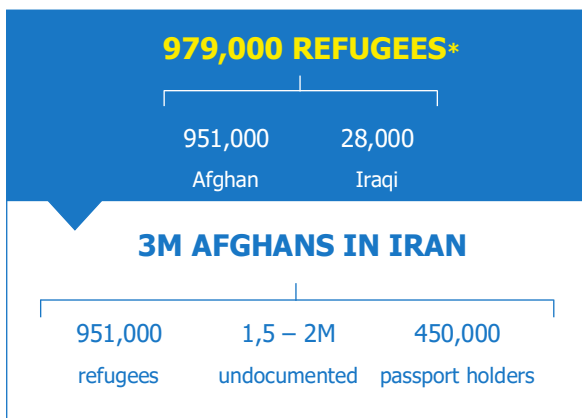


IRAN

September-October 2020

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In October, COVID-19 infections continued to rise sharply – surpassing 600,000 total cases and reaching almost 35,000 deaths at month-end – and movement restrictions, closure of non-essential businesses and health protocols were reinforced throughout the country. The Iranian Rial continued to experience devaluation while inflation continued to flare, causing prices of basic goods to continue to rise and affecting refugees’ and host communities’ ability to comfortably make ends meet. The Statistics Center of Iran’s latest report showed that food prices increased by over 49 percent in October compared to the same month last year. For the fourth decade, Iran continues to be amongst the countries hosting the highest number of refugees in the world, with almost 1 million Afghan and Iraqi refugees.



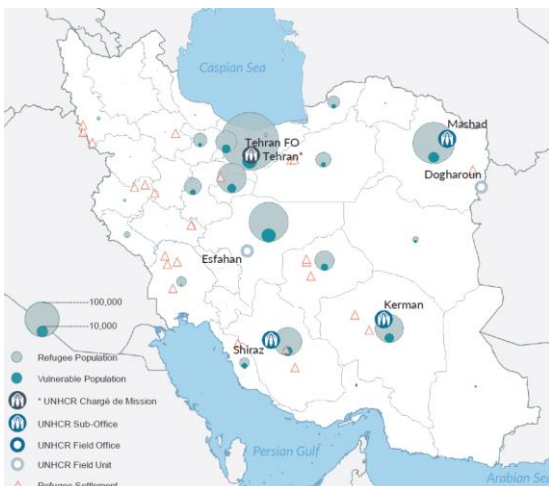
* Based on IX round of Amayesh, 2015



96% of refugees live in urban areas side by side with the local community



4% of refugees live in refugee settlements in 20 provinces of Iran



POPULATION MOVEMENTS

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

760 individuals, all Afghans, returned to their country of origin from Iran as of October 2020, as part of UNHCR’s voluntary repatriation programme. During the same period in 2019, 1,733 refugees had been voluntarily repatriated. Due to COVID-19, UNHCR is currently only carrying out voluntary repatriations from its Dogharoun Field Unit.

RESETTLEMENT

In 2020, UNHCR Iran only received resettlement quota for **120** individuals – the lowest since UNHCR started resettlement activity in Iran in 1999. The United Kingdom provided a quota of 100, while Iceland provided a quota of 20.

So far in 2020, **90** individuals departed for resettlement; 4 to New Zealand, 70 to Sweden, 7 to the UK, 8 to Australia and 1 to Finland. Due to COVID-19, resettlement from Iran is currently on hold, with many refugees who have been accepted for resettlement to third country waiting for the availability of flights.

By the end of September 2020, 22 cases (84 individuals) have been submitted to five countries, namely Iceland, the UK, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. Also by the end of September 2020, 9 cases (36 individuals) were accepted by Australia, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the UK.

SECONDARY MOVEMENT

From January to October 2020, Afghans were the **second most common** citizenship to claim asylum in Europe (25,485 first-time claims), according to the Eurostat database.

Afghans made up **6%** of all arrivals to Europe through the Mediterranean from January to October this year.

Afghan arrivals to Europe declined in April due to COVID-19-related movement restrictions, but are slowly resuming. According to the Mixed Migration Centre, **25%** of Afghans interviewed in Turkey started their journey from Iran, 4% from Pakistan, and 71% from Afghanistan.

