

IRAN

July - September 2021

Iran overcame the fifth wave of the **COVID-19** pandemic by the end of September 2021. Nationwide vaccination efforts saw a rise in the reporting report, with nearly **half** of the population having received at least one dose of the vaccine. Socio-economic conditions in Iran remained worrying. In the past year, the number of Iranians living under the official poverty line (less than \$46 a month) increased by nearly **40%**.

Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August, Afghans continued to make their way to Iran irregularly through unofficial border points: some **17,786** Afghans arrived in Iran from 1 January until 25 September 2021, according to UNHCR's interviews with those new arrivals approaching us directly. The numbers are thought to be much higher. **Sustained international humanitarian** support remains needed to support the Government in maintaining their inclusive refugee policies.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

800,000

Afghan 780,000

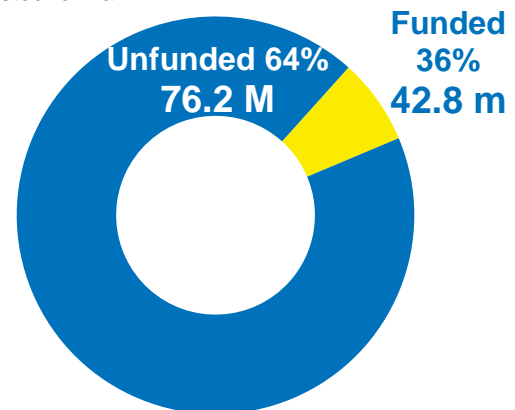
Iraqi 20,000

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

FUNDING (AS OF OCTOBER 2021)

USD 118.9 million

Requested for Iran



UNHCR PRESENCE

UNHCR Staff

& Affiliate Workforce:

136 National Staff

30 International Staff

Offices:

1 Country Office in Tehran

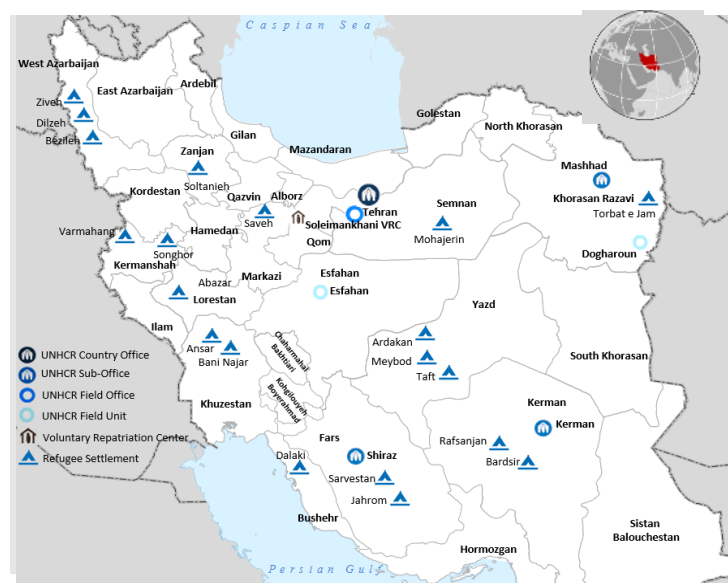
1 Field Office in Tehran,

3 Sub-Offices in Mashhad,

Kerman and Shiraz

2 Field Units in Esfahan

and Dogharoun



Working with partners

- The **Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA)** is UNHCR Iran's main government counterpart and signatory to all tripartite partnership agreements. Other current partners with whom agreements have been signed include:
- **Governmental:** Ministry of Education (MoE), Literacy Movement Organization (LMO), Ministry of Health (MoH), Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Iran Health Insurance Organization (IHIO).
- **National NGOs:** Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), Society for Recovery Support (SRS), Pars Development Activists Institute (PDA), Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA), KIYANA, Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC) .
- **UN agencies and International Organizations:** UNHCR coordinates with UN partner agencies, NGOs and international organizations under the umbrella of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).

Main activities

Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

The SSAR is a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy between UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Launched in 2012, the SSAR provides a framework for cooperation between humanitarian and development actors to address the needs of Afghan refugees and the communities that host them. It is also the guiding regional policy framework for protecting and enabling solutions for Afghan refugees. The June 2019 quadripartite meeting between the three governments and UNHCR saw the SSAR extended until end 2021. The key objectives of the SSAR in Iran are focused on health, education and livelihoods.

