



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR IRAN

PROTECTION OVERVIEW OF AFGHANS IN IRAN

Key Protection Risks,
Needs and Priorities
amid Economic Pressure
and Insecurity



Supported by UNHCR,
the UN Refugee Agency

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
1. Methodology	5
1.1 Ethical considerations	5
1.2 Limitations	5
2. Geographical coverage	6
3. Thematic area findings and protection analysis	7
3.1. Access to territory, documentation and asylum (OA1) - Documentation and visa issues	7
3.2. Safety and Access to Justice (OA6) Safety, security and freedom of movement	8
3.3. Well-being and basic needs (OA4) – Basic needs and livelihoods	9
3.4. Community engagement and women’s empowerment (OA7) Community engagement and communication	10
3.5. Healthy lives (OA10) - Access to health and medical support	11
3.6. Crosscutting themes	12
Population Movement Intentions	13
4. Top three priorities identified by the community	14



Supported by UNHCR,
the UN Refugee Agency

This report is published by UNHCR, in collaboration with the SSAR Support Platform. This analytical report was funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which assumes no responsibility for the content of the larger study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This analysis examines protection risks facing Afghan refugees and other Afghans in need of international protection in the Islamic Republic of Iran amid rising insecurity and economic pressure. Consultations indicate a protection environment shaped by socioeconomic strain, increasing psychosocial distress and weakened administrative and dispute-resolution institutions. Across provinces where UNHCR operates, community representatives consistently describe heightened anxiety and uncertainty. One refugee focal point observed:

“ the overall atmosphere within the community is highly tense, with widespread anxiety and stress driven by rising inflation and loss of livelihoods.

Protection risks have increased sharply since early 2026 due to economic decline and further exacerbated by the conflict that began on 28 February. The loss of informal and daily wage employment, combined with rising food costs, rent and health care expenses, has significantly reduced households' ability to meet basic needs. Refugees consistently link these pressures to secondary risks, including debt and deteriorating mental health. As highlighted during community consultations:

“ many families rely on daily wages, and the loss of work has made it increasingly difficult to afford food, rent and medical expenses.

Households with older persons, persons with disabilities and those requiring medical care are disproportionately affected.

At the same time, partial closures of institutions responsible for documentation and administrative procedures have prolonged legal uncertainty. While no system-wide increase in detention or deportation has been reported, uncertainty around documentation status and delays in case processing – linked to the closure or evacuation of Government institutions under the Ministry of Interior – are heightening fear and discouraging engagement. Increased security presence and checkpoints in several provinces further compound this effect. No formal movement restrictions are currently in place. However, many Afghans are limiting their own mobility due to fear, indirectly constraining access to work, health services and legal assistance.

Scope and approach

The analysis focuses on Afghan refugees and other Afghans in need of international protection living primarily in urban and peri-urban settings across multiple provinces. Findings draw on inputs from refugee focal points (RFPs), UNHCR-hired lawyers (UHLs) and psychosocial counsellors (PSCs) working with diverse communities.

While not statistically representative, the strong convergence across locations and respondent groups indicates broadly shared protection challenges affecting women and men, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and households with specific protection or medical needs.

The analysis is intended to inform UNHCR and partners' programming, advocacy and strategic decision-making during a period of heightened uncertainty. It examines how insecurity, economic shocks and institutional constraints interact to shape protection risks, access to services, coping capacities, and identifies community-informed priorities for response.

¹ 16 thematic areas under the Global Results Framework (2022 – 2026) that guide UNHCR's work to protect, assist, and secure solutions for forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Data collection is based on harmonized qualitative tools, complemented by indicative semi-quantitative estimates and triangulated with [UNHCR Helpline and field counselling insights from March 2026](#). All information is presented in aggregate form and follows do-no-harm and confidentiality principles.

The analysis is structured around the following [UNHCR outcome areas](#):

- Access to territory, documentation and asylum (OA1).
- Safety and access to justice (OA6).
- Community engagement and women's empowerment (OA07).
- Well-Being and Basic Needs (OA8).
- Healthy Lives (OA10).

