


# IRAN


January-March 2024

The Islamic Republic of Iran is host to **the largest refugee population** in the world, hosting **3.7 million refugees and people in refugee-like situation**. The country has generously hosted refugees for over four decades.

Within the framework of the **Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)**, UNHCR supports the Government of Iran in implementing inclusive refugee policies. The SSAR also facilitates **coordinated protection approaches** among

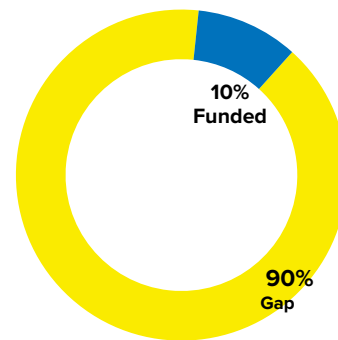
partners, **consensus-building** on protection priorities, as well as dialogue and partnerships in support of the Afghan refugee situation.

 **99%** of registered refugees live in urban areas side by side with the local communities.

 **1%** of registered refugees live in **20** refugee settlements in **12** provinces of Iran.

**USD 140 MILLION**  
NEEDED FOR IRAN IN 2024

As of 31 March 2024



## UNHCR Presence



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Source: UNHCR as of July 2022.

**247** National Staff

**36** International Staff

### Offices:

**1** Country Office in Tehran

**1** Field Office in Tehran,

**3** Sub-Offices in Mashhad,

Kerman and Shiraz

**2** Field Units in Esfahan

and Dogharoun

## Population figures

According to the information available to UNHCR, Iran is host to some **773,049** refugees holding *Amayesh* (760,874 Afghans) and *Hoviat* cards (12,175 Iraqis). In 2022, the Government undertook a headcount of undocumented Afghan nationals in the country, including those who arrived following the events of August 2021. Those Afghans who participated in the exercise, received a ‘headcount slip’, providing this group with a form of temporary protection. In total, UNHCR estimates that some **3.7** million forcibly displaced persons of various documentation status currently reside in Iran.

## Registration and documentation

The Government of Iran manages, registration and documentation related processes for foreign nationals, including forcibly displaced persons. Since 2003 the Government has annually renewed refugee identification cards - *Amayesh* cards for Afghans and *Hoviat* cards for Iraqis. These cards have been providing long staying refugees conditional freedom of movement, access to basic services and eligibility for temporary work permits for limited job categories.

In June 2023, the Government of Iran announced a new **Smart Governance Scheme for Foreign Nationals** to unify the documentation IDs issued to foreign nationals in Iran and facilitating the provision of services to them. This new scheme is expected to lead to the consolidation of all types of IDs so far issued for foreign nationals in Iran with priorities given to *Amayesh* and *Hoviat* card holders as well as students. Headcount slip holders and family passport holders are also targeted by this scheme. The Government has indicated that two million smart cards had been printed and 30,000-40,000 individuals were receiving cards on a daily basis<sup>1</sup>.

In a parallel attempt initiated by the Government to utilize the small capital of foreign nationals into the production and infrastructure of the country, in January 2024, the National Organization for Migration (NOM) announced the launch of a **“Financial Scheme”** which enables foreign nationals to invest 1-1.5 billion Iranian Rials (USD 2,500-3,750<sup>2</sup>) in order to receive a six-month residence booklet and access services including banking services and insurance. According to the Government, the participation in the scheme is voluntary; the headcount slip holders are the primary eligible group to participate in the scheme. The Government has indicated that over 75,000 individuals have registered for the Financial Scheme<sup>3</sup>.

## Durable solutions

Following the UNHCR non-return advisory for Afghanistan, UNHCR remains cautious and continues to provide enhanced counselling under its **voluntary repatriation** programme to prospective returnees on the situation in their final destinations and routes thereto, particularly to those with more vulnerable profiles. From January to the end of March 2024, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of **123** Afghans, which represents a **27** per cent increase compared to the same period in 2023. Some **51** per cent of the refugee returnees were females. Refugees declared to be returning for various reasons including financial constraints in Iran, acquiring documentation from Afghanistan or family reasons. The interviews with the refugees showed that an increasing number demonstrated the financial constraint in Iran as a reason for return and to look for better livelihood opportunities and prospect for the family members.