PROTECTION

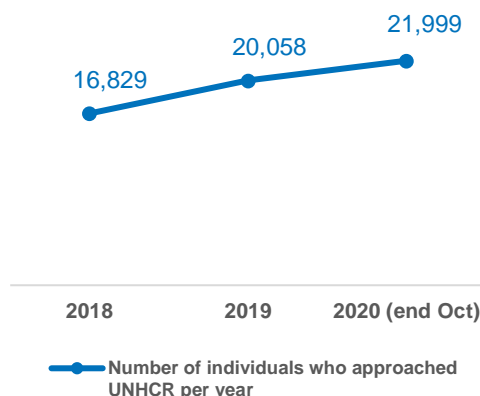
REGISTRATION

Since 20 June, the process to extend Afghan refugees' **Amayesh cards** (the equivalent of refugee ID cards for Afghan refugees) has started in all provinces in Iran. Even though the official deadline for Amayesh registration was on 5 November, Administrative Centers were instructed to continue the extension of Amayesh cards until further notice. Some refugees are facing difficulties to afford the extension fees, yet the Government of Iran has shown flexibility by providing discounts to extremely vulnerable refugees.

CASE MANAGEMENT

In October, UNHCR received **2,442** approaches via receptions and helplines, bringing the total for 2020 to 37,167. The main reasons for approaches were to receive assistance (1,775 approaches), for resettlement (230 approaches) and for health reasons (165). Meanwhile, the total number of individuals who approached UNHCR was of almost 22,000 as of October, already more than the total for previous years (graph on the right).

In Tehran, UNHCR continued its efforts to reach out to local NGOs and charities who may provide protection and assistance to refugees during the pandemic. A total of **104 cases** were referred to and assisted by various



NGOs and charities in the third quarter of 2020. Livelihoods, health and education were recorded as the three main reasons for these referrals. There is also an increase in referrals compared to the 2nd quarter, when only around 50 cases were referred.

In the first week of October, UNHCR's Mashhad office received a **high number of calls** from refugees who mentioned that they had been laid off from their employment at salespersons, due to a decline in business activity.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

684 individuals had their cases examined by 16 Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) from January to September 2020, as part of a joint UNHCR-BAFIA initiative to provide legal assistance to refugees in Iran to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. In September alone, 113 cases were processed, including 38 financial disputes, 26 family disputes, 16 wage-related disputes, 5 landlord/tenant disputes, and 13 other cases. Due to COVID-19, DSCs only process 70 to 80% of cases on a case-by-case basis, within strict compliance with hygiene protocols.

2,482 individuals were assisted by UNHCR-Hired Lawyers (UHLs) from January to September 2020. Due to the COVID-19 situation, UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely.

On 28 and 29 September in Bushehr province for example, **Dispute Settlement Committee (DSC) sessions** were conducted due to the high number of cases, despite the usual complete suspension in the province due to COVID-19. 13 of the 15 cases could be settled or closed, and saw the participation of UNHCR-hired lawyers. The cases comprised of 6 wage-related disputes, 5 family disputes, and 4 other financial disputes.

EDUCATION

480,000 Afghan and Iraqi students are enrolled in the 2019-2020 academic year in Iran, including some 130,000 undocumented Afghans. In Iran, UNHCR supports the efforts of the Government in providing access to formal primary and secondary education to all children, regardless of documentation.

In September, UNHCR's government counterpart BAFIA [reported](#) a **growth of 4.5%** in the enrolment of foreign students in the new school year compared to last year, despite reduced funding for UNHCR to support the government's inclusive education policies.

In Fars and Bushehr provinces, over **2,000 stationary packages** are being distributed through UNHCR's government counterpart BAFIA and refugee representatives, to respond to increasing needs amongst vulnerable refugee students. The packages were funded by local private donors, in an example of solidarity towards Afghan refugees.

The Government of Iran has informed UNHCR that some refugee students are facing issues accessing **online education**, due to a lack of equipment such as smartphones, tablets or internet connection. Due to COVID-19, several schools in refugee-hosting areas are holding most of their classes online, through a smartphone application. UNHCR is planning a

connectivity project, for which additional funding is needed.

HEALTH

For specific information on UNHCR's COVID-19 response in Iran, please consult the [UNHCR Iran COVID-19 Update](#).

In Qom province, UNHCR continued its efforts to encourage vulnerable refugee families to enrol in this year's **Universal Primary Health Insurance** (UPHI) scheme. As a result of families being contacted, an additional 1,457 enrolments were registered, to reach a total of 5,322 as of 21 October. Also, UNHCR and BAFIA have together reached out telephonically to some 7,000 refugees to enrol in the scheme.