Key trends

Across provinces, three cross-cutting trends emerge:

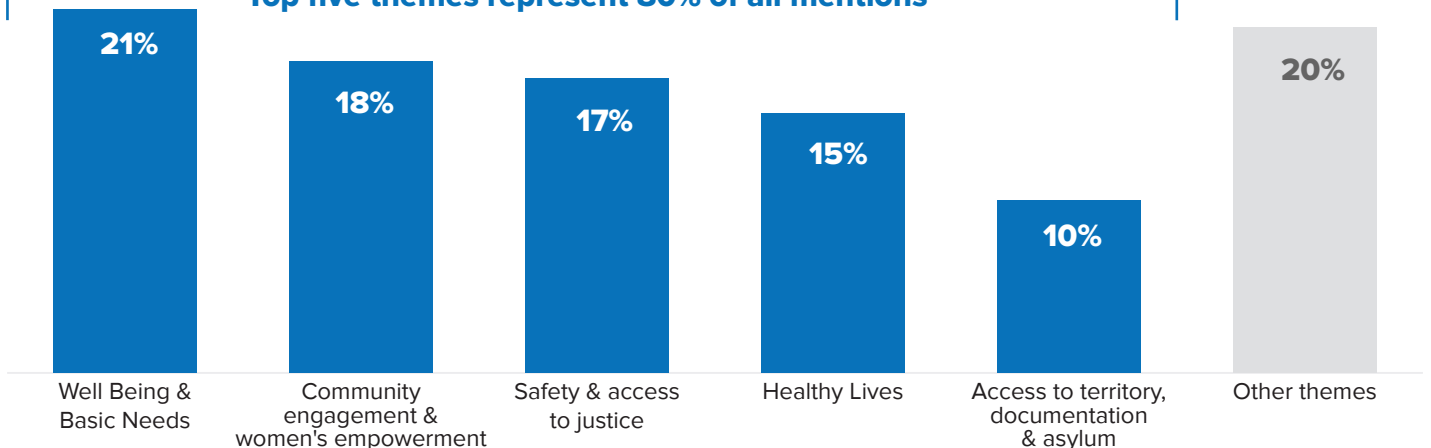
Economic hardship is the primary driver of protection risk. Livelihood loss and inflation are undermining household coping capacity and increasing exposure to exploitation and harmful coping strategies.

Psychosocial distress is rising across all age groups. Prolonged uncertainty, financial strain and disruption to daily routines are driving anxiety and stress.

Main thematic areas

Percentages reflect the share of total mentions across compiled interview summaries (n=470), not the proportion of individual respondents.

Top five themes represent 80% of all mentions



PSCs reported:

“anxiety is the most common symptom, driven by uncertainty about the future and worsening financial pressure.”

Children are affected indirectly through school disruption and household stress, raising longer-term protection concerns.

Community engagement and access to reliable information are increasingly constrained. Reduced in person contact due to security concerns, restrictions on commonly used communication platforms, and fear associated with movement and security presence have shifted engagement towards phone based and informal channels. While RFPs remain central, fragmented communication, misinformation (particularly on legal status, services and resettlement) and slow feedback loops hinder awareness, collective problem solving, and timely response. These challenges disproportionately affect women, older persons and more isolated households.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for integrated responses combining targeted cash-based assistance, sustained access to health and psychosocial services, adaptable legal and protection support, and strengthened community-based mechanisms. Interventions should adapt to evolving security and institutional constraints and be anchored in refugees' expressed priorities: economic survival, access to essential services and reliable information, and mental health support amid prolonged uncertainty.

1. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and semi-quantitative data collected from RFPs, UHLs and PSCs operating in 17 provinces: Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin, Semnan, Fars, Bushehr, Khuzestan, Hormozgan, Kerman, Yazd, Isfahan, Qom, Tehran, North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan and Golestan. A harmonized assessment questionnaire was used across all locations to ensure findings comparability. In total, twenty-one RFPs, twelve UHLs and five PSCs responded to the questionnaire. Consistency across the respondent groups and data sources were ensured. The assessment included forcibly displaced Afghans living in both urban areas and refugee settlements across the assessed provinces.

Respondents drew on over 4,050 interactions with Afghan refugees and other Afghans in need of international protection between 9 and 31 March 2026, as part of their regular engagement across these provinces. These interactions provided insights into emerging protection risks, access to services, legal and documentation issues, psychosocial well-being, population movements and community priorities. While the evidence is primarily qualitative, respondents also provided indicative estimates to support interpretation; these figures are treated as illustrative rather than statistically representative.

The data was analyzed in themes aligned with UNHCR's outcome area. Particular attention was given to cross-cutting issues, including economic pressure, mental health and psychosocial distress, documentation-related uncertainty and self-restriction of movement. Findings were triangulated with information from the [UNHCR Helpline and field counselling in March 2026](#).

1.1 Ethical considerations

All data collection and analysis followed UNHCR's protection and ethical standards, including principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and do-no-harm. Respondents participated in their professional or community representative capacity and were informed of the purpose and use of the data.

No personal identifiers were collected or included in the analysis. All findings are presented in aggregate form. Sensitive information was handled carefully to minimize any potential risk to individuals or communities, particularly in a context of heightened insecurity and fear. Where protection concerns were identified, respondents acted in line with established UNHCR procedures for the provision of legal, psychosocial support or protection interventions.

