

THE COVID-19 SITUATION IN IRAN has entered its third wave since October 2020, with over 600,000 cases and almost 35,000 deaths by the end of October. In early October, health measures such as movement restrictions and business closures were re-established throughout the country. Due to COVID-19, coupled with the economic downturn, sustained international humanitarian support is key to facilitate the Government's efforts to provide inclusive policies towards refugees, including free COVID-19 testing. There are currently no indications that refugees are disproportionately infected. However, given that refugees often belong to the more vulnerable segments of the population, they may feel the overall impacts more severely, namely on their livelihoods. Working closely with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant's Affairs (BAFIA), **UNHCR CONTINUES TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY SUPPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN'S** response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but more support is needed.



UNHCR and the Government of Iran continued to provide **ESSENTIAL MEDICINES AND PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT** to help bolster Iran's health system. UNHCR has airlifted over 100 tons of medical aid, while as of the end of October, the Ministry of Health had distributed some 52% of 320,000 N95 masks, 78% of 11,650 PPE sets, and 82% of 20,550 face shields to 66 health facilities countrywide. Out of the 79 ventilators imported and handed over to the Ministry, 31 have been distributed to hospitals and emergency units. The Ministry of Health is also distributing the remaining items, including contactless thermometers (33% of 500), on a needs basis. Meanwhile, UNHCR has prepositioned 14,000 contingency COVID-19 hygiene packs in its warehouse in Tehran, to allow for immediate support in settlements or urban areas, and has distributed basic hygiene packages including soap, hand sanitizers, masks and cleaning materials, to some 9,000 refugee households.



UNHCR continued providing one-off **CASH ASSISTANCE** to refugee households who are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19. These include households with a family member who

contracted or is at risk of contracting COVID-19, or has suffered immediate loss of income, combined with specific protection vulnerabilities. The assistance helps them cover basic needs for up to three months. An initial 3,608 households were targeted, while assistance is ongoing.



Thanks to the Government of Iran's **INCLUSIVE HEALTH POLICIES**, refugees and foreign nationals continue to have access to free COVID-19 testing in designated Ministry of Health testing centers. If refugees are enrolled in the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI), they also have access to free treatment and hospitalization, similar to nationals, and only pay the franchise fee. However, UNHCR continues to receive reports of uninsured refugees facing challenges in affording the costs of hospitalization for COVID-19 treatment. UNHCR covers the UPHI premium for 100,000 of the extremely vulnerable refugees, but efforts are ongoing to encourage others to enroll. As of 21 October, a total of 5,474 refugees were self-enrolled premium payers.



UNHCR and BAFIA have increased **COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES** to share information on hygiene and health practices, by engaging with legal-aid partners, psycho-social counsellors,

refugee focal points and other partners. UNHCR also disseminates information through posters and on its digital platforms, to ensure wider reach.



Since 3 May, UNHCR has partially resumed **VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION** and 760 refugees have returned to Afghanistan in 2020, as of the end of October – a significant decrease compared to 1,733 individuals in the same period last year. Additionally, 696,000 undocumented Afghans have returned from Iran as of late October. Some 435,000 of them returned spontaneously without UNHCR assistance; a 250% increase compared to the same period in 2019, potentially due to losses in livelihoods linked with COVID-19.



UNHCR has increased its hotline capacity, for **REFUGEES TO CONTINUE ACCESSING PROTECTION SERVICES**, such as counselling, referrals or inclusion into relevant programmes. This helps address the heightened vulnerabilities of persons with specific needs, including women and children. So far, some 22,000 individuals have approached UNHCR in 2020 – already more than the 20,000 approaches in 2019. UNHCR's hired lawyers and psycho-social counsellors also continued to provide assistance via phone.



\$16.9M needed for COVID-19 measures in Iran

With your support we can help prevent the virus from spreading.

In Iran, UNHCR is seeking USD 16.2 million for its COVID-19 emergency response. This is part of UNHCR's global funding needs and feeds into the wider UN appeal.

In Iran, strengthening and promoting the inclusion of refugees in national systems can help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable.

Support for UNHCR's regular activities, as part of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), further complements the emergency response to COVID-19, by strengthening inclusive national systems, notably for health, and mitigating the virus' socio-economic impact.