While in 2021 UNHCR Iran received no quota for **resettlement** of Afghan refugees, in 2022 and 2023 it worked with Member States providing resettlement quotas and the Government of Iran to resettle close to **6,400** refugees, given the increasing protection needs of refugees in Iran combined with the security situation in Afghanistan. From January to end March 2024, a total of **900 refugees** were submitted to resettlement countries for resettlement consideration. During the same period, **210** refugees departed Iran on resettlement. UNHCR Iran also expanded complementary pathways to help refugees find protection and solutions in third countries. From January to the end

<sup>1</sup> According to the [statement](#) of National Organization for Migration on 18 February 2024. No publicly available information is available about the number of cards issued.

<sup>2</sup> Based on the current UN exchange rate

<sup>3</sup> According to the [statement](#) of National Organization for Migration on 18 February 2024. No publicly available information is available about the number of residency booklets issued.

of March 2024, UNHCR Iran provided support to **122** individuals to access family reunification and **18** individuals to access other pathways, such as education, employment, humanitarian visa and private sponsorship programmes.

### Cash-based interventions

UNHCR provides cash assistance to refugees and refugee-like populations who are highly vulnerable, helping them address their immediate protection and basic necessities. As such, they can utilize the multipurpose cash according to their specific needs, whether it is for food, accommodation, medical treatment, or other vital expenses. As of the end of March 2024, UNHCR had assisted **2,086** households, with cash, supporting **9,837** individuals, and utilizing a budget of approximately **USD 800,000**.

### Education

Since May 2015, all foreign national children in Iran have had access to primary and secondary education, regardless of their documentation status. Refugee, undocumented and foreign national children study side by side with Iranian school children and follow the same national curriculum.

- According to the Ministry of Education (MoE), the number of Afghan and Iraqi children enrolled in primary and secondary schools for the 2023-2024 scholastic year is **800,000 to 1,000,000**. Worsening economic conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers, combined with a lack of enrolment capacity in schools, has hampered many Afghan children's access to education, resulting in a considerable number of out-of-school children. In 2024, UNHCR is supporting the government by co-funding the construction of **four** schools from for refugee and host community children in refugee-hosting provinces.
- UNHCR also supports tertiary education for refugees through the DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship programme. In 2024, under the **DAFI scholarship programme**, **298** refugee students will benefit from support with tuition fees and living allowances.
- To mitigate the priority unmet needs of the education sector in 2024, UNHCR requires some **USD 32 million**. From this amount 79 per cent would be utilized for school construction in refugee-hosting provinces, and 21 per cent for components of soft activities such as procurement of equipment, life-skills training, hygiene training, and support to tertiary education.

### Health

UNHCR complements the inclusive health policies in Iran through working with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME), to ensure that all refugees have access to vital and lifesaving medical services. These services include primary care, secondary, tertiary healthcare and harm reduction services include medical referrals, prevention, and harm reduction services through individual and group counselling.

- **Primary healthcare (PHC):** Primary healthcare, which includes vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines, and family planning, is available free of charge for refugees and asylum-seekers in health posts located in settlements and refugee-populated urban areas.
- UNHCR supports the construction and rehabilitation of health posts located in refugee populated areas, supporting the costs of health personnel in selected health posts, procurement of essential medicines and medical and non-medical items.
- **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI):** Since 2015, as part of the agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in cooperation with MoHME, all registered refugees have access to the national health insurance scheme, similar to Iranians, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services at a subsidized rate. For the current/10<sup>th</sup> cycle (25 Feb 2024 to 24 Feb 2025), UNHCR is covering **100 per cent** of the insurance premium for **95,000** of the most vulnerable refugees including refugees who suffer from special diseases<sup>4</sup> and their family members. The remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance scheme by paying the premium fee from their own pocket (self-enrolment in the scheme). Moreover, UNHCR is engaged with the government on evaluation of health programmes specifically the health insurance to review achievements gained and next steps required to ensure further sustainability of the programme.
- To mitigate the priority unmet needs of the health sector in 2024, UNHCR requires some **USD 19 million**. Among the priorities are the need for further support to PHC including vaccination, construction and rehabilitation of health centers, local and international procurement of essential medical equipment and supplies and expanding the coverage of UPHI for all refugees beyond the vulnerable 95,000 target population.