1.2 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings:

Non-representative sampling: The analysis reflects inputs from community focal points and service providers and is not statistically representative of all Afghan refugees and other Afghans in need of international protection in Iran.

Second-hand reporting: Findings are largely based on observations and discussions by RFPs, UHLs and PSCs. While these actors engage closely with diverse groups, some aspects of lived experience may not be fully captured.

Indicative estimates: Quantitative elements, including caseload figures, contact volumes and assessments of institutional functionality, are based on respondent estimates rather than verified administrative data and should be interpreted as indicative trends.

Time-bound snapshot: The analysis reflects conditions and perceptions during a specific period of heightened insecurity and economic strain. Subsequent developments may affect the protection environment.

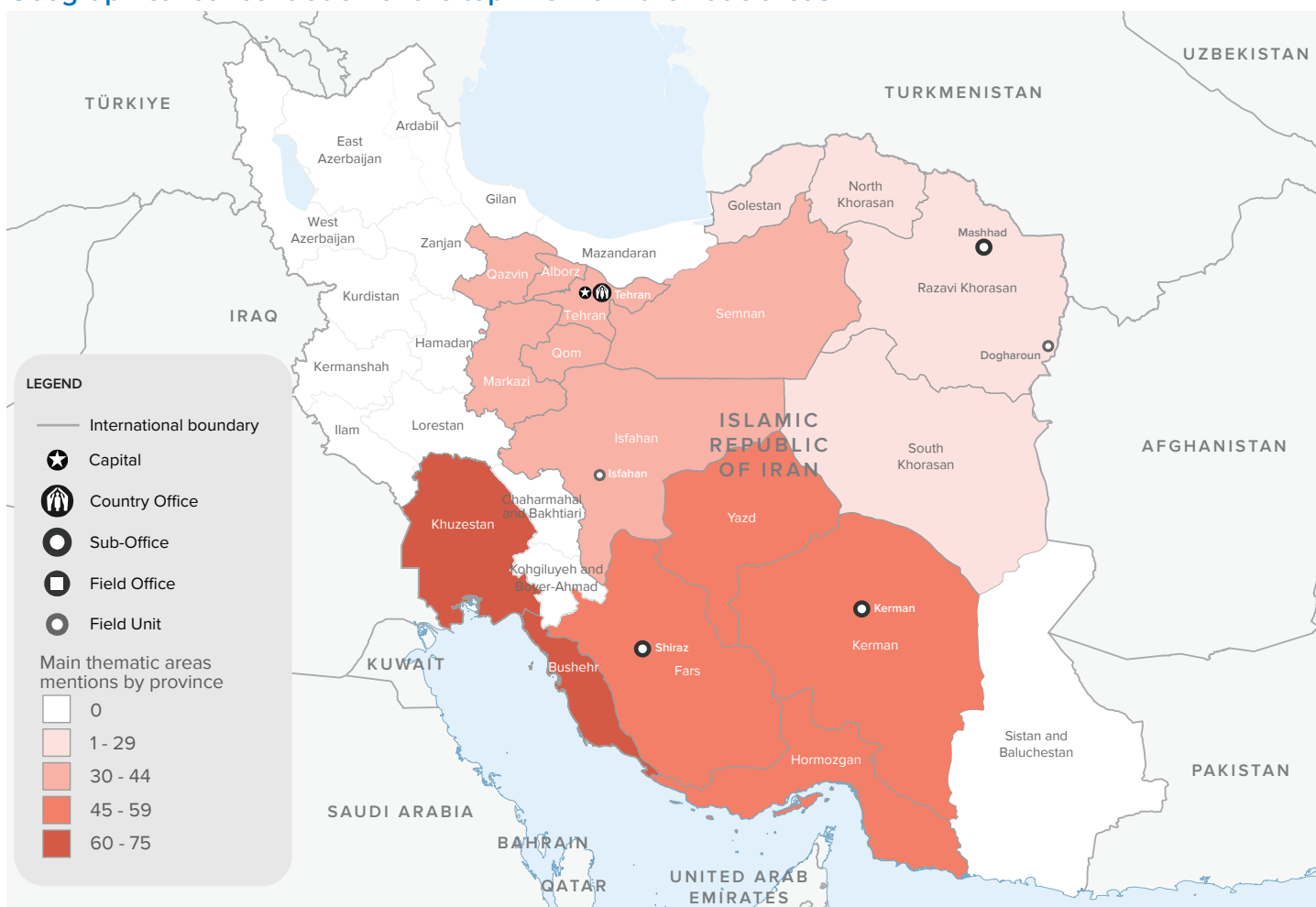
Sensitivity and self-censorship: Fear related to insecurity, documentation status or movement may have limited willingness to share sensitive information, potentially leading to underreporting. Despite these limitations, strong convergence across provinces, respondent categories and data sources provides a robust qualitative evidence.

2. GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

The assessment covers 17 provinces hosting significant populations of Afghan refugees and other Afghans in need of international protection across a range of settings, including urban neighbourhoods, mixed Afghan and host communities and more concentrated Afghan communities such as Baninajjar and Dalaki settlements.

The locations correspond to areas covered through ongoing engagement by RFPs, UHLs and PSCs as part of regular operational presence across provinces. They include a mix of long established Afghan communities and locations affected by recent movements and temporary relocations, capturing variations in protection risks, access to services, and coping capacities across different contexts. Data collection builds on these existing structures while capturing emerging risks, needs and community perspectives.

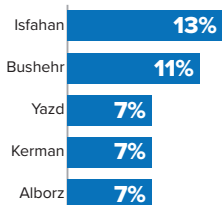
Geographical concentration of the top five main thematic areas



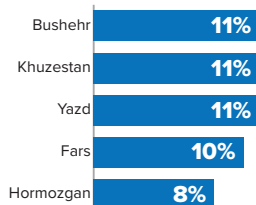
Top 5 provinces by thematic area

Percentages reflect the share of total mentions of each specific thematic area across the provinces.

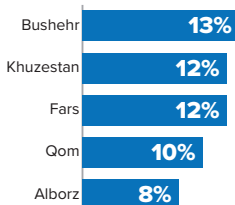
Access to territory, documentation & asylum



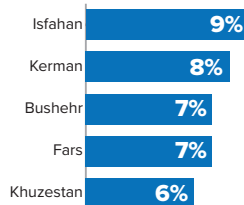
Safety and Access to Justice



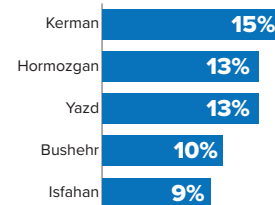
Well-being and basic needs



Community engagement and women's empowerment



Healthy lives



3. THEMATIC AREA FINDINGS AND PROTECTION ANALYSIS

The findings below are organized by UNHCR outcome areas and examine key protection risks, service barriers and coping strategies.



3.1 Access to territory, documentation and asylum (OA1) - Documentation and visa issues

Contexts and risks

Across provinces, issues related to documentation remain the primary protection concern under this outcome area. Access to territory was not part of the harmonized assessment questionnaire.

In Fars, Bushehr and Khuzestan, many passport holders are seeking legal advice as visa validity deadlines approach. *Kefalat* centres² indicate that a fifth visa extension is generally not possible, except in limited cases where transition to a work visa may be possible at the request of an employer.

Across provinces, respondents emphasize that documentation validity and legal status are closely linked to perceived risks of arrest, deportation and access to services, reinforcing anxiety and uncertainty.

Barriers to services and protection

While UHLs report no confirmed increase in detention or deportation linked to the conflict, heightened sensitivity around movement and documentation is increasing anxiety and perceived risk and shaping how individuals access services and legal assistance.

Detention centres in Fars and Bushehr are reported to be closed, while the centre in Khuzestan remains operational, with a lower rate of reported arrests. In Isfahan, no significant change in detention or deportation trends have been observed although a small number of individuals reportedly arrested at checkpoints were released following UHL intervention.

Uncertainty regarding documentation status, combined with increased security related checks, is contributing to fear and precautionary behaviour. While not constituting formal policy barriers, these conditions indirectly constrain access to services and increase reliance on legal counselling for clarification and risk mitigation.

Key community recommendations

- Provide clear, timely information on documentation requirements and visa procedures, particularly for passport holders nearing visa expiry.
- Strengthen access to legal counselling on documentation, status and family unity to support informed decision making in complex legal situations.
- Maintain rapid legal intervention mechanisms, particularly in cases involving detention or documentation related issues.

² Kefalat centres (Offices for Residence and Employment Services of Foreign Nationals) in Iran are private institutions designated by the Iranian government to handle administrative tasks for foreign nationals legally residing in the country, particularly Afghan and Iraqi refugees.



3.2 Safety and Access to Justice (OA6) - Safety, security and freedom of movement

Context and risks

Across provinces, access to justice remains available but uneven in practice. Legal needs are primarily shaped by economic pressures, insecurity and operational constraints rather than systemic denial of services.

Labour disputes, documentation issues and family law cases consistently emerge as the most common legal concerns. Labour-related cases are largely driven by non payment of wages and job loss, reflecting the broader economic downturn affecting both refugees and host communities.

