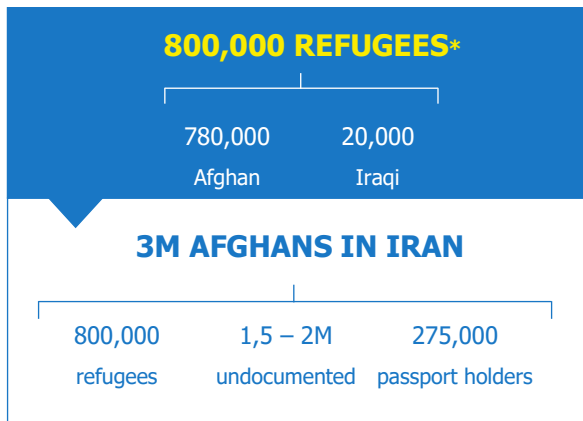


# IRAN

November – December 2020

## OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In December, COVID-19 infections continued to rise, although the rise was slower than previous months, giving cause for cautious optimism. Movement restrictions, closures of non-essential businesses and health protocols continued to be reinforced throughout the country. The Statistical Centre of Iran announced that the inflation rate in 2020 stood at 30.5 percent, rising by 1.5 percent from the previous year. As such, the inflated prices of basic goods continued to affect refugees' and host communities ability to meet their basic needs. In 2020, according to UNHCR's Global Appeal for 2021, Iran ranked as the world's eight-largest refugee-hosting country, as it continued to host 800,000 Afghan and Iraqi refugees. In November, children at risk of statelessness started receiving Iranian identity documents, as a result of a law passed by the Government of Iran in September 2019, allowing children born to Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers to become eligible for the Iranian nationality.



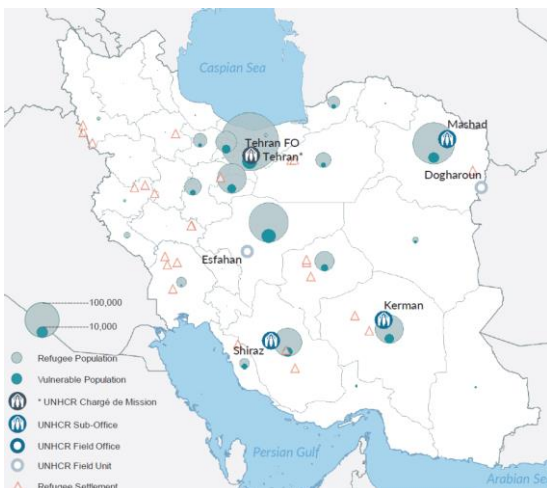
\* Based on the data received from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing. The Afghan/Iraqi breakdown is based on UNHCR's estimations.



**96%** of refugees live in urban areas side by side with the local community



**4%** of refugees live in 20 refugee settlements in Iran



## POPULATION MOVEMENTS

### VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

**947** individuals, all Afghans, returned to their country of origin from Iran in 2020, as part of UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme. In 2019, a total of 2,009 refugees were voluntarily repatriated. Due to COVID-19, UNHCR is currently only carrying out voluntary repatriations from its Dogharoun Field Unit.

### RESETTLEMENT

In 2020, UNHCR Iran only received resettlement quota for **120** individuals – the lowest since UNHCR started resettlement activity in Iran in 1999. The United Kingdom provided a quota of 100, while Iceland provided a quota of 20.

By the end of 2020, **114** individuals had departed for resettlement; 4 to New Zealand, 94 to Sweden, 7 to the UK, 8 to Australia and 1 to Finland. The outbreak of COVID-19 significantly affected resettlement departures.

In 2020, **32** resettlement cases (110 individuals) were submitted to seven countries, namely Iceland, the UK, Sweden, France, Australia and Finland. Also in 2020, 12 cases (48 individuals) were accepted by Australia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, New Zealand and the UK, of which 20 have already departed.

### SECONDARY MOVEMENT

From January to November 2020, Afghans were the **second most common** citizenship to claim asylum in Europe (28,145 first-time claims), according to the Eurostat database.

Afghans made up **7%** of all arrivals to Europe through the Mediterranean from January to November this year – up from 6% by October 2020.

Afghan arrivals to Europe declined in April 2020 due to COVID-19-related movement restrictions, but are slowly resuming. According to the Mixed Migration Centre (June 2020), **25%** of Afghans interviewed in Turkey started their journey from Iran, 4% from Pakistan, and 71% from Afghanistan.

## PROTECTION

In the second half of 2020, Afghans started **arriving in Italy** in greater numbers, taking boats from Turkey and Greece. Roughly one quarter of arrivals were in Italy and the remainder landed in Greece.

In December, the Central Bank of Iran issued a circular specifying the documentation needed for foreign nationals to benefit from **bank services**, namely Amayesh XV for Afghan refugees, Hoviyat XIV for Iraqi nationals, and passports with valid visas and valid refugee booklets. This was done in a bid to facilitate refugees' access to bank services.

As the winter season approached, many refugees expressed concerns about the **affordability of heating systems**, which affects their health and vulnerability to COVID-19.