A **Support Platform** dedicated to achieving the SSAR objectives was launched on 16 December 2019 as part of the first-ever Global Refugee Forum. The Support Platform aims to reinforce the priorities of the SSAR and mobilize additional resources to promote and realize its three pillars – voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration, and assistance to host countries – while seeking to address the remaining gaps through reinvigorated, sustained and coherent humanitarian and development investments. As of late 2020, 12 states and international organizations have become members of the **Core Group** of the Support Platform, namely the Asian Development Bank, Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Qatar, Switzerland, Turkey, UNDP, the United States of America, and the World Bank.

On 6 July 2020, UNHCR and the three governments launched a **portfolio of projects** as part of the SSAR Support Platform, outlining key areas of focus and support needs for two years (2020-21).

On 22 September 2021, UNHCR and EU representatives (as the chair of the Core Group) virtually met with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA) to update them on the Core Group Work Plan and to give the opportunity to the government to present their needs and expectations with regard to support for refugees directly to the EU. An Iran-level meeting will be planned before the end of 2021 to follow-up on global discussions and adjust the Core Group's priorities as needed.

Protection

- **Registration and documentation:** The Government of Iran is responsible for the registration of asylum-seekers and refugee status determination, and annually renews refugee identification cards - *Amayesh* for Afghans and *Hoviat* cards for Iraqis. Refugee identification cards give refugees conditional freedom of movement, access to basic services and eligibility for temporary work permits. In 2021, the registration exercise of *Amayesh XV* started in May. The process is ongoing and all eligible heads of households were required to approach *Kefalat* centers to renew their cards by 21 September 2021. UNHCR continues to advocate with the government to receive regular updates on the number of persons of concern in Iran, to better inform our planning and response.

- According to data received from the government in October 2020, some **800,000 refugee card holders** reside in Iran, of which it is estimated that 780,000 are Afghans and 20,000 are Iraqis. In addition, some **586,000 Afghan passport-holders** with Iranian visas reside in the country, including former *Amayesh* cardholders who now have student visas that allow them to access higher education, as well as some **2.6 million undocumented Afghans**. In 2017, the Government of Iran issued documentation slips to more than 804,000 undocumented individuals¹ (mostly Afghans) who participated in a ‘headcount exercise’ targeting certain categories of individuals residing in Iran without a valid *Amayesh* card or an Iranian visa and national passport. The type of documentation to be issued as a result of the headcount exercise has still not been announced. UNHCR continuously engages with relevant governmental counterparts to pursue this matter.
- **Durable solutions:** UNHCR facilitates **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to their countries of origin. On 2 March 2020, UNHCR temporarily suspended voluntary repatriation activities as a preventive measure to limit the exposure of staff, partners and refugees to COVID-19. The facilitation of voluntary repatriation resumed on 2 May 2020, only through the Field Unit Dogharoun. Following the issuance of the non-return advisory for Afghanistan on 16 August, UNHCR remains cautious and continuous to provide enhanced counselling to prospective returnees on the situation in their final destinations and routes thereto, particularly to those with more vulnerable profiles, on a case by case basis. Due to ongoing insecurity and instability in both countries of origin, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, only a modest number of refugees had opted for voluntary repatriation in the reporting period.
- Regarding **resettlement** to third countries, UNHCR Iran has not received any quotas for 2021. Departures to third countries have resumed and 56 individuals (16 cases) have departed to New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom as of the end of September. Advocacy continues to increase the resettlement quotas for refugees in Iran. In June, during the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, UNHCR presented the situation of resettlement in Iran, emphasising on the necessity for an increased quota for Iran, given the existing and increasing vulnerabilities and needs for resettlement among refugees in Iran.
- **Onward movement:** Although the arrival of Afghan asylum-seekers to Europe significantly subsided following the signing of the EU-Turkey deal in March 2016, displacement and onward movement of Afghans continue. Applications by Afghans increased for the third consecutive month, growing by a third from February 2021. More than two fifths of all unaccompanied minors in May 2021 were from Afghanistan. In August 2021 Afghans were the largest applicant group in the EU+ for the first time on record, overtaking Syrians. The especially sharp rise in applications by Afghans coincided with the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.²
- **Community-based protection:** UNHCR Iran continuously seeks to strengthen meaningful participation of and engagement with persons of concern, to understand their protection risks, build on their capacities and pursue solutions that take into account their perspectives and priorities. In Iran, community-based projects, awareness raising sessions and focus group discussions are key activities that facilitate community engagement. These activities allow for refugees and UNHCR to together identify, prioritize and address key issues within refugee communities, whether it be related to child protection, peaceful coexistence, persons with specific needs, including those living with disabilities. Allowing refugees to take ownership of these activities is key to their success. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based protection activities have been adjusted to ensure continued, albeit largely remote, two-way communication with communities on COVID-19 as well as key protection-related topics. However, with large numbers of new arrivals approaching UNHCR receptions since July, offices have also been conducting in-person group counselling. From January until end September 2021, UNHCR Iran reached 13,640 refugees through awareness raising and information dissemination activities (10,433 in person, 3,207 virtually). Meanwhile, in consultation with refugee communities and local authorities, 13 community-based projects were developed, covering a range of topics such as stress management and mental health during the pandemic, awareness raising and distribution of hygiene kits, virtual sports competitions for children, support to children engaged in child labour and positive parenting. Advocacy is on-going to receive government approval for these projects.