No widespread attacks targeting Afghan communities have been reported. However, isolated conflict-related incidents have affected Afghans and their property in several locations. In Hormozgan, Kerman and Yazd, Afghan residential areas located near high-risk sites have been affected, with reported fatalities. Property damage affecting Afghan households were reported in Fars and in Qom, as well as in Khuzestan where Afghan refugee fatalities have also been recorded. While no direct harm to Afghans or their properties was confirmed in Isfahan and North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan and Golestan provinces, proximity to affected areas has increased fear and perceived risk.

Living conditions influence exposure to these risks. Afghans residing in settlements generally report a stronger sense of safety and more predictable access to services, supported by proximity to community structures and regular interaction with service providers. Conversely, those in urban areas report greater exposure to insecurity, checkpoints and uncertainty.

In practice, access to justice is more limited, as fear, mobility constraints and reduced institutional capacity discourage in person engagement with legal and protection services, even where these remain formally available.

Across provinces, justice and protection institutions remain operational albeit at reduced capacity. Law enforcement bodies like Faraja³ continue to function although staffing levels are significantly reduced – estimated at around 20 per cent in Tehran, Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin and Semnan, and approximately 50 per cent in Isfahan.

The Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs⁴ operates with similarly reduced capacity – around 20 per cent in Tehran, Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin, Semnan, Fars, Bushehr and Khuzestan – with reported office closures in Bushehr and Khuzestan. Courts are described as partially operational, with some civil cases registered for later processing rather than adjudicated. Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) are widely reported as non-functioning or operating at very limited capacity. Afghan embassies and consulates remain partially operational with restricted access. These constraints are contributing to delays in resolving documentation, labour and legal cases, prolonging uncertainty and increasing exposure to protection risks.

Barriers to services and protection

Respondents report increased security measures and checkpoints in several locations, including Tehran, Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin, Semnan and North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan and Golestan provinces. While not reported to explicitly target Afghans, it contributes to heightened anxiety and perceived risk.

³ The Police Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran (abbreviated as FARAJA in Farsi) includes the law enforcements as well as other departments such as immigration police etc.

⁴ The Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA) is the main Iranian government counterpart to UNHCR, responsible for registering foreign nationals, determining refugee status, and managing documentation (e.g., *Amayesh/Hoviat* cards). It is part of the Ministry of Interior, acting as the key partner for managing refugee protection, services, and voluntary return.

No formal movement restrictions targeting Afghans have been reported. However, in areas with a visible security presence, many are self-limiting their movements out of fear, particularly when travel is non-essential or routes pass through high-risk areas. This undermines access to jobs, services, and in person legal assistance, even where these remain available.

At the same time, reduced institutional capacity is affecting access to justice. Limited court functionality, suspension of DSCs and increased reliance on remote legal consultations are reported across several provinces, including Tehran, Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin, Semnan, Hormozgan, Kerman, Yazd, Fars, Bushehr and Khuzestan. These constraints, combined with fear and mobility limitations, are delaying resolution of documentation and labour cases, with knock-on effects on access to services.

Key community recommendations

- Maintain access to legal assistance, particularly for labour disputes, documentation and family law cases, including continued follow up of ongoing cases.
- Enhance communication so refugees are aware of available legal pathways and how to seek assistance during periods of heightened insecurity.



3.3 Well-being and basic needs (OA4) – Basic needs and livelihoods

Context and risks

Across provinces, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions are driving protection risks, primarily through livelihood loss and rising living costs. Most Afghan households rely on daily wages and informal labour, leaving them highly exposed to income shocks.

Inflation – particularly in food prices – has significantly reduced purchasing power. Respondents report increases exceeding 100 per cent for some basic commodities. These pressures disproportionately affect households with older persons, persons with disabilities and those requiring continuous medical care, who face higher costs and fewer livelihood options.

Economic strain is also closely linked to psychosocial distress. PSCs report increased anxiety, fear and stress associated with job loss and unmet basic needs. In several locations, prolonged financial pressure is contributing to family stress and intra household tensions, heightening the risk of protection incidents where coping capacities are exhausted.

Barriers to services and protection

Barriers to assistance and services are significantly exacerbating protection risks. In Isfahan, Hormozgan, Kerman and Yazd, respondents indicate that assistance mechanisms and NGO services often prioritize nationals, leaving Afghan refugees with limited or inconsistent access to support.

Irregular access to food or cash-based assistance, coupled with rising rent and medical costs, is forcing households to make difficult trade-offs. These include delaying or foregoing medical care, reducing food intake, and accumulating unsustainable debt. Labour and wage disputes linked to non-payment of wages are also increasing.

Certain groups are disproportionately affected. Women at risk, elderly persons, and households without stable income face greater barriers to assistance and are more exposed to harmful coping strategies. PSCs highlight that prolonged financial strain and uncertainty are contributing to stress and may increase reliance on harmful coping mechanisms, particularly where formal support systems are inaccessible or perceived as exclusionary.

