools and register their children for the 2020/2021 academic year.
- **Higher Education:** In 2020, under the DAFI Scholarship Programme, 472 DAFI students (372 ongoing and 100 new) will be supported with tuition fees and living allowances.

### Health

- **Primary health care:** UNHCR will continue to complement the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure the provision of quality Primary Health Care to refugees, including vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines and family planning, in health posts located in settlements and refugee-populated urban areas. In 2020, UNHCR will contribute towards the construction, rehabilitation and support (through procuring medicine) of 134 health posts; for 26 of these health posts, which are primarily in refugee-hosting areas, UNHCR will also cover the personnel costs of essential health staff.
- **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI):** As part of the agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in close cooperation with MoH, all registered refugees have been allowed to enrol in a health insurance scheme similar to Iranian nationals for the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year since 2015, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services (medicine, doctor’s visits, radiology, etc.). For the sixth cycle (24 Feb 2020 to 24 Feb 2021), UNHCR is covering 100% of the insurance premium for up

to 100,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including refugees who suffer from special diseases<sup>6</sup> and their families, while the remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium themselves. 4,501 refugees have so far self-enrolled into the scheme, which will contribute to the scheme's sustainability.

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.

- **Other health and protection interventions:** UNHCR will continue to collaborate with national charities and NGOs to extend its outreach in the area of health for specific vulnerable categories. The interventions include medical referrals through “Chain of Hope” and “MAHAK,” and harm reduction services through the “Society for Recovery Support” and “Rebirth.” UNHCR will also address the psychological, social and legal needs of refugees through collaboration with the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) and the Association for the Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI).

### Livelihoods

Enhancing refugees' livelihoods opportunities, through recognising that refugees should be empowered to earn a decent living, remains a priority for UNHCR Iran. Giving refugees the possibility of benefiting from livelihoods opportunities will prepare them to become more self-reliant and self-sufficient – enabling them to meet the basic needs of their families and become less dependent on humanitarian assistance. Refugees who are able to develop their skills and capacities, and engage in income-generating activities, are more likely to feel prepared to return to their home country, compared to refugees who have not.

- **Employment/income generation:** In 2020, UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Iran and non-governmental partners will continue to implement a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions, targeting some 2,168 refugees to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees. These projects include technical and vocational training, income-generating projects in workshops, and the establishment of home-based enterprises.
- **Business start-ups:** UNHCR will continue to provide business start-up/business expansion equipment to support income-generating activities by refugees. UNHCR is also looking into possible cross-border initiatives to support refugees once the security situation in Afghanistan becomes more conducive for return. These initiatives will aim to link the knowledge and skills of refugees in Iran with job opportunities in Afghanistan, while also providing them with information on the situation in Afghanistan. UNHCR also intends to explore the replication of a successful Revolving Funds programme, in collaboration with the Government.

### Cash-Based Interventions

UNHCR implements cash-based interventions (CBIs) directly and through partners, including multi-purpose cash assistance to assist extremely vulnerable refugees in meeting 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, and to assist in covering documentation and transportation needs prior to resettlement. UNHCR co-leads a Cash Working Group with INGOs and UN agencies 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 access the same national financial channels and mechanisms as Iranians. Some 1,900 refugee households (9,500 individuals) will benefit from multi-purpose cash support from UNHCR in 2020.

Additionally, in April 2020, UNHCR rolled out one-off Cash for Basic Needs (COVID-19) grant to cover basic shelter, nutritional and hygiene needs for a three months period, for some 1,657 households. As of June, 1,031 households (4,854 individuals) had been assisted. This is to address the negative economic impact of COVID-19 on these individuals.

### Shelter and Infrastructure

<sup>6</sup> Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoH.



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 regularly updated scenario-based Contingency Plan for the Afghanistan situation is in place to respond to a possible sudden influx of 150,000 arrivals to Iran.

For non-refugee emergencies, UNHCR continues to play an active role in the UN Country Team/Crisis Management Team/Disaster Management Team and the Protection Working Group for Preparedness.

### **COVID-19**

UNHCR's response to the pandemic is anchored in supporting the Ministry of Health's country-wide response by providing medical equipment in hospitals and health centres. By June, UNHCR had airlifted almost 100 tonnes of medical aid, including masks, gowns, ventilators, non-contact thermometers and PPEs, to help address critical shortages and support the COVID-19 response. UNHCR, in coordination with the Government of Iran, also distributed basic hygiene items such as soap, hand sanitizers and cleaning materials to refugees in settlements across the country. In addition, the office is responding to outbreaks in refugee settlements.

### **Floods**

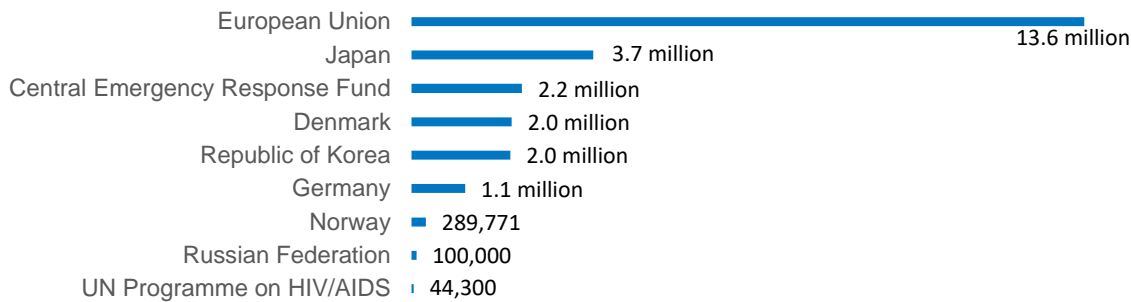
**Response to January 2020 flooding:** UNHCR, in close liaison with its Governmental counterpart, has dispatched core relief items (tents, blankets, plastic tarpaulins, jerrycans and sleeping mats) for some 500 flood-affected households from the Afghan and host communities in the Sistan and Baluchestan provinces, in southern Iran.

## Financial information

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.

### Earmarked contributions | USD

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some **25.10 million**



UNHCR is thankful to the Government of Germany and the Government of Denmark for their support to the 'Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative' (DAFI scholarship programme) which supports 472 students in Iran.

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked/softly earmarked contributions.

### Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Sweden 76.4 million | Norway 41.4 million | Private donors Spain 39.8 million | Netherlands 36.1 million | Denmark 34.6 million | United Kingdom 31.7 million | Germany 25.9 million | Private donors Republic of Korea 20.5 million | Switzerland 16.4 million | France 14 million | Private donors Japan 11.7 million

### Softly earmarked contributions | USD

Germany 39.2 million | United Kingdom 24.8 million | Denmark 14.6 million | United States of America 12 million | Canada 9.9 million | Private donors USA 7.4 million | Private donors Australia 4.6 million | Private donors Japan 3.9 million | Spain 3.4 million | Ireland 3.3 million | Sweden 3 million | Private donors United Kingdom 2 million

Australia | Czech Republic | Iceland | Jersey | Liechtenstein | Morocco | Norway | The World Bank | UN Malawi  
SDG Acceleration Fund | Private donors

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## Links:

Data portal: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>  
Website: <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/>  
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/unhcriran/>