¹ According to the Quadripartite Meeting held in mid-June 2019

² <https://www.easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends>

- **Persons with specific needs:** UNHCR provides support to persons with specific needs through targeted cash-based and in-kind assistance, referrals to governmental and non-governmental partners, and inclusion in relevant programmes such as livelihoods and community-based protection activities.
- **Protection of women and children:** UNHCR provides support to women and children directly through case management and through a referral system with governmental and non-governmental partners. During the pandemic, case management has largely been remote, however in the past month offices have started shifting back to in-person activities.
- **Legal support:** UNHCR, jointly with BAFIA, operates a legal services project to provide legal assistance to refugees in Iran to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Currently, 16 functioning Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) and 17 UNHCR Hired Lawyers (UHLs) are operational across the country. UHLs also provide free legal advice and assistance to Afghan and Iraqi refugees.

Education

UNHCR continues to support the efforts of the Government of Iran in providing access to formal primary and secondary education for all children regardless of documentation, and to non-formal education (literacy classes) as well as to tertiary education (DAFI programme)

- **School construction:** In 2021, UNHCR is supporting the Government by co-funding the construction of 10 schools in refugee-hosting provinces that are among the poorest in terms of infrastructure.
- **Inclusive policies for the undocumented:** Since May 2015, all children in Iran have access to primary and secondary education, regardless of their documentation status. Refugee, undocumented and foreign national children study side by side with Iranian school children, while following the same national curriculum. According to the Ministry of Education, the number of Afghan and Iraqi children enrolled in primary and secondary schools in 2021 is 500,080, including 185,000 undocumented children.
- **Fee regulation:** Following new regulations on the registration of foreign nationals in May 2016, “*refugee-specific*” fees of USD 70-90 were removed. In 2020, based on the newest education circular, families holding government-issued identification documents including passports, residence permits, *Amayesh* XIII or XIV, laissez-passer, or Refugee Booklets, were able to approach schools and register their children for the 2020/2021 academic year.
- **Higher education:** In 2021, under the DAFI Scholarship Programme and through a tripartite partnership agreement with Pars Development Actors (PDA), a total of 569 refugee students will benefit from DAFI programme (369 ongoing and 200 new) and receive support with tuition fees and living allowances. The DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) Scholarship Programme offers qualified refugee students the possibility to earn an undergraduate degree in their country of asylum.

Health

- **Primary health care:** UNHCR continues to complement the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure the provision of quality free-of-charge similar to nationals Primary Health Care to refugees, including vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines and family planning, in health posts located in settlements and refugee-populated urban areas. In 2021, UNHCR is contributing towards the construction of 5 health centres, rehabilitation of 3 health centers and support (including through procuring medicine) of 134 health posts. For 27 of these health posts, which are primarily in refugee-hosting areas, UNHCR also covered personnel costs of essential health staff.
- **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI):** As part of the agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health, all registered refugees have access to enrol in a health insurance scheme, similar to Iranian nationals, for the 7th consecutive year since 2015, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services (medicine, doctor’s visits, radiology, etc.) at a subsidized rate. For the 7th cycle (23 Feb 2021 to 24 Feb 2022), UNHCR is covering 100% of the insurance premium for up to 120,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including refugees who suffer

from special diseases³ and their families, while the remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium fee. By mid- September 2021, a total of 94,632 refugees had enrolled in the UPHI, out of which 83,672 (70% out of 120,000) refugees were vulnerable and special disease cases for which UNHCR pays the fee (and thus enrolled in the scheme free of charge).

In addition to improving the healthcare of refugees, UPHI provides social protection benefits and offers potential protection dividends by reducing the risk of high out-of-pocket health expenditures, and negative coping mechanisms related to economic vulnerability, particularly where surgery or hospitalisation is required.

- **Other health and protection interventions:** UNHCR continues to collaborate with national charities and NGOs to extend its outreach in the area of health for specific vulnerable categories. The interventions include: harm reduction services through the Society for Recovery Support organization. UNHCR also addresses the psychological, social and legal needs of refugees through collaboration with the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV).