Key community recommendations

- Expand cash based assistance, alongside targeted support for food, rent and health care needs, particularly for households with older persons and those with medical conditions.



3.4 Community engagement and women's empowerment (OA7) – Community engagement and communication

Context and risks

Across provinces, community engagement continues to rely primarily on RFPs, while other communication channels are under strain due to staffing shortages or connectivity disruptions and movement constraints.

Restrictions on widely used applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Imo in Fars, Bushehr and Khuzestan, have increased reliance on phone calls, in person contact and national platforms. In other provinces, communication remains mixed but constrained. In Hormozgan, Kerman and Yazd, communication continues through national messaging applications, phone calls and limited community gatherings. In Isfahan, communication has shifted largely to phone based channels following the cancellation of social and religious gatherings. Across North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan and Golestan provinces, reduced in person interactions is affecting mutual support and community self management.

Reduced opportunities for in person engagement have limited group activities and information exchange. In Isfahan and Qom/Alborz, respondents report that gatherings are no longer a preferred or feasible modality. In North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan and Golestan, decreased face to face engagement has weakened community coordination.

Clear differences are observed between Afghans living in settlements and those in urban areas.

In settlements, stronger social cohesion and proximity to community structures support more regular engagement and information sharing, alongside a general sense of safety. In urban areas, engagement is more fragmented, relying mainly on informal and phone based networks. Reduced in person gatherings and communication constraints in these settings have limited collective participation and awareness of available support.

Barriers to services and protection

Community engagement is further constrained by connectivity disruptions, reduced in person contact and persistent information gaps. Restrictions on digital platforms, blocked SIM cards (in Qom and Alborz), intermittent network outages (in Isfahan, North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan and Golestan), and fear associated with communication are all limiting effective outreach and feedback.

These barriers disproportionately affect women and older persons, who face greater isolation and fewer accessible spaces to receive information or raise concerns.

Key community recommendations

- Strengthen and diversify communication channels, including hotlines and trusted intermediaries, and provide timely responses to urgent requests.
- Address misinformation and rumours, particularly on resettlement and security, through clear and consistent communication.
- Sustain community based structures, including RFPs and informal networks, while ensuring the safe participation of women and older persons.
- Expand psychosocial and community based support, including remote and group modalities, to mitigate isolation and distress, particularly among women at risk.



3.5 Healthy lives (OA10) - Access to health and medical support

Context and risks

Across all provinces, health-related needs remain a critical protection concern, closely linked to insecurity and socioeconomic pressure. Medical assistance is consistently identified as a priority, particularly for households managing chronic conditions, disabilities or ongoing treatment needs. In Tehran, Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin, Semnan and North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan and Golestan provinces, respondents repeatedly rank medical support – alongside cash assistance – as an urgent need, including access to services under the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) scheme.

Livelihood disruptions and rising living costs are making it increasingly difficult for households to afford health care, medication, or transport. Older persons, people with chronic illnesses, and those with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and face heightened risks of delayed care.

Psychological distress is also increasing. PSCs report heightened anxiety and stress linked to insecurity, job loss, and housing instability, which affect coping capacity, family dynamics, and protection outcomes.

Children face specific and compounding risks. In Tehran, Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin, Semnan, and North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan and Golestan, children report having trouble sleeping, feeling isolated because of not going to school, difficulty concentrating, irritability, and emotional detachment. Although fewer cases are reported in Hormozgan, Kerman and Yazd, sadness related to school disruption highlights broader concerns about child protection and well-being.

Barriers to services and protection

Despite the availability of some state-run mental health services, access and utilization among Afghan refugees remain limited.

Low awareness of available services, perceived eligibility barriers and uncertainty around access continue to reduce uptake, particularly for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

Concerns regarding the adequacy and consistency of health-related needs assessments and follow-up have been reported in Fars, Bushehr and Khuzestan provinces, particularly for individuals with medical needs, as operational state medical facilities are largely focused on treating those affected by the strikes.

Service delivery is increasingly shaped by security and mobility constraints, with psychosocial support delivered through remote or hybrid modalities. While these approaches help maintain service continuity, they may limit access for the most vulnerable, including individuals with limited connectivity, lower digital literacy or severe mental health needs requiring in person support.

