

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

16 January 2022

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

699,123 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan since the start of 2021, of which 21% are women and 59% are children.

According to **preliminary estimates by the Government of Iran**, approx. **500,000** Afghans have arrived in Iran in 2021.

Borders remain officially closed for asylum-seekers and Afghans continue to make their way to Iran informally. 28,489 Afghans who arrived in Iran from 1 January 2021 to 13 January 2022 have approached UNHCR requesting assistance and protection.

UNHCR and OCHA jointly launched the **Regional Response Plan (RRP)** and the **Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)** for the Afghanistan humanitarian crisis. These plans aim to bring **USD 5 billion** of humanitarian relief to the region to help 22 million people in need.



POLITICAL, SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

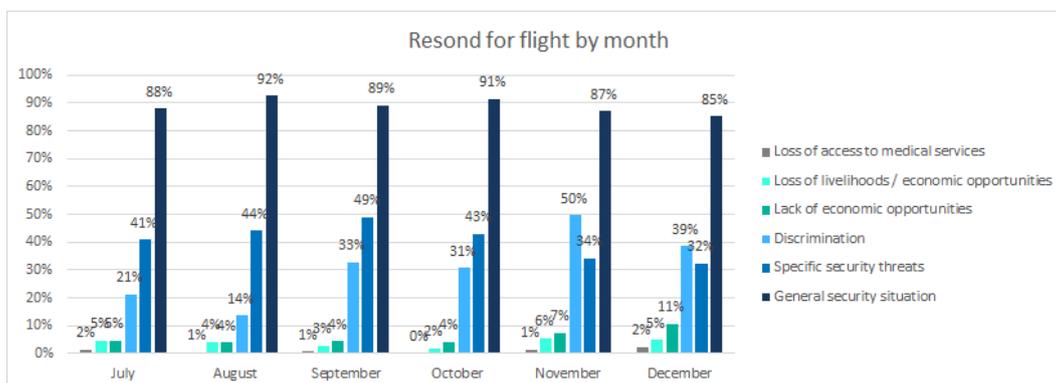
- **Conflict has subsided, but violence, fear and deprivation continue to drive Afghans to seek safety and asylum across borders, particularly in Iran and Pakistan.** On 11 January, during the launch of the RRP and HRP, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, reiterated that Afghanistan faces one of the world's most rapidly growing humanitarian crises. Half of the population face acute hunger, over 9 million people are displaced, millions of children are out of school, fundamental rights of women and girls are under attack, farmers and herders are struggling amidst the worst drought in decades, and the economy is in free fall. Without support, tens of thousands of children are at risk of dying from malnutrition as basic health services have collapsed.
- The **United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, urged the international community to fund the UN's USD 5 billion joint humanitarian appeal, release Afghanistan's frozen assets and jump-start its banking system to avert economic and social collapse.** Guterres said that international funding should be allowed to pay the salaries of doctors, sanitation workers, electrical engineers and other civil servants, as well as help Afghan institutions deliver healthcare, education and other key services. He further said the US has "a very important role to play" because it has frozen USD 7 billion in Afghan foreign reserves. **Afghanistan's currency**

has reportedly plummeted by about a quarter since the Taliban seized power, exacerbating an economic crisis that has left millions of people in the import-dependent country facing starvation.

- On 12 January, the UN Humanitarian Chief Griffiths, and the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, held a [virtual meeting with US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken](#), to discuss the Afghanistan situation. Blinken highlighted the US' robust and growing engagement on women's issues in Afghanistan at senior levels, including **the recent appointment of Rina Amiri as Special Envoy on Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights**; the trio also discussed how to further protect and support aid groups in overcoming challenges related to Afghanistan's extremely difficult operational landscape.
- On 14 January, the [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) reported that **all 34 provinces of Afghanistan are facing emergency levels of acute food insecurity**, with half of the population projected to be acutely food insecure in 2022, including 8.7 million at risk of famine-like conditions, of which 4.7 million are children or pregnant and lactating women at risk of acute malnutrition.
- On 13 January, the **Health Cluster in Afghanistan, which is led by WHO, reported that, in 2021, there were 46 attacks on health facilities across the country, which affected 35 healthcare facilities.** These incidents include attacks with heavy weapons, armed or violent searches, abductions, removal of healthcare assets, and an airstrike attack on a hospital building. During these incidents, 42 healthcare providers were severely affected, including 14 persons killed and 21 injured. 9 healthcare patients were also severely affected, including 5 persons killed. The report also notes that there has been a decrease in the number of incidents since the Taliban takeover, with 38 of the 46 incidents happening before August compared to only 4 occurring in the last four months of the year.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- According to preliminary estimates by the Government of Iran, approximately 500,000 Afghans have arrived in Iran in 2021. UNHCR continues to face challenges in monitoring new arrivals and verifying figures. This is due to the absence of a centralized registration system in Iran and continued lack of comprehensive and sustained access to border areas. Instead, UNHCR is using available indications from various sources to estimate the number for 2021-22. Bearing in mind that a large number will likely be deported, other individuals moving to Iran for livelihoods or family reasons and a small number may move onwards towards Turkey, **UNHCR estimates that 274,000 Afghan new arrivals will remain in Iran – 166,000 in 2021 and 108,000 in 2022.**
- There has been an increase in approaches by new arrivals to UNHCR Offices in Iran in the months of December and November 2021 compared to October, despite the expectation of reduced numbers due to the harsh winter weather conditions. Interviews conducted by UNHCR with these new arrivals demonstrates that the predominant reasons for flight remain insecurity and persecution in Afghanistan:
 - The general security situation as a reason for fleeing was reported by 85% in December, a slight reduction from 91% in October and 87% in November. Specific security threats as a main reason declined from a high of 49% in September, to 43% in October, to 34% in November and 32% in December.
 - Economic related reasons for fleeing increased during the four-month period as both loss of livelihood and lack of economic opportunities as reasons rose from 3% and 4% respectively in September to 5% and 11% in December.** This is in line with the analysis that, while there are no reported widespread open conflicts in Afghanistan, economic and humanitarian conditions are worsening, especially with the coming of winter.



- **Since the start of 2021 and so far into 2022, UNHCR spoke to 29,345 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran (and approached UNHCR receptions through 7,333 heads of households), seeking urgent assistance.** As of 11 January, out of these new arrivals, UNHCR had interviewed 2,403 families (consisting of 9,160 individuals) for protection concerns. Of these:
 - 40% were Hazara, 36% were Tajik and 8% were Pashtun (11% were categorized as being from 'other' ethnicities).
 - 65% reported crossing to Iran unofficially, while 28% reported entering officially. Additionally, 63% reported using smugglers to cross the border, while 31% stated that they did not. **These figures show a decrease in Afghans crossing unofficially and with the use of smugglers**, which is in line with reports of increased security measures in areas of unofficial border crossing points and the reopening of the Iranian consulate in Afghanistan and the recommencement of passport and visa issuance.

RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- Afghans who are apprehended while trying to enter Iran continue to be returned to Afghanistan despite UNHCR's non-return advisory and advocacy for asylum to provide to those fleeing conflict. Through the analysis of available data and information, **UNHCR estimates that 65% of all newly arriving Afghan asylum seekers are deported from Iran by the Government.**
- **In 2021, it was reported that 20 families, consisting of 32 individuals, voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan.** UNHCR continues to provide counselling for those seeking voluntary repatriation to allow them to make the decision with the best available information on the risk they face upon return to Afghanistan.

THE REGIONAL RESPONSE PLAN (RRP) AND HUMANITARIAN REPORTS PLAN (HRP) 2022

- **On 11 January 2022, UNHCR and OCHA launched the HRP and RRP.** The HRP aims to assist 22.1 million people in Afghanistan, requiring **USD 4.4 billion** and the coordination of 158 dedicated humanitarian organizations operating in Afghanistan. The RRP targets 5.7 million persons of concern in the neighbouring countries of Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, in coordination with 40 partners and requires **USD 623 million.** **The humanitarian and refugee response plans combined require over USD 5 billion in international funding in 2022.** During the online launch event, a number of refuge-hosting countries, including Iran, donor States and humanitarian organizations provided input on the need for assistance and their efforts and commitments to provide support.
- **For Iran in 2022, the RRP is targeting 2.2 million persons of concern, including Afghans of varying status and host communities, with 16 partners involved, and requiring USD 259 million.** This includes approximately USD 69 million on health and Nutrition, USD 42.5 million on Shelter and NFIs, USD 35.1 million on WASH, USD 27.5 million on education, USD 27.3 million on protection, USD 27 million on livelihoods and resilience, and USD 22.2 million of food security.
- **The development of temporary accommodation for Afghan new arrivals continues at the Niatak site in Sistan and Balochistan Province,** with the construction of walls and shelters, as well as ground levelling, being underway. The site is on track to begin hosting new arrivals in April or May. There will also be a joint interagency mission to Fariman in Khorasan Razavi Province next week, to determine whether a second temporary site for new arrivals can be developed there.

NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLANNING

In line with central aspects of GIRI's contingency plan, UNHCR and partners are providing support for the establishment of a new site in the border area of Niatak in Sistan and Baluchestan province, with possibly another site in Khorasan Razavi province. UNHCR and partners are responding to new arrivals in terms of health, food and other needs that are considered as priorities with the authorities. GIRI has previously confirmed that it will grant access to its territory to Afghans seeking safety and protection. UNHCR is seeking guidance and clarity on various issues, including the status that will be conferred to new arrivals and the process of receiving them, and continues to advocate for registration and documentation.

UNHCR coordinates the Refugee Response among international actors in Iran, with 16 participating UN agencies and international NGOs under its leadership, in line with the globally-agreed **Refugee Coordination Model.**

FUNDING NEEDS

For 2022, the **interagency regional funding needs** under the RRP 2022 are **USD 623 million**, including almost **USD 263.7 million for UNHCR alone**.

Under the RRP for Iran, interagency needs are **USD 259 million in 2022, including USD 119.4 million for UNHCR**.

As of 13 January 2022, UNHCR's **overall programs in Iran** (regular and emergency programming) were **30% 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 programs 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 **USD 35.5 million**.

Germany 16.7 million | **Italy** 5.6 million | **European Union** 4.2 million | **Republic of Korea** 0.68 million | **UNAIDS** 0.009 million

Softly earmarked contributions | USD

Norway | Private donors

Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions:

Sweden 77.6 million | **Netherlands** 37.2 million | **Denmark** 35.6 million | **Germany** 27.6 million | **Switzerland** 18.4 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Ireland** 11.8 million

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