Livelihoods

Enhancing refugees' livelihoods opportunities, by recognising that refugees should be empowered to earn a decent living, remains a priority for UNHCR Iran. Giving refugees the possibility of benefiting from livelihoods opportunities will prepare them to become more self-reliant and self-sufficient – enabling them to meet the basic needs of their families and become less dependent on humanitarian assistance. Refugees who are able to develop their skills and capacities, and engage in income-generating activities, are more likely to feel prepared to return to their home country, compared to refugees who have not. UNHCR implements its livelihood projects through three national partners.

- **Employment/income generation:** In 2021, UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Iran, and non-governmental partners will continue to implement a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees. These interventions include certified technical and vocational training in 50 occupations which will benefit some 1,968 refugees, as well as income generation projects to be implemented through UNHCR's interventions by establishment / expansion of business workshops. Some 288 job opportunities are planned to be created, and will include on-the-job technical and vocational training and various income-generating Interventions. UNHCR supports capacitating a vocational training centre with providing necessary equipment as well.
- UNHCR implements **cash-based interventions (CBIs)** directly and through partners, including UNHCR's regular **multi-purpose cash** assistance, to assist extremely vulnerable refugees in meeting their immediate protection and basic needs. CBIs are also used to facilitate access to higher education and healthcare, to support shelter and livelihoods needs, to support persons with disabilities, and to assist in covering documentation and transportation needs prior to resettlement. Additionally, To address the negative economic impact of COVID-19, UNHCR rolled out one-off **Cash for Basic Needs** grants since April 2020, to cover basic shelter, nutritional and hygiene needs for a two-to-three-month period. UNHCR also collaborates on joint COVID-19 cash grants with BAFIA and is presently considering expansion of joint cash-based interventions in urban areas later this year for vulnerable households with special protection needs.
 - Between July to September 2021, 643 refugee households received multi-purpose cash support from UNHCR, out of a total of 3,247 individuals who will benefit from this assistance in 2021. Other cash supports included cash for refugee focal points, cash for relief of disability, cash for resettlement, and cash for voluntary repatriation, where a total of 242 individuals were assisted. Through a partnership agreement with the Iraqi Refugees Aid Council (IRAC) organization, multi-purpose cash will be provided to 120 vulnerable Iraqi households in Tehran, Qom, Ilam and Khuzestan provinces.
 - In 2021, UNHCR continues to provide Cash for Basic Needs for COVID-19 directly and through BAFIA for vulnerable households across the country impacted by the pandemic. Between July to September 2021, UNHCR offices in the field have directly identified and assisted 3,388 individuals at risk or in need, who have been affected by the pandemic.

³ Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoH.

- UNHCR co-leads a Cash Working Group with INGOs and UN agencies to harmonize approaches and maximize cooperation between all CBI actors in the country. UNHCR's approach to CBIs is guided by the principle of financial inclusion, which seeks to ensure that refugees can access the same national financial channels and mechanisms as Iranians.

Shelter and Infrastructure

In an effort to improve refugees' access to essential services (including shelter, water, domestic energy, sanitation and community halls), through a bipartite agreement with BAFIA, UNHCR supports critical infrastructure needs in the most refugee-populated urban areas and in refugee settlements. Of the existing refugee population in Iran, 4% lives in settlements, while the other 96% live in urban areas.

Moreover, in light of the Afghanistan situation and Taliban's takeover of the country, which has resulted in a large number of Afghans fleeing into Iran, a series of joint visits with the government and other agencies has taken place, to assess several identified provisional sites to host newly-arriving Afghans in the provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan, Khorasan Razavi and South Khorasan. UNHCR and BAFIA signed on 13 September an amendment to an agreement to commence infrastructure work for the development of the Niatak camp in the eastern border district of Sistan and Baluchistan. Once fully completed (with the co-contribution of other specialized agencies), the camp is expected to be able to host some 7,500 new arrivals. The amendment also includes the upgrade of two transit/reception areas in South Khorasan and Khorasan Razavi, to enable dignified reception and short stays of persons of concern.

Emergency Preparedness and Response (Contingency Planning)

UNHCR continues to work closely with BAFIA and other partners on refugee emergency preparedness and response. A regularly updated scenario-based Contingency Plan for the Afghanistan situation is being discussed with the Government to respond to a possible sudden influx of arrivals to Iran. This inter-agency contingency plan also reflects the contributions of up to 19 international partners, and is ultimately overseen by the **Refugee Emergency Coordination Group (RECG)** chaired by UNHCR. Sector Working Groups are responsible for the implementation of the contingency plan, under the leadership of dedicated lead agencies for each sector.