<sup>4</sup> Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoHME.

## Livelihoods

Enhancing refugees' livelihoods remains a priority for UNHCR, as it can help refugees become more self-reliant and self-sufficient. Enabling them to meet the basic needs of their families and become less dependent on humanitarian assistance, and ultimately preparing them for their return to Afghanistan, when conditions become conducive. In 2024, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government and non-governmental partners is implementing livelihood interventions to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees. These interventions include certified technical and vocational training in some **40** occupations, including welding, gas piping, repair of appliances, electrician, tailoring, leather crafts, baking and confectionery which will benefit around **782** refugees and vulnerable host community members under the partnership agreement with the Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO). Additionally, some **71** refugee women will receive vocational and skills training which will lead to income generation under the partnership agreement with the Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA) NGO in 2024. Additionally, in 2024, through Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC), **68** Iraqi vulnerable refugees in three provinces of Ilam, Khuzestan, and Qom will benefit from multipurpose cash assistance for addressing their basic needs and improve their livelihoods situation.

## Inter-Agency Coordination

The 2024-2025 **Refugee Response Plan (RRP)** for the Afghanistan Situation was launched in March 2024. Under the delegated authority of the Refugee Response Group (RRG), the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) oversees the development and implementation of the RRP in close coordination with eight sectors activated under the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) in Iran. In total, **14** aid organizations<sup>5</sup> are partners to the RRP 2024, appealing for USD **252** million- currently **7 per cent** funded- (UNHCR budget: USD **13.3**) targeting **2.8** million Afghans and Iranians. The RRP 2023 requested budget was USD 199 million (of which only USD 74.3 million was received) with a target population of 3.2 million. UNHCR continues to actively coordinate with partners to facilitate the implementation of the RRP and mitigate common challenges which impede responses through coordination with its partners. The RRG, chaired by UNHCR, constitutes the main strategic coordination forum for the refugee response, bringing together representative from key international aid organizations engaged in refugee responses at a senior level.

## Working with partners (5 Governmental, and 6 NGOs).

- The **National Organisation for Migration (NOM)**, of the Ministry of Interior, is UNHCR Iran's main government counterpart, superseding the previous counterpart, the Bureau for Aliens and Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA). The establishment of NOM had been the subject of discussion at the Iranian Parliament for several years, leading to an entity that deals with refugee issues on a large scale and enact asylum policies for enhanced protection.
- **Government:** Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME), Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Iran Health Insurance Organization (IHIO).
- **National NGOs:** Rebirth Society, Society for Recovery Support (SRS), International Farda Development Activist Association (FDA), Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA), Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC), and the Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI).

**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). The SSAR is a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy between UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, UNDP, IOM, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNICEF, UNODC, UNFPA, WFP, WHO, ITC, NRC, RI, INTERSOS.

## 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 programs with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds.

**Earmarked contributions** for the Iran operation amount to some **USD 13.3 million** as of **31 March 2024**:

**Japan** 4 million | **Germany** 1.6 million | **UN Programme on HIV/AIDS** 0.08 million | **Bulgaria** 0.075 million | **Italy** 0.027 million

Donors of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to the 2024 global programmes:

**Sweden** | **Norway** | **Netherlands** | **Denmark** | **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** | **Switzerland** | **Republic of Korea** | **Ireland** | **Belgium** | **Australia**

For more information, please contact:

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**Links:**

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