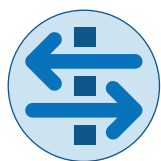
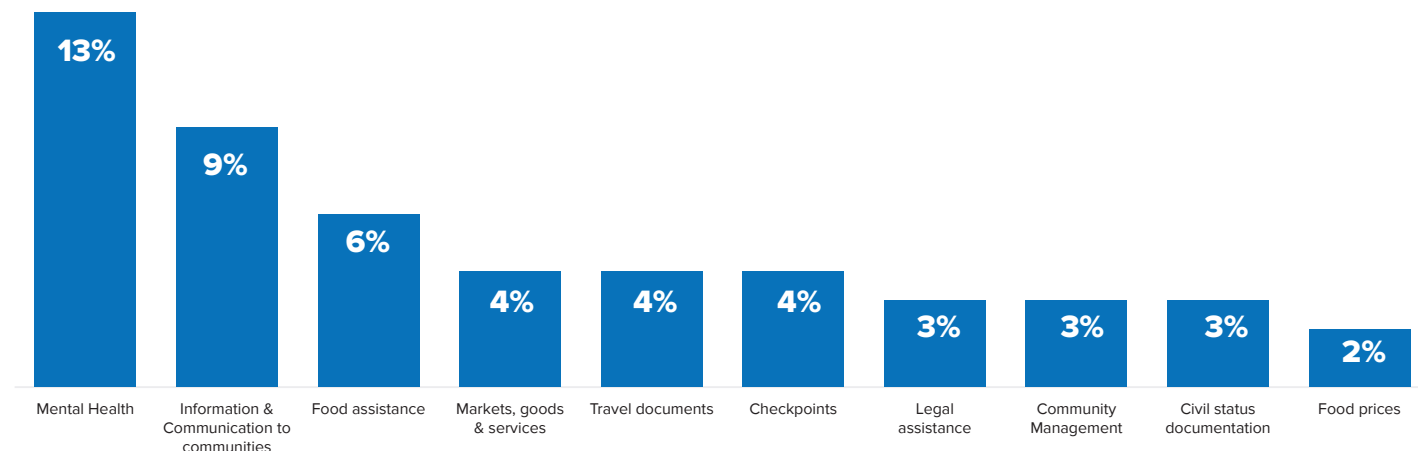
Overall, gaps in access to timely, targeted and inclusive health and MHPSS services are contributing to deteriorating physical and mental health, reduced coping capacity, and increased strain at household and community levels.

Key community recommendations

- Ensure continuity and improved targeting of medical assistance, including support for chronic conditions, disabilities and essential medications, with strengthened follow up mechanisms.
- Sustain and expand access to MHPSS services through remote, hybrid and community based approaches, while addressing barriers related to awareness, eligibility and connectivity.
- Strengthen child sensitive psychosocial interventions, including school based or community based activities where feasible, to address distress linked to insecurity and disruption of routines.
- Improve awareness and access to existing health services, including UPHI and state run mental health services.

Top 10 subcategories

Percentages reflect the share of total mentions across compiled interview summaries (n=470), not the proportion of individual respondents.



3.6 Crosscutting themes

Context and risks

Schools and universities are currently operating online and are expected to remain so until the end of the academic year. In Hormozgan, Kerman and Yazd, children are not attending school in person, disrupting learning routines and increasing stress within households. The loss of this key protective space for children contributes to heightened psychosocial strain for both children and caregivers.

Across several provinces, interest in resettlement continues to emerge as a recurring concern. In Qom and Alborz, refugees frequently raise resettlement enquiries with RFPs and UHLs, alongside concerns about security, inflation and loss of livelihoods. In Fars, Bushehr and Khuzestan, resettlement is similarly raised among urgent concerns, together with financial and medical needs. In Tehran, Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin and Semnan, anxiety linked to documentation status and perceived deportation risk is driving increased demand for resettlement information.

Barriers to services and protection

Heightened security presence and checkpoints in Hormozgan, Kerman, Yazd, Tehran, Alborz, Markazi, Qazvin and Semnan complicate movement, even where services remain operational. At the same time, economic hardship is limiting households' ability to meet education related costs, including access to devices required for online learning, as well as their ability to pursue legal remedies.

In the resettlement context, information gaps on eligibility, documentation requirements and limited available slots – particularly in Qom, Alborz, Fars, Bushehr and Khuzestan – are contributing to repeated enquiries, frustration and distress.

Key community recommendations

- Support access to online education to mitigate learning disruption and associated protection risks for children.
- Provide clear, consistent and realistic information on resettlement and complementary pathways, including eligibility criteria and limitations, to reduce misinformation and anxiety.

POPULATION MOVEMENT INTENTIONS

Across provinces, return to Afghanistan is widely considered unfeasible due to long-term residence in Iran, security concerns, and economic challenges. Respondents in Isfahan report limited knowledge of current conditions in Afghanistan and emphasize that their lives, livelihoods and social networks are firmly rooted in Iran, particularly for households with children, older persons and those requiring medical care.

Perceptions are further shaped by secondary information, including community-reported incidents affecting returnees. In Bushehr, reports of returnees killed in incidents linked to Pakistan–Afghanistan hostilities have heightened fear and discouraged consideration of return. At the same time, onward movement is generally viewed as dangerous, costly and not viable under current conditions. As a result, despite increasing insecurity and hardship, remaining in Iran is consistently identified as the preferred option.