UNHCR is currently in advanced discussions with the government to support site upgradation and provision of short to medium term relief items for new arrivals, referrals of persons in need and other urban based responses in the areas of basic needs, education and health as the services increasingly become overstretched.

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 currently leading the development of the 2022 RRP with partners.

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.

As part of preparedness and emergency response, the office dispatched the following items to field locations:

Item description	Dogharoun	Sub-office Kerman	Niatak	BAFIA Sistan and Baluchestan
Hygiene pack	100	0	0	2,900
Family Tent	100	0	200	1,000
Tarpaulin	99	0	200	4,000
Jerry can	200	0	400	4,000
Blanket	512	0	1,000	8,000

Sleeping Mat	500	0	1,000	6,250
Kitchen set	100	0	200	1,500
Gas Stove	100	100	0	0
Water tank (5000 ltr)	30	30	0	0

For non-refugee emergencies, UNHCR continues to play an active role in the UN Country Team/Crisis Management Team/Disaster Management Team and the Protection Working Group for preparedness.

COVID-19

UNHCR's response to the pandemic is anchored in supporting the Ministry of Health's response by providing medical equipment in hospitals and health centres. UNHCR has airlifted more than 100 tonnes of medical aid, including masks, face shields, gowns, hand sanitizers, gloves, ventilators, non-contact thermometers and PPEs, to help address critical shortages and support the COVID-19 national response complementing the refugee inclusive efforts led by the government. As part of the government's inclusive policy, refugees and foreign nationals are included in the COVID-19 National Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP), albeit with some delays with vaccinations given procurement and economic issues to acquire vaccines.

UNHCR, in collaboration with the UN country team (UNCT), supported the government's application for the supply of vaccines for 20% of persons of concern through the **COVAX Humanitarian Buffer**, for which Iran received approval on 28 September. As of the end of September, some 500,000 foreign nationals had received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Moreover, as a mitigative measure as well as a response to outbreaks, UNHCR, in coordination with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs of the Ministry of Interior, distributed basic COVID-19 related hygiene packages, including items such as soap, hand sanitizers, masks, and cleaning materials, to almost 11,000 refugee households residing in three populated refugee settlements across the country as well as eight provinces and urban areas in various rounds and shall continue to cover such needs as and when identified. Further, the office shall continue to replenish a contingency stock to be able to provide a prompt response in case of needs in settlements or urban areas.

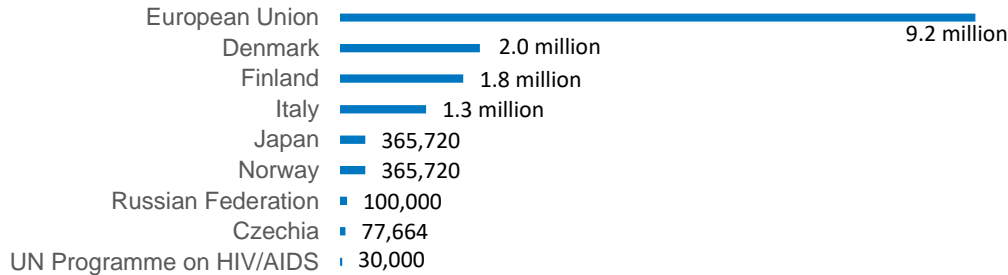
Financial information

As of 05 October 2021

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 **42.8 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 569 students in Iran.

Softly earmarked Contributions | USD

Germany 33.3 million | **Private donors Australia** 13.4 million | **Austria** 11.8 million | **Private donors Denmark** 4.9 million | **Denmark** 4.8 million | **Norway** 4.1 million | **Private donors Germany** 3.4 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2 million

Canada | Czech Republic | Iceland | Ireland | Jersey | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | New Zealand | Slovakia | Spain | Private donors

Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

Norway 80 million | **Sweden** 66.9 million | **Private donors Spain** 62.6 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 28.5 million | **United Kingdom** 28.4 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** 14 million | **Private donors Sweden** 13 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

Algeria | Armenia | Australia | Austria | Bulgaria | Canada | Costa Rica | Cyprus | Estonia | Finland | Holy See | Iceland | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | Malta | Monaco | Montenegro | Morocco | New Zealand | Peru | Philippines | Portugal | Republic of Korea | Russian Federation | Saudi Arabia | Singapore | South Africa | Thailand | Turkey | Uruguay | Private donors

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