

THE COVID-19 SITUATION IN IRAN was on the verge of entering its fourth wave as of February 2021, with over 1.6 million cases and 60,000 deaths by the end of the month. Iran purchased 16.8 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine from COVAX and on 9 February, the country started nationwide vaccination using the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. Health measures, such as movement restrictions and business closures, continued to be implemented 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, refugees' access to vaccination, and the provision of equipment to facilitate remote education amidst school closures. Working closely with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant's Affairs (BAFIA), **UNHCR CONTINUED TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY SUPPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN's** response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



UNHCR and the Government of Iran continued to provide **ESSENTIAL MEDICINES AND PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT** to help bolster Iran's health system. In 2021, UNHCR continues to airlift additional medical supplies that continue to be distributed through the Ministry of Health and BAFIA. Distribution of hygiene items to refugee throughout the country is planned for May, while UNHCR is also restocking necessary items in its warehouse, as part of our contingency plan for an emergency COVID-19 response.



In 2021, in order to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 and reduce the risk of refugees adopting negative coping mechanisms, UNHCR in coordination with BAFIA, will provide cash assistance to some 13,000 vulnerable refugees to help them meet their basic needs with choice and dignity.



Thanks to the Government of Iran's **INCLUSIVE HEALTH POLICIES**, refugees and foreign nationals continued to have access to free COVID-19 testing in designated Ministry of Health 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 COVID-19 treatment costs.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing economic downturn in Iran increasing vulnerabilities amongst refugees in 2021, UNHCR has agreed to temporarily increase the number of refugees whose UPHI fees will be covered, from 100,000 of the most vulnerable to **120,000**, covering 12 months from February 2021 to February 2022.

Based on the approaches that UNHCR offices have received, and on information from the Ministry of Health, almost 2,300 refugees had **CONTRACTED COVID-19** as of late February 2021, with 173 deaths both in settlements and urban areas. As a precautionary measure, refugees have been asked to only approach settlements' health posts and BAFIA offices for urgent matters, until further notice.



UNHCR and BAFIA have increased **COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES** to share information on hygiene and health practices, by engaging with refugee focal points, UNHCR-hired lawyers, psycho-social counsellors and other partners. Additionally, remote community engagement is taking place via virtual focus group discussions, online awareness raising sessions, and key informant interviews over the phone.



UNHCR has partially resumed **VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION** since early May 2020, and so far in 2021, 253 refugees have returned from Iran. Additionally, 160,000 undocumented Afghans have returned to Afghanistan since the beginning of 2021, an increase of more than 150% compared to the same period in 2020, potentially due to losses in livelihoods linked with COVID-19.



UNHCR Iran 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. In 2021, health continued to be one of the main reasons for which refugees approached UNHCR. UNHCR received a total of 2,002 approaches in February 2021. Mental health concerns amongst refugees has been exacerbated by the pandemic, health concerns and loss of livelihoods. UNHCR offices continue to provide refugees with virtual one-on-one sessions with **PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLORS**, and some are referred to specialized mental health services. UNHCR-Hired Lawyers also continued to provide assistance via phone.



\$12.6M needed in 2021 for COVID-19 measures in Iran

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

In 2021, UNHCR is seeking USD 12.6 million for its COVID-19 response in Iran, which has been mainstreamed into its wider programmes. 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.