

Iran

September 2022

Iran has been one of the world's leading refugee hosts for over forty years. In August 2021, following the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, many Afghans fled to Iran. UNHCR rapidly scaled up its operation in Iran to respond to the

large number of new arrivals and their urgent needs for assistance. Within the framework of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), UNHCR supports Iran in implementing inclusive refugee policies.

The SSAR also facilitates coordinated protection approaches among partners, consensus-building on international protection priorities, and dialogue and partnerships in support of the Afghan refugee situation.

KEY POPULATION FIGURES

800,000 Refugees

According to the latest data received from Iran in October 2020, there are 800,000 refugees in Iran (*780,000 Afghan *Amayesh* cardholders and 20,000 Iraqi *Hoviat* cardholders).

586,000 Afghan Passport Holders

These are Afghan university students in Iran or those have family visas. Their status as passport holders does not automatically rule out their need for international protection.

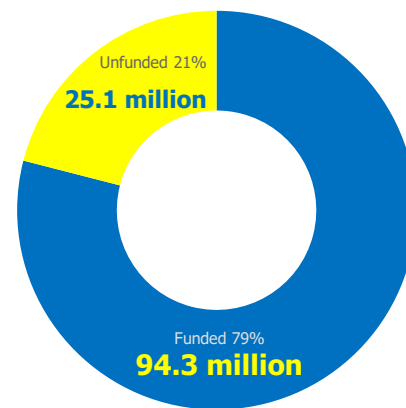
2.2 Headcounted Afghans

In April 2022, the Iranian Ministry of Interior announced the undertaking of a Headcount of all undocumented Afghan nationals in Iran, including the new arrivals. The Headcount was concluded on 30 June 2022. According to the Ministry of Interior, approximately 2.2 million undocumented Afghan nationals (including new arrivals) were registered and received headcount laissez-passers which are valid until 22 October 2022. UNHCR is awaiting the official results of the headcount.

FUNDING (AS OF 13 SEPTEMBER)

USD 119.4 million

requested for the Iran Operation in 2022



UNHCR Iran's funding level averaged around USD **31** million over a five-year period (2016-2020), prior to the events in Afghanistan in 2021. As of 31 August 2022, UNHCR Iran is unprecedentedly **77%** funded, having mobilized about USD **91.5** million of its overall 2022 financial requirements (USD **119.4** million).

However, the funding outlook for 2023 and beyond is sobering, with many other humanitarian crises around the world in need of resources. UNHCR urges the donor community to continue supporting Iran's humanitarian efforts, so services for refugees can be maintained.

Operational Context

According to evolving estimates by Iran, an estimated 1,000,000 Afghans fled to Iran since January 2021. Whilst the number of new arrivals has slightly decreased compared to 2021, an average of 2,000 daily arrivals are still being reported according to regular reports in the public domain. Some **50,400** Afghans who arrived in Iran from 1 January 2021 to 31 August 2022, approached UNHCR requesting assistance and protection (*of whom 31,600 from 1 January to 31 December 2021 and 18,800 from 1 January to 31 August 2022).

Worsening economic conditions as a result of sanctions have had significant adverse effects on Afghans' lives in the country. Reduced Government income has been affecting and limiting the Government's ability to sustain projects and maintain inclusive refugee policies. Should the ongoing negotiations to revive the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) be further delayed or not materialize, further humanitarian support by the international community will be needed to address the impact on refugees and vulnerable host communities.

UNHCR Impact

- **Health:** UNHCR Iran complements the efforts of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME) in providing free of charge primary health care services to all affected populations regardless of documentation, at the same level as nationals. Since 2015, as part of the agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA, and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), all documented refugees have had access to the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI), the national insurance scheme, which covers secondary and tertiary health care at a subsidized rate similar to Iranian nationals. For the current 8th cycle (25 Feb 2022 to 24 Feb 2023), UNHCR is covering **100%** of the insurance premium for **120,000** of the most vulnerable refugees, including refugees who suffer from special diseases and their families. The remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium fee themselves. UNHCR and key stakeholders however recognize that this has become increasingly challenging due to rising premium costs and discussions on remedial measures are underway. UNHCR also supports the construction and rehabilitation of health posts and centers in refugee populated areas, supporting the costs of health personnel in selected health posts/centers (*), procurement of essential medicines and medical and non-medical items. UNHCR supported 134 health posts/centres since 2018. UNHCR, in collaboration with the UN Country Team, supported the Government's application for the supply of vaccines for **20%** of refugees and asylum-seekers through the COVAX Humanitarian Buffer. As of February 2022, **80%** of the total population (refugees, undocumented, and new arrivals) had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- **Education:** Access to inclusive and equitable quality education in national systems creates conditions in which children and youth can learn, thrive and develop their potential, build individual and collective resilience, experience and negotiate peaceful coexistence, and contribute to their societies. Refugee, undocumented and other foreign children study side by side with Iranian students, while following the same national curriculum. UNHCR works with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to facilitate affected people's access to quality primary and secondary education (***500,080** Afghan and Iraqi children enrolled in primary and secondary schools in 2021). Moreover, from 2010 to 2020 UNHCR supported **95** school constructions in **18** provinces, which facilitated access to education for **39,000** foreign national and Iranian students. While education is accessible to all in Iran, many refugees and new arrivals have not been able to continue their studies, due to financial constraints, delayed instructions on the

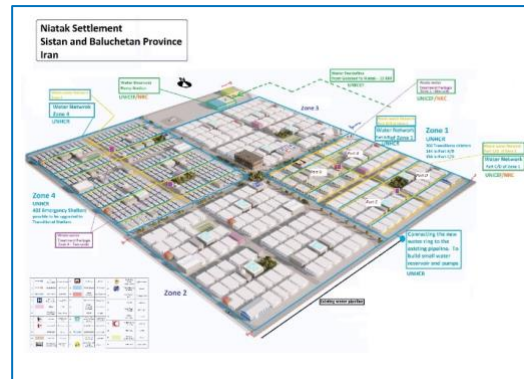
new arrivals' eligibility to enroll in schools, and more importantly a lack of enrolment capacity in schools which needs to be seriously addressed and improved.