Based on UNHCR offices reception approaches, and information received from MOH provincial, total number of cases amongst refugees since the beginning of the pandemic is of 1,754, with 99 deaths both in settlements and urban areas. As a precautionary measure, refugees have been asked to only approach the settlement's health post and the BAFIA office for urgent matters, until further notice. In the first week of September, an outbreak of COVID-19 was also reported in Azna settlement, with five infected families.

UNHCR has been informed that the **shortage of insulin** currently affecting Iran has reached Azna refugee

settlement. UNHCR is following up with authorities on any potential supply of insulin.

LIVELIHOODS

2,199 refugees currently benefit from UNHCR-supported livelihood interventions. These projects, either implemented directly by UNHCR or through partnership agreements, include technical and vocational training, income generating projects in workshops and the establishment of home-based enterprises.

In the second half of September, as many renting leases are coming to an end, a number of refugees reported to UNHCR that they are facing difficulties to **afford housing** following increases in rent prices. Many reported overdue rents, risks of evictions, or having had to move to the suburbs of cities such as Tehran or Mashhad, confirming the trend of a decline in refugees' livelihoods.

As of the end of September, **1,400** households (6,551 individuals) received multi-purpose cash from UNHCR, out of a total of 1,900 refugee households (9,500 individuals) who will benefit from multi-purpose cash support from UNHCR in 2020.

SOLUTIONS STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES (SSAR)

Within the framework of the SSAR, UNHCR supports the Government of Iran in implementing inclusive policies towards refugees. The SSAR also facilitates coordinated protection approaches among partners, consensus-building on international protection priorities, dialogue and partnerships in support of the Afghan refugee situation.

On 1 October, UNHCR and the governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan virtually held the 7th session of the **Quadripartite Steering Committee**, or Q4, to exchange on common priorities for the implementation of the SSAR. An important point of discussion were the 20 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan, which the Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR have identified, and for which the Q4 is eager to see increased investment to help sustain durable returns.

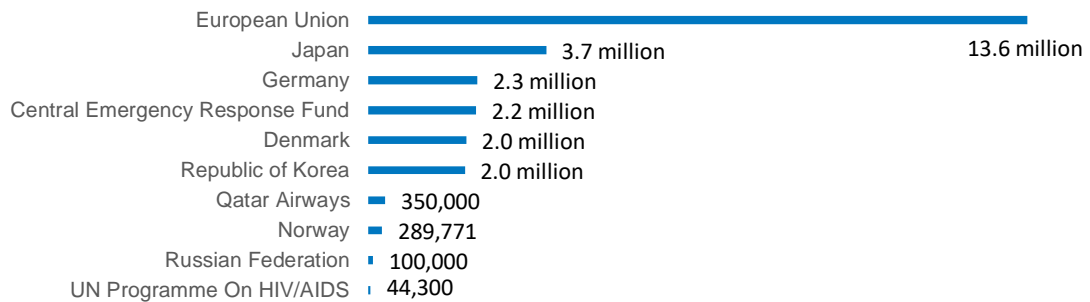
On 7 October, members of the abovementioned Q4 virtually met, for the first time, with members of the Core Group of states and institutions who are part of the Support Platform of the SSAR, launched at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. This inaugural meeting saw an important exchange on priority support needs and steps needed to enhance the implementation of the SSAR and tangible responsibility-sharing. The Core Group currently counts 12 entities, namely the Asian Development Bank, Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Qatar, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States of America, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

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.

Earmarked contributions | USD

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some **26.64 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 472 students in Iran.

Major softly earmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

Germany 62.7 million | **United Kingdom** 24.8 million | **Denmark** 14.6 million | **Canada** 9.7 million | **Private donors Australia** 9.5 million | **Private donors USA** 8.2 million | **Private donors Japan** 4.4 million | **Private donors Germany** 3.5 million | **Spain** 3.4 million | **Ireland** 3.3 million | **Sweden** 3 million | **Private donors United Kingdom** 2.3 million | **Japan** 2.1 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.1 million | **Private donors Lebanon** 2 million

Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

Sweden 76.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 59.9 million | **Norway** 41.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **United Kingdom** 31.7 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 30.6 million | **Germany** 25.9 million | **Japan** 23.8 million | **Private donors Japan** 21 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Italy** 14 million | **France** 14 million | **Private donors Sweden** 11.7 million | **Italy** 10.6 million

For more information, please contact:

Farha Bhoyroo

External Relations Officer

bhoyroo@unhcr.org, +98 21 89349112

Links:

Data portal: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>

Website: <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/unhcriran/>