Starting in November, and in light of the **16 Days of Activism** for the elimination of violence against women, UNHCR, with the help of psychosocial counsellors, produced and disseminated 16 audio training materials through official refugee social media accounts in Kerman and Yazd. Similar techniques were used to conduct awareness raising on parenting skills amongst the refugee population.

On 30 November, a virtual **Nansen Refugee Award Ceremony** was co-hosted by the Swiss and Norwegian embassies, as well as by BAFIA and UNHCR, to celebrate the life and work of Ms. Rozma Ghafouri, regional winner for the Asia region.

## REGISTRATION/DOCUMENTATION

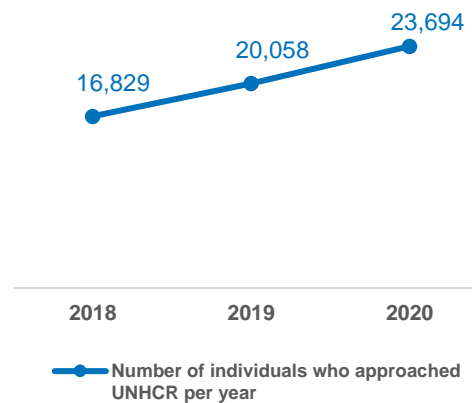
The process to extend Afghan refugees' **Amayesh cards** (the equivalent of refugee ID cards for Afghan refugees) started in June 2020 and is ongoing in all provinces in Iran and will be completed at the end of February 2021. Some refugees are facing difficulties to afford the extension fees, yet the Government of Iran has shown flexibility by providing discounts to extremely vulnerable refugees.

As of mid-December, **six e-Tazkira centers** (for the biometric registration of all Afghan nationals) had been set up in four provinces in Iran, of which two are currently operational. Additional staff is being sent to Iran by the Afghan Government to operationalize more centers.

In November, children at risk of statelessness started receiving Iranian identity documents, as a result of a law passed by the Government of Iran in September 2019, allowing **children born to Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers** to become eligible for the Iranian nationality.

## CASE MANAGEMENT

In December, UNHCR received **3,479** approaches via receptions and hotlines, bringing the total for 2020 to 45,923. The main reasons for approaches were to receive assistance (24,946 approaches), for resettlement (2,457 approaches) and for health reasons (2,566). Meanwhile, the total number of individuals who approached UNHCR was of almost 24,000 as of late December, compared to some 20,000 individual approaches in 2019.



In Tehran, UNHCR continued its efforts to reach out to local NGOs and charities who may provide protection and assistance to refugees during the pandemic. In 2020, a total of **455 cases** were referred to and assisted by various NGOs/INGOs and charities. Livelihoods, health and education were recorded as the three main reasons for these referrals.

As UNHCR's in-person receptions remained closed due to COVID-19, groups of refugees have requested to **meet with UNHCR staff members in person**, instead of remotely, on the grounds that remote sessions do not offer the same quality as face to face interview sessions, where refugees said they can better express their problems. Nonetheless, as this is not an option for all, a guidance on remote case management for CP and GBV cases has been developed in order to address at risk cases remotely when required.

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE

In 2020, **949** individuals had their cases examined by 16 Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs), as part of a joint UNHCR-BAFIA initiative to provide legal assistance to refugees in Iran, to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Due to COVID-19, DSCs only processed 70 to 80% of cases on a case-by-case basis, within strict compliance with hygiene protocols.

A total of **4,303** individuals were assisted by UNHCR-Hired Lawyers (UHLs) in 2020. Due to the COVID-19 situation, UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely.

## EDUCATION

Some **500,000** students (including 470,000 Afghans) have been enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic year in Iran, including some 130,000 undocumented Afghans. In Iran, UNHCR supports the efforts of the Government in providing access to formal primary and secondary education to all children, regardless of documentation.

On 4 November, one of two **schools** co-constructed with the Ministry of Education in Esfahan was inaugurated in a small ceremony, compliant with COVID-19 prevention measures.

UNHCR offices across the country report that refugee students continue to face challenges due to a lack of internet connectivity and smartphones/tablets, to access remote lessons as schools remain closed. The remote learning during the pandemic has put more refugee children at risk of school dropout and child labor.

In December, Sub-office Shiraz raised funds through private donors and in coordination with BAFIA Fars procured 5 tablets for vulnerable refugees and 5 for Iranian students.

## HEALTH

*For more information on UNHCR's COVID-19 response in Iran, please consult the [UNHCR Iran COVID-19 Update](#).*

During the implementation of the 6<sup>th</sup> cycle of the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI), from 25 February 2020 to 24 February 2021, UNHCR and BAFIA continue their efforts to encourage vulnerable refugee families to **self-enrol** in the scheme. Some 7,000 refugees were reached via phone. This joint undertaking has resulted in increased refugee enrolment and awareness about the insurance scheme. As of 23 December 2020, some 7,372 premium payers were enrolled in the 6<sup>th</sup> cycle of the scheme by paying the premium fee, compared to 2,763 individuals in the 5<sup>th</sup> cycle covering the same period.

In Mashhad, UNHCR received reports from refugees of a lack of **access to some vital medicines**, such as insulin and blood pressure medicines, as a result of increased prices or their unavailability in the country.

## LIVELIHOODS

**2,233** refugees were benefiting from UNHCR-supported livelihood interventions as of the end of 2020. These projects, either implemented directly by UNHCR or through partnership agreements, included technical and vocational training, income-generating projects in workshops and the establishment of home-based enterprises.

In the last week of December, UNHCR assisted the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in providing **cash assistance to 1,050** refugee families in Sarvestan refugee

settlement. The cash, destined for food and hygiene items, was deposited on the families' WFP cards.

As of the end of December, **2,204** households (10,391 individuals) had received multi-purpose cash from UNHCR, surpassing the figure of 1,900 refugee households (9,500 individuals) who were initially targeted to benefit from this UNHCR assistance in 2020.

UNHCR continued to receive reports from refugees on inflation paralyzing their ability to provide **basic commodities** to their families. Meat, dairy and fruit have virtually disappeared from food baskets, resulting in an overall weakening of immune systems and increased vulnerability to illness. Basic medical items, including for persons with specific needs, are increasingly unaffordable, further affecting the health and hygiene of the family. There is a need for increased financial assistance for these vulnerable families.

## SHELTER

As a result of overdue rent accumulation, many refugee families report to have been forced to **evict their homes** and move in with relatives, as an indirect consequence of the socio-economic downturn.

## SOLUTIONS STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES (SSAR)

*Within the framework of the SSAR, UNHCR supports the Government of Iran in implementing inclusive policies towards refugees. The SSAR also facilitates coordinated protection approaches among partners, consensus-building on international protection priorities, dialogue and partnerships in support of the Afghan refugee situation.*

On 24 and 25 November, the **2020 Afghanistan Conference** took place virtually in Geneva, with participants from 66 countries and 32 international organisations. It was co-hosted by the Governments of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Finland, and the United Nations. The communique issued on 24 November stated: "We [the Afghan Government, the international

community and other partners] *call for all relevant parties to work closely to facilitate the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return, rehabilitation and reintegration of the Afghan refugees and express appreciation to those regional countries, in particular Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, that continue to host them.*” The participants committed to reconvene to review progress and pledges at a Senior Officials Meeting in 2021 and in a Ministerial Meeting in 2022.

On 20 November, in the lead-up to the aforementioned conference, UNHCR convened **high-level consultations on “Return and reintegration: Building a future for all Afghans.”** This event built upon the ongoing consultations within the context of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) and the Global Compact on Refugees, to inform discussions at the 2020 Afghanistan Conference, including at its side-event on “Reintegrating Refugees and Returnees.”

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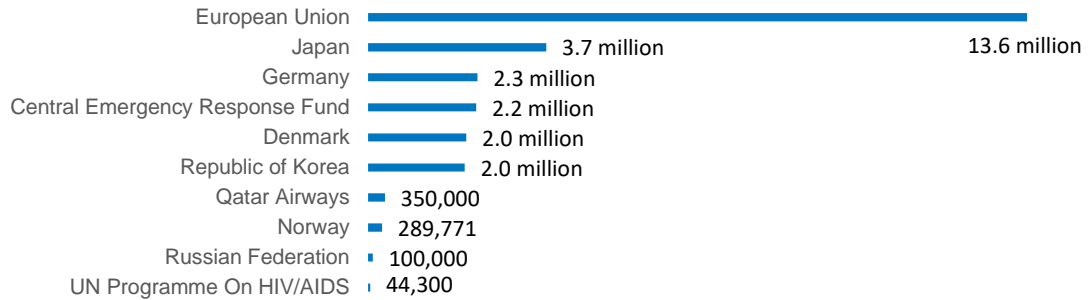
# FUNDING UPDATE

As of 15 December 2020

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 **26.64 million**



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

## Major softly earmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of softly earmarked contributions.

**Germany** 62.7 million | **United Kingdom** 24.8 million | **Denmark** 14.6 million | **Private donors Australia** 11.4 million | **Canada** 9.7 million | **Private donors USA** 8.7 million | **Private donors Germany** 5.1 million | **Private donors Japan** 4.5 million | **Spain** 3.4 million | **Ireland** 3.3 million | **Sweden** 3 million | **Private donors United Kingdom** 2.6 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.5 million | **Japan** 2.1 million | **Private donors Lebanon** 2.1 million

## Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

**Sweden** 88.2 million | **Private donors Spain** 73.5 million | **United Kingdom** 45.7 million | **Norway** 41.4 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 37.5 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Japan** 27.8 million | **Germany** 25.9 million | **Japan** 23.8 million | **Private donors Italy** 17.6 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **France** 14 million | **Private donors Sweden** 12.8 million | **Italy** 10.6 million

For more information, please contact:

**Farha Bhoyroo**  
External Relations Officer  
[bhoyroo@unhcr.org](mailto:bhoyroo@unhcr.org), +98 21 89349112

## Links:

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