With the aim of providing literacy classes to enable over-aged, out-of-school children and adults to benefit from literacy training and help them re-join the education system, UNHCR collaborates with the Literacy Movement Organization (LMO), linked to the MoE, to provide non-formal education to refugees. In 2021, **1,380** out-of-school children and over-aged students were supported with access to literacy and numeracy courses. Refugees in Iran can access higher education, by exchanging their **Amayesh** cards and obtaining a national passport and Iranian student visa. They can also receive support to cover their tuition fees and living costs while undertaking their undergraduate studies, thanks to the DAFI scholarship programme – funded by Germany, private donors and UNHCR. Since 2020, **1,496** refugee students in Iran have benefited from the DAFI scholarship.

- **Livelihoods:** UNHCR provides refugees the opportunity to build their skills, capacities and entrepreneurial know-how so that, when the conditions become conducive to their return to Afghanistan, they are better prepared to rebuild their lives, reintegrate their communities, and contribute to reconstructing their country. In 2022, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government and non-governmental partners, implements a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees. These interventions include certified technical and vocational training in some **60** occupations which will benefit a total of **1,488** refugees, as well as income generation projects which supported some **129** refugees as of the end of July 2022.
- **Durable Solutions:** In February 2022, UNHCR issued a [Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan](#), superseding the previously issued non-return advisory of August 2021. As such, UNHCR does not promote returns to Afghanistan and only facilitates **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees who chose to voluntarily return to their countries of origin. By the end of July, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of **225** returnees to Afghanistan and **one** returnee to Iraq, in a voluntary and informed manner. 17% of the returnees were students.¹This represents a substantial decrease compared to the **761** returns facilitated in the same period in 2021. The number of those opting to return to Afghanistan declined by **70%** compared to the same period in 2021. While in 2021 UNHCR Iran received no quota for **resettlement** of Afghan refugees, in 2022 it is working with resettlement partners and the Government to resettle **3,000** refugees.
- **Inter-agency coordination:** Under the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), UNHCR facilitates coordination among international humanitarian organizations in Iran. At a strategic-level, the UNHCR-led Refugee Response Group (RRG) brings key international partners together to support a coordinated and coherent approach including, most recently, on issues of common concern such as local partnerships and the response to new arrivals in settlements. As the lead agency under the RCM, UNHCR also uses this platform to identify challenges and other operational barriers which impede the response of international partners, using its convening power to subsequently raise these issues on behalf of the wider community with BAFIA. Going forward, UNHCR will continue to promote and recommend inclusive coordination mechanisms bringing together all key national and international stakeholders.

¹ UNHCR facilitates the return of Afghan students from Iran to Afghanistan to obtain student visas to pursue their studies back in their country of asylum.

- **Support to settlements:** In agreement with the government, the new **Niatak** site will host both newly arrived Afghan asylum-seekers and the *in situ* vulnerable Afghan populations (Afghans who have been in Iran prior to the upheavals in Afghanistan in 2021) in Iran. Partners, in coordination with BAFIA, are supporting more sustainable response options as opposed to short-term response options which are likely to be more costly to maintain over the medium to long term. Upon completion, the site can accommodate **6,500** individuals. While waiting for the Niatak site to be ready, Afghans who were previously residing in the government-managed Fariman facility were relocated to the existing refugee settlement of Torbat-e-Jam, in Khorasan Razavi province. Given the limited space in the settlement, UNHCR and partners, in support of BAFIA, will upgrade the settlement's shelters and facilities to respond to the increased population and needs. Currently, UNHCR is undertaking the renovation of over **300** shelter units and the building of **140** new shelter units.



Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- **Access:** Sustained access to border areas and new arrivals would enable UNHCR to further report on the **numbers** and needs of newly arrived Afghans. Currently, UNHCR relies on the data collected from those who have reached us through our hotlines and receptions directly.
- **Data:** Improved access to regular, updated and disaggregated data on refugee populations remains a priority for the operation. Such data will further enhance planning, fundraising and strengthen UNHCR advocacy with the international community and donors.
- **Asylum/Documentation:** UNHCR continues to advocate for open borders and access to asylum and sustained documentation for the 2.2 million headcounted Afghans and new arrivals. Uncertainties remain regarding the status of those headcounted after October 2022 when the slips expire. While the laissez-passer provides Afghans temporary protection against forced return, UNHCR's advocacy in this regard will continue with a view to ensuring that all those in need are provided with as much protection, assistance and stability as possible.
- **Diversifying partners:** UNHCR has made progress with INGOs in terms of the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) roll out in Iran to create more opportunities to engage. UNHCR continues to take a strategic approach to create, maintain and improve our operating space and conditions to further collaborate with partners, including NGOs. UNHCR continues to take a strategic approach to create, maintain and improve the operating space and conditions for UNHCR to further collaborate with partners, including NGOs. While the country context draws a clear line between humanitarian and development assistance, in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR continues to explore opportunities to engage with development actors (such as the Islamic Development Bank) and private sectors in the context of humanitarian and development nexus to further support the governments to keep its inclusive policies for refugees/asylum seekers in Iran, whilst also factoring in the needs of host communities through enhanced integrated programming and 'Nexus' approaches.