

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

26 October 2021

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

677,832 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan in 2021. UNHCR's emergency response in Afghanistan continues, with the provision of cash grants and distribution of basic items to vulnerable Afghans.

Afghans continue to make their way to Iran irregularly through unofficial borders. UNHCR is aware of **20,341 Afghans who arrived in Iran** from 1 January-23 October. The numbers are much higher.

Official borders between Afghanistan and Iran remain closed for asylum seekers. UNHCR continues its advocacy with the Government to open borders and allow individuals in need of international protection to get it.



POLITICAL & SECURITY SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- More than half of the Afghan population, or some 23 million people, will face acute food insecurity from November**, according to a [report](#) by the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster in Afghanistan, co-led by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP). The combined impacts of drought, conflict, COVID-19, and the economic crisis have severely affected people's access to food, but many who depend on the delivery of humanitarian assistance and live in certain areas of the country may be cut off due to the harsh winter conditions. Many Afghans are selling possessions to buy food, with the Taliban unable to pay wages to civil servants. According to [local media reports](#), the **Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock has launched a nationwide 'food for work' program** to prevent a food crisis, reduce poverty and create job opportunities for the people. "More than 40,000 people will be provided jobs, they will receive wheat as they work, and the initiative will be expanded to other provinces in the next two months," said Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesperson of the de facto Afghan government.
- The situation for women and girls in Afghanistan remains precarious.** UNICEF reported that, in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, girls were being allowed to attend schools in grades 7-12. However, the de facto Taliban head of public awareness for the Kabul municipality has said, according to local media, that

female government city employees were told not to come to their jobs while officials prepare a new 'plan' to allow women to work in government offices.

- On 21 October, Russia, China, Pakistan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan joined the Taliban in calling on the UN to convene 'a donor conference' as soon as possible to help rebuild the country. Washington chose not to attend the talks, citing technical reasons, but has said it may join future rounds. While governments around the world, including Russia, have declined to give official recognition to the Taliban government, the [communiqué](#) recognised the "new reality" of their ascent to power. G20 leaders and ministers have also [agreed](#) they will have to involve the Taliban in sending humanitarian aid to Afghanistan but say that this stops short of political recognition of the Taliban as a government.
- **Political and security uncertainty continue to define the current context in Afghanistan.** Since the Taliban takeover in August, ISIS-K attacks have claimed the lives of hundreds of Afghans. [Analysts](#) have warned of further violence as the group attempts to prevent the Taliban from consolidating power. Dismayed by the Taliban's reluctance to impose even tougher restrictions on women and its diplomatic overtures to countries such as the US and China, former Taliban members are reportedly switching allegiance to ISIS-K.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- As of 23 October, UNHCR identified **20,341 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran** (based on 4,962 heads of households who approached UNHCR directly at our receptions). The higher number of new arrivals approaching UNHCR between August and September, as compared to October, is due to the initial influx of Afghans following the Taliban takeover and initial misinformation on resettlement opportunities. With ensuring mass communication and Communication with Communities efforts by UNHCR, many new arrivals now contact UNHCR through its hotlines and protection mailbox, which decreased the number of individuals approaching UNHCR's receptions in person.
- To date, out of the new arrivals approaching us directly, UNHCR interviewed 1,044 families (consisting of 4,317 individuals) of which:
 - **24% were men, 31% women and 45% children.**
 - **Refoulement¹(30%) and detention (30%)** were the highest concerns reported in Iran by Afghans.
 - The majority of Afghans who UNHCR interviewed **had no registration status in Iran (84%)**. Only six per cent were valid visa-holders and the remaining population were passport-holders and previous Amayesh cardholders.
 - The highest reported needs are **access to shelter (56%), access to livelihoods (50%) and documentation (43%)**.
- **On 22 October, the Iranian Minister of Interior, Ahmad Vahidi, called on Afghan officials to improve the living conditions in their country to prevent Afghans from crossing the borders.** "We have always asked the people of Afghanistan not to come to our borders and if they have any needs, we will provide them in other ways inside Afghanistan and we hope that the rulers of Afghanistan will pay attention to this issue," said Vahidi during the inauguration ceremony of the new Governor-General in the Razavi Khorasan province.
- UNHCR [welcomes](#) the recent announcement by Pakistani authorities to ease the movement of people and goods through official border points with Afghanistan. Disruptions have left many Afghans, including women, children and those needing urgent medical attention, stranded for weeks at the Chaman-Spin Boldak crossing between the two countries. The new steps help reduce fears and risks that many will be pushed into the hands of human smugglers and traffickers, with deadly consequences, when official cross-border channels are shut. **UNHCR continues to call on the Iranian Government to keep its borders open for asylum-seekers.** On 25 October, the UNHCR Representative in Iran met with the Director-General of BAFIA, our main government counterpart, and discussed several protection priorities, including the need to have open borders and an accessible asylum system, through which new arrivals could be registered and receive documentation.
- **The number of newly arrived Afghans is much higher** than reported by UNHCR, as many Afghans continue to cross into Iran undetected and irregularly. Different government officials at various times and events have unofficially stated that the number of new arrivals may range **between 100,000-300,000**. UNHCR continues to face challenges in monitoring arrivals and verifying figures, due to the absence of a centralized registration system and continued lack of comprehensive and sustained access to border areas.

RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- UNHCR's sub-office in Kerman reported that **Afghan families who were apprehended and processed through BAFIA have increased, in comparison to single males** – processing procedures usually include

¹ The principle of non-refoulement refers to the practice that no one should be sent back to their country of origin when their life and freedom would be at risk.

the collection of biometrical data of the new arrivals until it is further decided whether they are recognized as refugees or held in government-led facilities and ultimately deported to the country of origin. Families who recently entered Iran crossed through Pakistan.

- On 16 August 2021, UNHCR issued a **non-return advisory** for Afghanistan, which remains in place. UNHCR is seeking further clarity and reiterating the principle of non-refoulement to the Government.

ONWARD MOVEMENTS

- **On 22 October, the Turkish Minister of Interior, Süleyman Soylu, said that his country is facing a serious irregular migration threat amid the recent developments in Afghanistan.** "There are 3.5 million Afghans in Iran. Considering that 2 million people are ready to move, and 2,000 people come daily, we are faced with a very serious threat of migration", stated Soylu, who visited Iran to sign a Memorandum of Understanding designed to prevent terrorists and illegal activities between their joint borders. Turkey has maximized the security on its eastern border with Iran to prevent the influx of Afghans.

REGIONAL REFUGEE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN (RRPRP)

- On 25 August, UNHCR launched the **Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (RRPRP)**. This is an inter-agency plan with 10 partners working on a coordinated response to potential outflows, by supporting the host countries of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This plan focuses on preparedness, limited emergency response, and expanded support to regular programmes.
- **UNHCR is planning the pre-positioning of non-food items (for 5,000-8,000 households)** at the Niatak site by mid-November. Meanwhile, coordination continues between UNHCR, partners and BAFIA to **accelerate site construction**, while rehabilitation of some existing facilities (e.g., health posts) has started. UNHCR has also developed site plans for the rehabilitation of the Dogharoun reception facility (including an upgrade of the temporary accommodation and installation of tent-like structures) and planned new reception facilities at Mil-78 (Mahirood) border crossing. These plans will be submitted to BAFIA this week. Discussions are also ongoing around the preferred options for site development in Khorasan Razavi.
- In light of newly arrived persons moving towards urban centres, UNHCR continues to advocate with BAFIA for a **complementary urban response**. This is also to avoid an encampment policy at the border and have a hybrid response, in line with UNHCR global policy. A proposal has been submitted to BAFIA around the provision of gift cards to new arrivals approaching UNHCR and BAFIA reception centres.
- In line with standing global arrangements, the Refugee Coordination Model has been activated in Iran under the leadership of UNHCR and in support of the Government of Iran, and regular sector working group meetings are taking place. UNHCR has instituted a biweekly bilateral Task Force meeting with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) to discuss the operational response for the new arrivals.
- UNHCR is currently leading the development of the 2022 RRP with partners. Unlike the 2021 RRP, the 2022 RRP will be more expansive, taking a need- and area-based approach to support not only new arrivals from Afghanistan but also existing refugees (Amayesh cardholders), undocumented Afghans and host communities.

NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLANNING

The Government of Iran informed UNHCR that, under a worst-case scenario, they anticipate that up to **500,000 new arrivals from Afghanistan could enter Iran over 6-months**. In case of an influx, new arrivals would reportedly be granted access to Iranian territory and settled in locations along the border. Shelter, health and food would be the priorities to cope with the Government's scenario.

Such contingency planning is a Government-led process. UNHCR continues to seek additional guidance and clarity on various issues, including the status that will be conferred to new arrivals and the process for receiving them.

UNHCR coordinates the refugee response among international actors in Iran, with 18 participating UN agencies and international NGOs under its leadership, in line with the globally-agreed **Refugee Coordination Model**. UNHCR and BAFIA convene on a regular basis, through an agreed-upon biweekly/bilateral meeting. Discussions are ongoing around options for more inclusive coordination.

FUNDING NEEDS

The interagency regional funding needs are USD 299 million, including almost **USD 131 million for UNHCR alone**.

For Iran, interagency needs are **USD 135.9 million, including USD 58.8 million for UNHCR**. As of 18 October, 3 of the 10 agencies participating under the RRRP have reported receiving a combined USD 4.89 million, indicating that the RRRP is 4% funded. This analysis is based on partners reporting new funding; however, the actual funding is likely higher, as many partners have not yet reported on the funding they have most recently received.

UNHCR Iran overall funding needs for 2021: USD 118.9 million. As of 19 October 2021, UNHCR's overall programmes in Iran (regular and emergency programming) were **43% funded**.

FUNDING UPDATE

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. Whilst interest in the current emergency is relevant and opportune, UNHCR wishes to also highlight ongoing regular programming needs which are severely underfunded.

Earmarked contributions | USD

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some **15.3 million**

European Union 9.2 million | **Denmark** 2 million | **Finland** 1.79 | **Japan** 1.25 million | **Norway** 0.36 million | **Russian Federation** 0.1 million | **UNAIDS** 0.03 million

Major softly earmarked contributions | USD

Germany 79.8million | **Private donors Australia** 14.9 million | **Austria** 11.8 million | **Private donors Denmark** 5 million | **Denmark** 4.8 million | **Norway** 4.1 million | **Private donors United Kingdom** 3.8 million | **Private donors Germany** 3.4 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.6 million

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Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions

Norway 80 million | **Sweden** 75.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 62.6 million | **United Kingdom** 40.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 31.9 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Private donors Japan** 23.6 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Italy** 15.7 million | **Private donors Sweden** 13 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

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