No large-scale, self-organized population movements have been reported across provinces. Instead, mobility patterns are characterized by limited, short term and precautionary internal displacement, largely shaped by security considerations and economic constraints. In Hormozgan, Kerman and Yazd, Afghan families living near high-risk facilities report temporary relocations, typically staying with relatives in nearby areas before returning due to the financial and social burden placed on host households. In other provinces, movement is more constrained, with limited intra-city relocation linked to perceived safety concerns and economic pressures, alongside widespread self restriction due to fear and the presence of checkpoints.

Triangulation with [UNHCR Helpline and field counselling data from March 2026](#) indicates that some Afghan refugee families have also undertaken temporary internal relocation to provinces perceived as safer.

Community feedback underscores the need to avoid framing return to Afghanistan as a viable option in the absence of safe and sustainable reintegration conditions and instead strengthen support for continued stay and integration in Iran, including access to livelihoods, services, and clear guidance on available pathways.



4. Top three priorities identified by the community

While communities raise multiple, interlinked concerns across locations, three overarching priorities consistently emerge based on frequency, urgency and recurrence across outcome areas:

1. Financial assistance, livelihoods and basic needs.
2. Access to essential services and reliable information, particularly on documentation extension.
3. Safety, security and mental health

These priorities reflect the most urgent and recurrent needs identified by Afghan refugees across provinces and are intended to complement ongoing efforts by UNHCR, partners, and authorities. Given the fluid context, regular review through protection monitoring and coordination remains essential to respond to evolving risks and access constraints.

Priority 1 – Financial assistance and ability to meet basic needs

Across provinces, financial assistance is consistently identified as the most urgent concern. Consultations highlight the erosion of household economic capacity across both urban and settlement settings. Key issues include:

- Loss of income from daily wages and informal work, leaving households unable to meet food, rent and medical expenses.
- Rising living costs and inflation, particularly affecting food and basic commodities.
- Heightened vulnerability among specific groups, including women at risk, older persons and households without stable livelihoods, requiring targeted cash based or in kind support, or legal processes becomes increasingly constrained.

Community perspective: Without financial support to stabilize household economies – and opportunities to return to work – access to health care, education, or legal processes becomes increasingly constrained.

Priority 2 – Access to essential services and reliable information

Communities identified continued access to services and accurate information as critical in the context of uncertainty and reduced institutional capacity. Key issues include:

- Access to health care and medical assistance, including UPHI coverage and treatment for chronic and acute conditions.
- Access to education, particularly through remote modalities where in person attendance is disrupted.
- Clear and consistent communication on service availability, legal procedures, documentation processes and resettlement, alongside efforts to counter misinformation.

Community perspective: Gaps in services and information are widely reported to exacerbate protection risks. Access to health care, education and reliable information is essential to coping with uncertainty, while service disruptions and misinformation increase stress and undermine overall well being.

Priority 3 – Safety, security and mental health

Safety and well being emerge as a central cross cutting priority, closely linked to psychosocial distress. Key issues include:

- Anxiety linked to insecurity, checkpoints and uncertainty, even in the absence of systemic targeting or large scale attacks.
- Rising psychosocial distress driven by economic hardship, insecurity and service disruption.
- Limited availability of MHPSS services, prompting calls to expand counselling capacity through individual, group, remote and community based approaches.

- **Community perspective:** Mental health concerns are frequently described as a consequence of prolonged uncertainty, financial pressure and weakened community engagement rather than as isolated clinical issues. Without adequate psychosocial support, these pressures continue to undermine overall well being.



1. Financial assistance and ability to meet basic needs

Loss of daily wage income; rising living costs and inflation; reduced ability to cover food, rent and medical expenses; need for cash based assistance; targeted support for vulnerable groups (women at risk, older persons, households without stable livelihoods).



2. Access to essential services and reliable information

Limited access to health care, including UPHI and treatment for chronic conditions; disruption to education, including barriers to online/remote schooling; information gaps on services and procedures; misinformation and weakened feedback mechanisms.



3. Safety, security and mental health

Anxiety linked to uncertainty, checkpoints and insecurity; increasing psychosocial distress driven by financial strain and disrupted routines; limited access to MHPSS; need for individual, group and community based support.

UNHCR IRAN

PROTECTION OVERVIEW OF AFGHANS IN IRAN

**Key Protection Risks,
Needs and Priorities
amid Economic Pressure
and Insecurity**



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Analysis prepared by
DATA, IDENTITY MANAGEMENT & ANALYSIS UNIT (DIMA)
UNHCR REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC