

Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran

As of 31 August 2022

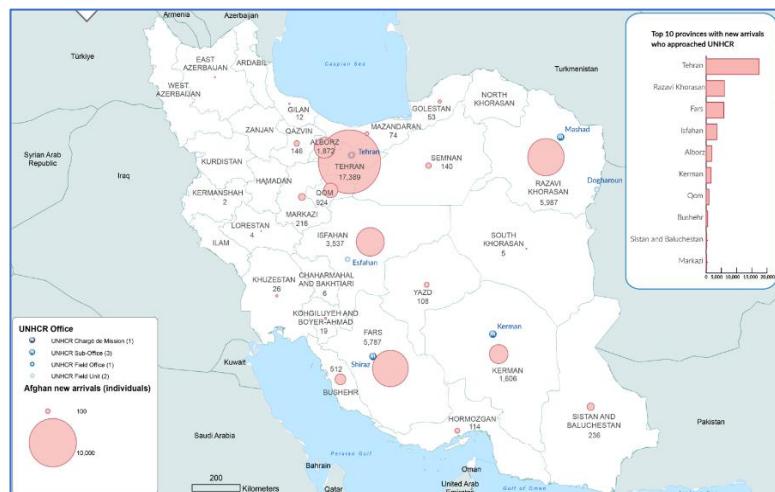
KEY FIGURES¹

Over **822,546** persons have been internally displaced in Afghanistan since the start of 2021, of which 20 per cent are women and 60 per cent are children. Approximately **170,000** have now returned to their previous places of residence, as the security situation improves. According to evolving **estimates by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran**, between **500,000 and 1.5 million** Afghans came to Iran in 2021². Arrivals have continued during 2022 due to the volatile security situation and deterioration of the human rights and socio-economic situation in Afghanistan.

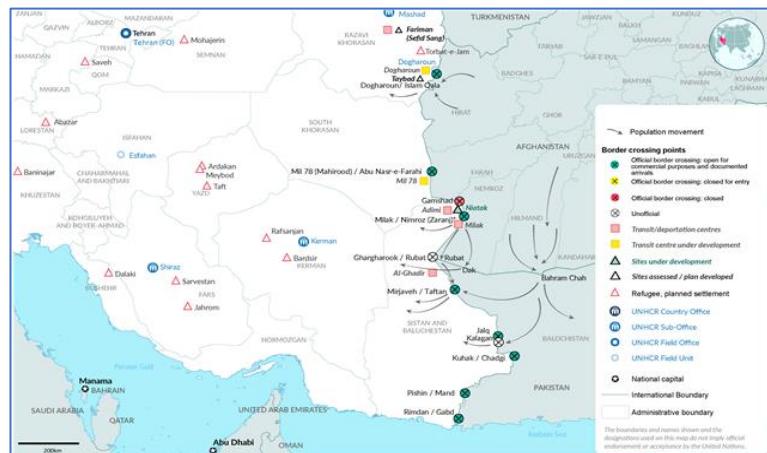
50,400 Afghans, who arrived in Iran from 1 January 2021 to 31 August 2022, approached UNHCR requesting assistance and protection. The 2022 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Afghanistan situation, estimates that **274,000** of the newly arrived asylum seekers, including those who have arrived in 2021, will remain in Iran by end of 2022.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

In April 2022, the Iranian Ministry of Interior announced the undertaking of a Headcount of all undocumented Afghan nationals in Iran, including the new arrivals. The Headcount was concluded on 30 June 2022. According to the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA), approximately **2.2** million Afghan nationals were registered and received headcount laissez-passeurs which are valid until 22 October 2022. While the laissez-passer seemingly provides Afghans temporary protection against forced return, UNHCR's position is that the headcount exercise should not be a replacement for a proper asylum mechanism to individually identify and protect those in need of international protection. UNHCR advocacy in



Map of Afghan new arrivals by province as of 31 August 2022



Map of border crossing points as of 31 August 2022

¹ Map of Afghan new arrivals by province (as of 31 August 2022): numbers of new arrivals per province are exported from UNHCR's proGres v4 database of refugees/asylum-seekers who approached UNHCR, and may be impacted by the locations of UNHCR offices. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Source: asylum seekers (Afghans who arrived in Iran and approached UNHCR after 1 January 2021) - UNHCR, August 2022.

² UNHCR relies on the Government of Iran for the information and data on displaced people, including the Afghan population in Iran. According to various government estimates, 500,000-1,000,000 Afghans have newly fled to Iran since the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan in 2021. As the situation in Afghanistan remains volatile, UNHCR foresees that Afghans will continue to flee to Iran in the coming months. Based on UNHCR estimates, 65% of all new arrivals are returned by the government, and smaller percentages include people who will continue moving to Turkey and the EU, and those who chose to come to Iran for economic or family reasons before returning to Afghanistan voluntarily.

this regard will continue with a view to ensuring that all those in need are provided with as much protection, assistance and stability as possible.

With the scholastic year fast approaching (beginning in September), access to education of newly arrived and head-counted Afghan children is now becoming a big concern for parents. Following the directive recently issued by BAFIA, currently only the holders of *Amayesh* cards and 'education protection papers' are able to enrol in schools, whereas the recently head-counted children must wait for another instruction. Considering the limited educational space across the country, many families are seriously concerned with the uncertainties about their children's ability to access education. In its latest meeting on 9 August with BAFIA Tehran province, UNHCR was informed about serious challenges and constraints faced by the Ministry of Education in absorbing into schools the growing number of school-aged children following the August 2021 situation in Afghanistan. In this regards, UNHCR recently communicated in a letter with BAFIA to put forward several suggestions/solutions to increase the capacity in education sector, including: support to Afghan-run and NGO-run schools, capacitating existing school facilities, and supporting the recruitment of Afghan teachers, etc.

RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

While UNHCR has no consistent access to border areas and detention facilities, and as such has limited or no details on particular deportations, through media reports, other sources and direct information from Afghans, UNHCR is aware that Afghans without a valid visa for Iran who are apprehended continue to be returned to Afghanistan by the Government of Iran despite UNHCR's [Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan](#) and advocacy for those fleeing conflict to be provided asylum.

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**. These numbers could change, following the conclusion of the headcount exercise as different government representatives have iterated the government's stance to deport those who did not participate in the headcount exercise. UNHCR during its meetings with BAFIA continues to advocate against the forced return of Afghans who have not undergone the headcount exercise, but who may yet be in need of international refugee protection.

By the end of August, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of **246** returnees to Afghanistan and **one** returnee to Iraq. This represents a 68% decrease compared to the **777** returns facilitated in the same period in 2021, which can be attributed to instability and continued fragile conditions in Afghanistan.

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

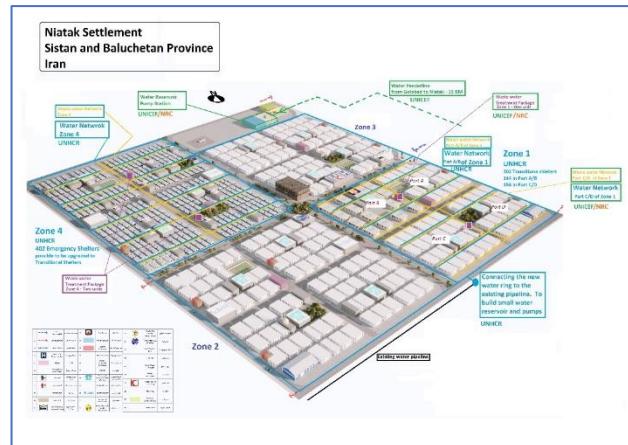
Under the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), UNHCR has continued to facilitate coordination among international humanitarian organizations in Iran. At a strategic-level, the UNHCR-led Refugee Response Group (RRG) brings key international partners together to support a coordinated and coherent approach including, most recently, on issues of common concern such as local partnerships and the response to new arrivals in settlements. As the lead agency under the RCM, UNHCR also uses this platform to identify challenges and other operational barriers which impede the response of international partners, using its convening power to subsequently raise these issues on behalf of the wider community with BAFIA.

At the operational level, UNHCR leads the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), which brings Sector Coordinators together to support information flow, coordinate operational plans and, under the delegated authority of the Refugee Response Group (RRG), oversee key planning process. Over the last two months, the ISCG continues to work on a multi-sector response plan to support a comprehensive response to new arrivals in settlements (in Niatak and Torbat-e-Jam) in line with established standards, and has initiated the 2023 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) development process, most notably by sourcing secondary data/ information to support needs/ context analysis.

The Protection Sector coordination platform, including its Child Protection and Women and Girls Safety sub-sectors, continues to facilitate collaboration between RRP partner organizations to support and enhance protection programming and advocacy. Sector partners are finalizing a joint protection service mapping to facilitate and streamline referrals, including to national institutions. Further, through a consultative process, guidance notes have been developed on a minimum package of protection activities as well as on protection-informed recommendations on multi-sectoral engagement in refugee settlements.

In agreement with the government, Niatak will host both newly arrived Afghan asylum-seekers and the *in situ* vulnerable Afghan populations (Afghans who have been in Iran prior to the upheavals in Afghanistan in 2021) in Iran. As such, partners, in coordination with BAFIA, are supporting more sustainable response options as opposed to short-term response options which are likely to be more costly to maintain over the medium to long term.

In Niatak, partners are prioritizing the completion of zones 1 and 4 of Niatak through a combination of emergency and transitional shelters (note that the emergency plots can easily be adapted later to develop transitional shelters). Pending consultation with BAFIA, partners will reprioritize resources allocated to zones 2 and 3 to address urgent needs in other sites (including Torbat-e-Jam). Fundraising will simultaneously continue to ensure that work can commence and be completed for zones 2 and 3 of Niatak as soon as possible. The settlement will be activated as soon as minimum standards, namely shelter, running water, electricity, and basic education, are in place while UNHCR's overall policy focuses on promoting urban / out-of-camp solutions and capitalising on existing facilities in terms of cost effectiveness and enhancement of resilience and self-reliance in the long run. It is hoped that this will be no later than mid-October. From mid-October 2022, the settlement will be able to accommodate a maximum number of **540** individuals in the already constructed **108** shelter units. Upon completion, the site can accommodate **6,500** individuals.



While waiting for the Niatak site to be ready for new arrivals, the Government of Iran decided in March 2022 to relocate Afghans who were previously kept in the government-managed Fariman facility to the existing refugee settlement of Torbat-e-Jam. Given limited space in the settlement, UNHCR and partners, in support of BAFIA, will upgrade the settlement's shelters and facilities to respond to the increased population and needs in the settlement. Currently, UNHCR is undertaking the renovation of over **300** shelter units (20% progress rate by end of August) and the building of **140** new shelter units. Non-Food Items and hygiene kits have been distributed by Relief International (RI), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and IOM. NRC is also following up through the education sector on education needs, while UNICEF and RI are working to rehabilitate communal WASH facilities.

FUNDING NEEDS AND UPDATE

The inter-agency 2022 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Afghanistan situation will support host governments (namely, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) in their efforts to promote resilience, aiming to ensure that no one is left behind and that the needs of Afghans and their host communities are met. The total **interagency regional funding needs** under the RRP in 2022 are: US\$**623 M**

For Iran, under the RRP in 2022, interagency needs are:

Under the 2022 RRP, international humanitarian organizations in Iran appealed for US\$**258.7 M** to respond to the needs of Afghans and vulnerable Iranian host communities in 2022. As per the most recent updates under the [Refugee Funding Tracker](#) (RFT), partners have reported US\$**104.7 M** of funding received so far (**40%** funded). Of this, US\$**91 M** (**87.5%** of all reported funding) was received by UNHCR. Please note that the RFT

data is based on the timely reporting of funding by RRP partners and therefore may not always reflect the full funding received by partners.

UNHCR Iran's funding averaged about **USD 31 M** over a five-year period (2016-2020), prior to the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in 2021. As of **31 August** 2022, UNHCR Iran is unprecedentedly **77%** funded, i.e., it has mobilized about **USD 91.5 M** of its overall financial requirements (USD 119.4 M) in 2022. However, funding opportunities for 2023 and beyond are sobering, with many other humanitarian crises around the world diverting resources. UNHCR urges the donor community to continue supporting Iran's humanitarian efforts, so services for refugees can be maintained.

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.

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